Statement of the New Mexico Campaign to Divest from Private, For-Profit Prisons
October 2019

We the following are current and retired New Mexico teachers and educators who are vested in the Educational Pension Trust Fund of the State of New Mexico - the very people to whom the NM ERB owes a fiduciary responsibility. We are also deeply concerned citizens of the state of New Mexico. Mass incarceration and the detention of people impacts communities, families, and children in New Mexico - the very people we work to serve. We now demand that the NMERB fully divest from the for-profit prison industry.

The US now imprisons more people than any country in the world, in terms of both the number of individuals incarcerated and by percentage of the population. The for-profit, private prison industry has spent decades promoting the use of mass incarceration in the US, which overwhelmingly and discriminatorily impacts minorities. The for-profit prison industry’s financial bottom line is dependent upon incarcerating as many people as possible in jails, prisons, and detention centers, which they operate by contract with local or federal governmental entities. New Mexico leads the nation in its dependence on private prisons, incarcerating 43% of our prison population in for-profit prisons.

The private prison industry is devastating marginalized and immigrant communities across New Mexico and the rest of the nation. The for-profit prison industry has donated for years to the campaigns of elected officials who pushed for harsh three strikes sentencing and “zero-tolerance” policies in schools, which criminalized youth. The industry now actively donates to elected officials who support the rounding up and incarceration of undocumented people who have lived for years in the US, but are caught up in a broken immigration system. In the past two years, the “administrative” arrests of immigrants without criminal convictions has spiked 203%. Moreover, the private prison industry contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to incarcerate asylum seekers who lawfully cross into the US, exploiting the plight of vulnerable people for the sole purpose of increasing profits.

The use of mass incarceration is an issue of human rights and morality. CoreCivic, GEO Group, and other corporations, operate 14 jails/prisons in NM. Seventy-one percent of all immigrants in detention in the US are held in for-profit detention centers, and this number is rising. Since ICE’s creation in 2003, at least 188 detainee deaths have been reported.

JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Suntrust, and BNP Paribas are divesting from private prison industry stocks due to their decreasing or volatile value, and due to mounting public pressure. Moreover, in the past year, major public employee pension funds and municipal governments in places like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and California have fully divested from the private prison industry.

The NM ERB’s pension fund is directly invested in CoreCivic and GEO Group. As of January 16, 2019, the fund owns 28,000 shares of CoreCivic, and 29,000 shares of the GEO Group. These shares are a small percentage of the NM ERB’s $13 billion investment portfolio in market value. As New Mexico’s educators we DO NOT WANT ANY of our retirement funds invested in a reprehensible system that profits from mass incarceration and immigrant detention. The NM ERB must find alternative investments that don’t use our most vulnerable families and innocent children as pawns for profits.

Endnotes:

Although minority races make up 30% of the population of the US, they make up 60% of the US incarcerated population. The ACLU estimates that 1 out of 3 black boys, and 1 out of 6 Latino boys may go to prison in their lifetimes, compared with 1 out of 17 white boys.

According to the NPR story, the Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks political contributions found that the two largest private prison corporations, CoreCivic and GEO Group spent $1.6 million and $2.8 million, respectively, on political contributions and lobbying in 2018. “CoreCivic and GEO Group’s revenues totaled a combined $4.1 billion in 2018.” “ Many activists say that the pursuit of revenue in the industry has helped drive today’s immigration policies. “ (Noguchi, 2019).