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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

APR 16 1975

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The Honorable Edward I. Koch
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Koch:

In response to your letter of June 28, 1974, and our subsequent meetings with you on August 14 and September 19, 1974, we reviewed the quality and variety of food served to inmates of non-Federal prison facilities in the States of New York and Pennsylvania. On March 6, 1975, we briefed your office on the results of our review. This letter presents our findings and summarizes the information given in the briefing.

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The Bureau of Prisons has contracted with approximately 900 State, county, and local correctional/detention institutions to house Federal prisoners. Community Program Officers assigned to the Bureau's five regional offices are responsible for negotiating and administering these contracts. The Bureau uses these non-Federal institutions to house Federal inmates

- before and during trials;
- pending transfer to a Federal institution for service of sentence;
- during commitments for relatively short sentences;
- in transit between two locations;
- for whom suitable Federal facilities are unavailable; and
- who represent a security hazard.

As of October 1, 1974, the Bureau's Northeast Regional Office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was responsible for administering contracts with about 140 non-Federal detention facilities, of which 49 were in

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the States of New York and Pennsylvania. We visited 13 of these institutions, 7 in New York and 6 in Pennsylvania. The institutions visited and their locations are listed in the enclosure.

At the institutions visited, we reviewed

- the planning and development of menus;
- the considerations made to insure that meals served were nutritionally balanced;
- menus to ascertain the extent of variety in food items served;
- food procurement procedures and practices, including the extent of consideration given to food quality standards and grades; and
- the conditions under which food was served.

We also held discussions with Bureau officials and reviewed their procedures for monitoring contract facilities. In addition, we obtained information about the food service operations of other State and city institutions, a university, and a hospital, as well as information concerning the procurement of food by the Department of Defense for consumption by military personnel.

In our opinion, the variety and the quality of the food served to inmates at the 13 institutions visited were adequate.

MENU PLANNING

Menus were developed by individuals who had food service experience and consideration was generally given to establishing nutritionally balanced diets. Menus developed were based on one or more of the following:

- Criteria established by the Bureau, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Academy of Sciences, and/or standards found by the Council on Foods and Nutrition of the American Medical Association to be consistent with current authoritative medical opinion.
- Master menus prepared by State and local government dieticians.

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FOOD QUALITY

Eleven of the institutions visited procure foodstuffs through a State, county, or city purchasing department on the basis of competitive bids. In many instances, these purchasing departments were also procuring food items of the same quality for consumption by residents of other institutions, such as hospitals, child centers, and homes for the aged. Procurement specifications used include USDA-approved Institutional Meat Purchase Specifications and/or USDA food grades. Also, food items purchased centrally are inspected either by USDA inspectors at the suppliers' places of business at the buyer's expense, or upon receipt by representatives of the local health or purchasing departments.

Several of the institutions obtain foodstuffs from local suppliers and food stores. In addition, food requirements of four of the prisons visited were partially met by using food produced on prison farms.

We found that the quality of prison food procured was generally at least equal to that procured for consumption by residents of other types of public institutions, as well as that procured for use by the military services.

GAO staff members sampled the food served at 18 different meals at the 13 prisons visited. The meals sampled included 2 breakfasts, 11 mid-day meals, and 5 evening meals. Overall, the meals were well prepared, tasty, and appetizing in appearance.

BUREAU MONITORING OF
CONTRACT FACILITIES

The contracts between the Bureau and the non-Federal prison institutions are standard in nature. Under current contract provisions, the non-Federal institutions are responsible for the safekeeping, care, and subsistence of Federal prisoners placed in their custody. Contract provisions provide in part that "Federal prisoners * * * will receive adequate and wholesome food * * *." However, these provisions do not define what constitutes adequate and wholesome food.

The contract terms give Bureau representatives the right to enter contract facilities to conduct inspections and to determine the conditions under which Federal inmates are housed. In this respect, we were told by Community Program Officers that, in their opinion, the variety and the quality of prison food were adequate.

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We discussed the results of our review with Bureau officials who agreed with our observations and conclusions.

We do not plan to distribute this report further unless you agree or publicly announce its contents.

Sincerely yours,



Victor L. Lowe
Director

Enclosure

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CONTRACT CORRECTIONAL/DETENTION FACILITIES VISITED

NEW YORK

Nassau County Jail, East Meadow

New York City - Department of Corrections

--Brooklyn House of Detention for Men

--Correctional Institute for Women (Riker's Island)

--Queens House of Detention for Men

Rensselaer County Jail, Troy

Schenectady County Jail, Schenectady

Westchester County Jail, Valhalla

PENNSYLVANIA

Chester County Farms Prison, West Chester

City of Philadelphia Prisons

--Detention Center

--House of Correction

State Correctional Institution, Graterford

State Correctional Institution, Muncy

Union County Jail, Lewisburg

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