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## Hawaii News

# State to maintain status quo on its use of private prisons

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State prison administrators say the decision by President Barack Obama to phase out the use of private prisons will not affect Hawaii's program, which was renewed this month, to send inmates to Arizona.

There are now 1,361 men incarcerated at Saguaro Correctional Center, which is run by Corrections Corporation of America, according to Toni Schwartz, spokeswoman for the state Department of Public Safety.

About one-quarter of the state's inmate population is housed at Saguaro, about 70 miles southeast of Phoenix.

According to the Associated Press, Corrections Corporation of America is one of three private prison operators that Obama wants to phase out. The other two are GEO Group Inc. and Management and Training Corp.

The Obama administration cited declining federal prison population to justify its decision to close privately run prisons. The federal prison population — now at about 193,000 — has been dropping due to changes in federal sentencing policies over the past three years.

As of December 2015, private prisons held about 12 percent of the total federal prison population, or 22,500 inmates, according to the inspector general report released earlier this month.

Saguaro in Eloy, Ariz., is the only privately contracted institution that houses Hawaii inmates. The state in 1995 decided to house inmates on the mainland to alleviate the overcrowding in Hawaii prisons.

Schwartz said the state on Aug. 1 awarded a three-year contract worth \$45 million per year to Corrections Corporation of America, the largest for-profit prison company in the country. The Tennessee company charges the state a per-diem rate of \$71.90 per prisoner.

Asked whether Hawaii plans to follow the federal government's action, Schwartz said, "The federal Justice Department decision does not affect corrections operations on the state government level."

Earlier this year, Gov. David Ige's request for \$489.3 million in general obligation bonds to relocate the Oahu Community Correctional Center to Halawa Correctional Facility failed in the Legislature.

However, lawmakers appropriated \$5.4 million to study "possible sites" for the construction of a new OCCC.