



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

May 1, 2014

OCSEA questions timing of food service fine; says more proof DR&C has lost control

Columbus – With just two business days before an arbitration begins between the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association and the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction on the privatization of prison food service, the agency has fined vendor Aramark \$142,000 for failing to adequately staff food operations.

But the union is questioning DR&C's motives, particularly since one of the largest arbitrations the union has ever undertaken is set to start next week. "What took them so long? It's not as if understaffing just began. Aramark has *never* adequately staffed food service," questioned OCSEA President Christopher Mabe.

Prison employees have logged a large number of incidents caused by the food service changeover including: menu substitutions; food line delays; doctoring recipes; poor food quality; small portions; sanitation and food safety; cost increases; reduction in service; and security issues. The most serious issues involve the increase in security breaches, including a sharp rise in contraband, inappropriate sexual relationships between Aramark staff and inmates, as well as theft.

"The union is calling on DR&C to do the right thing and bring food service back in-house to restore cost effectiveness and above all, safety," said Mabe.

DR&C's own quarterly report in February showed that 80 percent of current food service operation is unstable (see attached report). "The understaffing is just the tip of the iceberg, It is clear that DR&C has lost control of this contract and food service," said Mabe.

The fine breaks down to just \$32 per day per institution for staffing shortages and falls well short of what is called for by the contract. According to the contract, the vendor should be fined for "each occurrence" of understaffing. Instead, Aramark is being fined as if there were only one employee vacancy. "The fine is a day late and a dollar short. They are getting away with dozen of occurrences a day and only getting charged for one," said Mabe.

Even DR&C admits understaffing has been a systemic and widespread issue. According to the department's own quarterly report, more than 190 Aramark staff have been terminated, or more than 46 percent of the workforce. Total staffing for food service should be 414 employees.

"The fine is a wrist slap and will have no effect on the contractor's behavior," said Mabe. Since the contract's inception, Aramark has made \$7.3 million in profits. The fine

amounts to just 2 percent of company profits for the eight months.

“The bottom line is, if we weren’t holding their feet to the fire this penalty would not have happened,” said OCSEA Corrections Assembly President Jimmy Adkins, who works at Marysville Reformatory for Women. “This is exactly what we said was going to happen,” said Adkins. A pilot project in 1999 with the same vendor in a handful of prisons suffered from many of these same issues. That contract was terminated and taken back over by the union.

OCSEA represents 30,000 state employees, including 8,000 members in DR&C. For more information contact Sally Meckling, 614-865-2602 or 614-404-3881 (cell).

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