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Privatized food services a health hazard, say Pine Grove inmates

www.sgeu.org

1011 Devonshire Drive North,
Regina, SK S4X 2X4
(p) 522.8571
1.800.667.5221
(f) 352.1969

Suite 201,
1114-22nd Street West,
Saskatoon, SK S7M 0S5
(p) 652.1811
1.800.667.9791
(f) 664.7134

33-11th Street West,
Prince Albert, SK S6V 3A8
(p) 764.5201
1.800.667.9355
(f) 763.4763

As complaints skyrocket over poor quality and quantity of food being served at the Regina Correctional Centre, letters from inmates forwarded to SGEU indicate that privatized food services at Pine Grove Correctional Centre also continue to be inadequate.

"Inmates at Pine Grove are reaching out to us and asking for help," says SGEU President Bob Bymo. "They've told us that medically necessary diets are not being followed, that pregnant women are eating potentially unsafe food, and that tension among inmates is very high as a result of Compass food services."

U.K.-based Compass took over the kitchens at Saskatchewan correctional centres and young offender facilities on Nov. 7, 2015. Recently, the *Leader-Post* reported that the number of food-related formal complaints lodged by inmates at the Regina correctional centre has dramatically increased following privatization. Complaints jumped from only four in the first 10 months of 2015, to 20 in November to another 45 - including 12 group complaints - in December.

Female inmates at Pine Grove Correctional Centre are similarly worried by the food provided at their facility. They describe Compass food as "horrible," writing in their letters that they've been served raw roast beef that was beyond human consumption, that undercooked eggs were "liquefied," and that child-sized portions are served to adult inmates.

Although the government has tried to address some of these issues, Compass food services continue to pose a health and safety risk.

"I personally do get very sick," writes Kristen, an inmate at Pine Grove Correctional Centre. "In order to take my medication I have to eat before my meds. I cannot do that so I get sick, vomit and then end each night in hunger pains."

"The government continues to claim Compass is doing good work," said Bymo. "They don't seem to understand what's at stake. Compass is giving inadequate nutrition and potentially unsafe food to youth as young as 12, to

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Page 2 of 2

remand inmates who haven't had a trial yet, to people with serious mental health issues, to pregnant women, and to people with severe food allergies.+

When our members delivered food services, the meals were safe and met health standards,+adds Bymoer. Clearly Compass can't manage even that.+

As a result of poor food quality and quantity, inmates say they are experiencing a drastic drop in morale, potentially leading to security issues.

It used to be that when lunch and supper were served, it was a source of happiness on the unit,+writes Fran, an inmate at Pine Grove. Now mealtime can be somewhat volatile and unpredictable - all of the ingredients for a riot are present.+

Staff safety is being put at risk, says Bymoer. Food quality is a major factor in inmate moods and behaviour,+he said. If they're upset over quality and quantity, our members will feel the effects of this unrest.+

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See attached letters from inmates at Pine Grove Correctional Centre. (The writers have approved them being shared with the media.)

For additional information, contact:

Evie Ruddy
SGEU, Communications Officer
306.775.7877
306.550.1146