MEMORANDUM

TO: President Ana Mari Cauce
    Provost Gerald Baldasty
    Patrick Shanahan, Chair, Board of Regents

FROM: School of Public Health Leadership

RE: UW School of Public Health Leadership statement on prison divestment

DATE: July 15, 2016

The University of Washington School of Public Health leadership acknowledges with concern the role of mass incarceration in the United States. After remaining stable for most of the 20th century, the rate of imprisonment more than quadrupled beginning in the 1970s. Nearly one in 100 adults is currently imprisoned, for a total of 2.2 million prisoners—more than one in four of the world’s prisoners; our rate of incarceration is 5 to 10 times higher than the rates in other wealthy nations. The U.S. prison population is drawn from the most disadvantaged groups in our nation: people of color and those who are poorly educated. Prisoners often bear additional burdens of drug and alcohol addictions, mental and physical illnesses, and lack of work preparation or experience.¹ These issues are well described in the UW Health Sciences common book for the 2015-16 academic year, The New Jim Crow.² In disproportionately targeting people of color, especially black men, the “school to prison pipeline” has had a devastating effect on millions of lives—fracturing families, foreclosing opportunities, locking in poverty. Mass incarceration is a public health crisis, as noted by sources from the Vera Institute of Justice to the New York Times editorial page to academic researchers. It is also a moral crisis, given its discriminatory impacts and the damage it inflicts.

There are two ways in which the University of Washington may be institutionally engaged with prisons. First, the University may purchase goods manufactured by the Washington state prison inmate work program, Washington Correctional Industries. Second, the University may hold investments in such private prison firms as the Corrections Corporation of America and the GEO Group (formerly Wackenhut Corrections Corporation).

We understand that the University is currently assessing both forms of engagement. We understand further that both issues are complex. With regard to Washington Correctional Industries, state law governs some purchasing by state agencies, including UW. With regard to investments, the University has more control over its direct holdings than over those in consolidated funds.

Despite these complexities, we believe that both forms of engagement represent support of, and complicity with, mass incarceration, and therefore undermine public health and social and racial justice. Accordingly, we support University disengagement from the prison industry.
With respect to Washington Correctional Industries, we urge that all lawful means be utilized to cease purchasing from that source. If such purchasing is legally required, we urge the University to work with the Washington legislature to change the law as needed, to end the purchasing requirement.

With respect to investment holdings, we urge the University to divest itself of any direct holdings in the private prison industry, and to work with its fund managers toward divesting consolidated funds of such holdings as well.

Howard Frumkin, MD, DrPH
Professor and Dean

Patrick J. Heagerty, PhD
Professor and Chair, Department of Biostatistics

Michael Yost, MS, PhD
Professor and Chair, Department of Environmental & Occupational Health

Victoria Holt, PhD, MPH
Professor and Chair, Department of Epidemiology

Judith N. Wasserheit, MD, MPH
Professor and William H. Foege Chair
Department of Global Health

Jeffrey R. Harris, MD, MPH, MBA
Professor and Chair, Department of Health Services

Shirley A. A. Beresford, PhD
Professor and Senior Associate Dean

Annette Fitzpatrick, PhD
Research Professor and Assistant Dean, Graduate Education

Sara L. C. Mackenzie, MD, MPH
Senior Lecturer and Assistant Dean, Undergraduate Education

Uli Haller, MBA
Senior Director, Finance and Administration

India Ornelas, PhD
Assistant Professor, Health Services and Faculty Champion of Diversity
