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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY VIGIL HELD IN HONOR OF WOMEN WHO DIED AT DAWSON STATE JAIL

Austin, TX - A coalition of groups representing criminal justice, civil liberties, policy, and faith organizations will gather across the street from Dawson State Jail in downtown Dallas, TX for a candlelight vigil at 6:00 p.m., Thursday, March 7th, the eve of International Women's Day. The vigil is being held to honor the women who have died while incarcerated at the jail, a privately run for-profit prison operated by Corrections Corporation of America.

Those being honored include Shebaa Green (50), Ashleigh Shae Parks (30), and Pam Weatherby (45), all of whom died from ostensibly preventable causes after correctional officers at Dawson State Jail ignored pleas for help. Also being remembered at the vigil is Gracie Miller, a premature infant who lived only four days after being born in a toilet inside Dawson. The baby's mother, Autumn Miller, requested a pregnancy test just three weeks before giving birth but was denied by prison staff. The women who died, along with Gracie's mother, were serving short-term sentences for non-violent offenses.

"Corrections Corporation of American has a well-documented history of neglect of incarcerated people, and several cases at Dawson have resulted in death," said Kymberlie Quong Charles of Grassroots Leadership. "Unfortunately, these problems are common in prisons run for profit by corporations. How many more people will have to die before this facility is closed?"

Speakers at the vigil will include Joy Strickland, CEO of Mothers Against Teen Violence, Inc., in addition to representatives from Grassroots Leadership, a national organization against for-profit incarceration and detention, and the Texas Inmate Families Association, which provides education, support, and advocacy for the families of people who are incarcerated.

"Pam Weatherby, Ashleigh Parks, and Shebaa Green were incarcerated for low-level, nonviolent drug charges. By all accounts, their deaths were preventable and stand as an irrevocable indictment against Dawson State Jail and the corporation responsible for its operation," said Strickland. "It makes a mockery of justice when a person incarcerated for a nonviolent offense must risk her life as she pays her debt to society".

The vigil is taking place less than two weeks after the release of a report titled *Dawson State Jail: The Case for Closure*. Coauthored by the Sentencing Project and Grassroots Leadership, the report details abuses at the jail and encourages Texas lawmakers to not renew the state's contract with Corrections Corporation of America when it expires this August. The report appears to have made an impact on the Senate Finance Committee who voted Monday to zero out funding for the facility.

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