

Grand Rapids veterans home is Michigan's latest outsourcing disaster

Detroit Free Press Editorial Board 9:58 a.m. EST March 2, 2016



(Photo: Paul Lachine/Special to the Free Press)

How many times have you heard this story? Hoping to cut costs, government outsources work to a private contractor who promises to deliver superior service for less money. It doesn't happen. In fact, things go horribly awry.

Here's the latest: In 2011, in Gov. Rick Snyder's first term, the state privatized nursing assistant jobs at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans, laying off 150 aides and outsourcing the work to contractor J2S Group for an estimated \$4-million savings. After initial complaints about deterioration of care, a resident veteran filed suit, and an Ingham County Circuit Court judge briefly halted the privatization. But the state ultimately prevailed, the Michigan Court of Appeals ruling in 2013 that residence at the home was voluntary, and that veterans were free to relocate if the care wasn't up to par.

And so complaints about care continued, for years.



DETROIT FREE PRESS

Audit cites lack of staff, false records at vets home

(<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/02/18/draft-audit-michigan-veterans-home/80556304/>)

Until last week, when a state audit identified glaring deficiencies in the privatized service, including inadequate staffing levels, shoddy response to falls and fall alarms, failure to respond properly to abuse claims, inadequate controls for prescription medication and poor follow-through on insurance reimbursements.

The auditor general's report found that on one day, J2S was 22 workers short of the number necessary to adequately staff the home, averaging 121.3 staffers per day when 125.9 were required. Just 47% of required room checks were performed, and 33% of fall-alarm checks; even worse, the home faked documentation claiming the checks had happened. Of 10 abuse and neglect complaints reviewed by the auditor, only one was referred to the home's nursing director for investigation. After the audit was made public, Jeff Barnes, a veteran and former Snyder campaign manager who had served as director of the Michigan Veteran Affairs Agency, resigned.

These are unacceptable practices anywhere. They're especially outrageous at a facility charged with making good on this nation's promise to care for its veterans.

When the State of Michigan privatized a prison food contract, it was easy in certain circles to ignore the egregious wrongs perpetrated by employees of Aramark, the private company hired to provide food for inmates in Michigan's prisons. For some folks, it's OK to dismiss maggots near the food supply or rats nibbling on food intended for prisoners, food workers having sex with inmates or smuggling in drugs, because some believe that prisoners deserve rough treatment. They're in prison, after all.



DETROIT FREE PRESS

Audit finds \$3.4M discrepancy in prison meal counts

(<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/12/04/audit-aramark-paid-34m-unverified-prison-meals/76771446/>)

You can't make that claim about veterans. Especially not veterans in a nursing home.

It's the same principle at work, whether it applies to veterans or prisoners: The services most important for government to provide don't have a traditional bottom line. Schools, roads, care for veterans -- the public good, not profit, is the controlling concern.

"Our men and women who served in the military deserve the best possible health care and the home has a great reputation," Snyder's deputy press secretary Ken Silfven told Michigan Radio after the court ruled that privatization could go forward, back in 2013. "This ruling offers certainty that that level of care is going to continue and save taxpayer dollars."

There's a certain appeal to the idea that an outside vendor can cut through government red tape, dodging burdensome union requirements to provide efficient, targeted service at a lower cost than can a lumbering bureaucracy. Making government more efficient has been a hallmark of Snyder's administration; the accountant-turned-governor promised to apply business principles to government, improving efficiency and outcomes for taxpayers, or "customers," in the parlance of business-friendly politicians.

And, as far as theories go, there's nothing wrong with ensuring that government uses tax dollars effectively, delivering the best value to the people who trust, and rely, on its care.

But that's the caveat: As with any governing philosophy, it had better work.

When will the champions of privatization in Michigan admit that thus far, it has not?



DETROIT FREE PRESS

[Nurse anesthetists say disrespect led to resistance](http://www.freep.com/story/money/business/michigan/2016/01/14/nurse-anesthetists-say-disrespect-led-resistance/78525134/)

[\(http://www.freep.com/story/money/business/michigan/2016/01/14/nurse-anesthetists-say-disrespect-led-resistance/78525134/\)](http://www.freep.com/story/money/business/michigan/2016/01/14/nurse-anesthetists-say-disrespect-led-resistance/78525134/)

Read or Share this story: <http://on.freep.com/1oO6GSf>



CareInHomes



Simplify Your Search
for Senior Home Care

