

Prison systems- technology support



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Given the growing database of an imprisoned population in the United States, a proliferation of new prisons has been built which included private establishments. This expansion is the immediate consequence of a zero tolerance policy against crime that has increased the number of employees in the penitentiary system making them one of the biggest employers in the United States. The definitive measures undertaken by the criminal justice system and penal machinery has caused prison overcrowding which is rapidly becoming unbearable for state prisons.

Faced with maintenance and budgetary challenge, public authorities huddle over advance criminal machinery indispensable to the upkeep of incarcerated persons within prison walls. Privatized prisons also faced the more fundamental consideration of profit amidst keeping prisons cleaner, safer, better equipped and flexible to answer to overcrowding problems. In cost reduction, minimizing the number of staff is necessary.

Beyens and Snacken provided that the use of monitoring devices, neutralization and repression equipment is necessary in staff reduction while ensuring maximum security (2000: 259). A technological solution can therefore provide a substitute for the high cost of staff maintenance despite a loss of social relations between prisoners and jail guards. Technological device such as surveillance equipments are used to monitor offenders through the use of video surveillance cameras and biometrical devices (Schneider, 1997: 3).

Other monitoring devices include transmitter bangles and other electronic monitoring systems that can be classified in different categories. Electronic

monitoring is likewise an economical measure which has significantly reduced the costs of penal system for offenders who are placed under house arrest which at the same time minimize overcrowding in prisons (Schneider: 3). This system provides a higher and better alternative to imprisonment. Studies carried out also proposed this sanction as better adapted to the offender thus reducing the rate of recidivism.

Private cameras installed in prisons have also provided the positive aspect of video surveillance as prison personnel and detainee contact is minimized. Biometric techniques have also accompanied video surveillance system in the identification of individual and behavioral characteristics. This method eliminates the chances of breach in prison regulations while reducing violence at the same time. Likewise, surveillance cameras reduce the presence of guards for the safety of the establishment.

The use of neutralization technologies in the field of “ non-lethal” weaponry has also excelled in the art of neutralizing people, while diminishing the lethal risk or permanent injuries in stunning technologies and chemical incapacitating agents. Stun agents like belts used in conjunction with handcuffs and chains for the transport of dangerous criminals and during court hearing can effectively neutralize offenders at a minimal cost with lesser staff guarding them during transport (Schneider, 1997: 13).

Economically the belt’s cost of \$700 is ultimately lesser to the cost of the additional hours regularly worked by the guards in overcrowded prisons. It’s use also enables a significant reduction in security and escort personnel in penitentiary establishments each time an offender needs to be presented

before the judge, driven to the hospital or infirmary, or when teams of offenders at work need to be supervised(Beyens, 2000: 259).

Likewise when violence erupts within a prison facility, chemical agents and incapacitating gas can be dispersed from an electronically controlled room and may include a combined technology in subduing prisoners. High intensity strobe lamps which provoke symptoms such as dizziness, nausea and disorientation may temporarily blind the adversary according to Schneider, (1998: 6).

It is imperative that our correctional system when placing emphasis on isolation and repressive practices also require protection for offenders and prison staff. In view of the technological equipment endorsed like advanced monitoring technologies, biometric devices or control devices, the economic nature is necessarily favorable for the management of establishments where staff presence can be minimized while above all providing benefits to a private sector anxious to develop a new market.