

Triad Abolition Project's Statement on the FCLEDC Health Care Provider 4/26/21

The contract with the Forsyth County Law Enforcement Detention Center's (FCLEDC) health care provider, Wellpath (formerly known as Correct Care Solutions), has expired and will not be renewed. According to the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners' agenda briefing draft for next month's meeting (May 6), the Board is set to vote to approve a contract with NaphCare to become the FCLEDC's newest health care provider.

Since 2017, Deshawn Lamont Coley, Stephen Antwan Patterson, and John Elliott Neville have all died on Wellpath's watch. They were all fathers, sons, significant others, brothers, cousins, uncles, community members and Black men who had people that loved and cared about them.

Mr. Coley begged for his asthma inhaler, but he was repeatedly ignored by Wellpath staff. Mr. Patterson's blood pressure was so high that he should have been admitted to the emergency room, but instead, he too, was neglected by Wellpath staff. And most recently, Mr. Neville was brutalized by FCSO detention officers after falling from his bed after reportedly having a seizure while a Wellpath staff member stood by and watched. The brutality by FCSO officers and gross medical negligence by Wellpath is what ultimately led to Mr. Neville's untimely and tragic death.

Mr. Coley, Mr. Patterson and Mr. Neville all needed medical attention and care, but instead they were given a death sentence sanctioned by our elected officials and taxpayers of Forsyth County, North Carolina.

Last summer, Triad Abolition Project comrades completed a successful 49-day occupation in Bailey Park, resulting in the full ban of the bent-leg, prone restraint position that contributed to his death, from being used by FCSO deputies and FCLEDC detention officers. Since then, TAP has echoed the demand of the local prison solidarity group, Prisoner Outreach Initiative, to get Wellpath out of the FCLEDC for good.

While we'd like to celebrate that Wellpath's contract was not renewed again this time, as abolitionists, we know that simply replacing them with a different company profiting off the prison industrial complex as the health care providers of our siblings locked in cages on North Church Street is not a win. We are relieved that Wellpath will no longer neglect and perpetuate harm on our community and on our incarcerated siblings, however, we also understand it is counterproductive and a continuation of an inhumane practice to have one privatized health care entity replaced by another.

According to the 2019 *Atlantic* article "The Private Option" by Marsha McLeod, Wellpath was the contracted health care provider of "about 10 percent of the counties in the nation," working in over 500 jails, prisons, and behavioral-health settings in 36 states (and in Australia) with nearly 300,000 patients on a daily basis, making it the country's largest correctional health care company.

"Wellpath's rapid ascent is emblematic of America's booming \$40 billion market for private correctional services of all kinds. Its predecessors, Correct Care Solutions and Correctional Medical Group Companies, are stark examples of the surging growth that's possible with private-equity backing. In its newly grafted, sized-up form, Wellpath is at the beginning of another cycle, with bigger investors and bigger stakes than ever. To deliver returns to its investors, it must continue to grow."

Unfortunately, there is no way for us to believe or ensure that NaphCare will not demonstrate the same pattern of medical negligence in pursuit of profit as Wellpath has done to our community for almost a decade. According to McLeod's reporting, there "is no national agency charged with systematically ensuring the quality of health care," and there are no mandatory national standards—the only form of oversight is through litigation, which places the burden of proof on already incarcerated individuals and their families, who are often steeped in poverty.

"One of the main services these companies provide is not medical care at all, but legal protection. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1976 that 'deliberate indifference to serious medical needs of prisoners' was a violation of their constitutional right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment. Private firms thus helpfully offer to take the legal risk off localities' shoulders, offering, in one company's words, 'safe and defensible care' (though, as Forsyth and others have learned, the legal risk is not gone)."

The "justice" system has disproportionately failed (and continues to fail) Black and Brown folks. The only way to ensure no one else locked in cages are harmed or killed by the state is to abolish jails and prisons completely.

As NaphCare is set to take over the almost \$15 million contract that spans across the next three years, TAP pledges to remain vigilant in keeping a close, watchful eye on the treatment our incarcerated siblings receive from both NaphCare and the FCLEDC staff.

We continue to stand in solidarity and extend support to our incarcerated siblings that they have not received from our city and county leaders—the same leaders who have long demonstrated a refusal to truly change course even after the ultimate cost of human life was lost not once but at least three times since 2017.

When our elected officials are not able to take true accountability for their mistakes and correct their transgressions with actual change, they are resisting progress—which will eventually become politically disadvantageous to them.

TAP embraces progress and we will continue to magnify the voices of those inside the FCLEDC as long as their basic needs and health are being neglected by their county leaders and the private health care sector.

We will be watching out for our siblings, and continue standing in solidarity with them moving forward.