STopping BI, the Giant of e-Carceration

Based in Boulder, Colorado, BI is the biggest electronic monitoring operation in the world. The firm opened in 1978 as a producer of electronic monitors used to track cows. In the early 1980s, they patented a device called Home Escort to track humans. As of 2018 BI claimed to have 144,000 monitors in circulation. We estimate that 300,000 people a year spend time on a BI Monitor.

Where do their profits come from?

- BI manufactures monitors and rents them to state, county, and federal authorities. These devices include GPS monitors that track location, radio frequency monitors that verify a person’s presence at home, and alcohol monitors that record the volume of alcohol in a person’s perspiration. Daily rental for devices ranges from three to eight dollars.

- BI provides other carceral services besides EM. Through their subsidiary, Protocol Criminal Justice, they operate call centers for people on parole, with a special focus for people on BI monitors.

Business is booming

- BI’s revenue is rising from $10 million in 2008 to over $124 million by 2018. This increase came from growing the number of monitors and daily user fees which can reach as high as $25.

  In Illinois alone BI earns about $2.5 million a year from monitoring. From 2015-18 Protocol earned over $18 million for its Illinois call center contract. They have contracts with departments of corrections in eleven different states for electronic monitoring of people on parole.

BI’s biggest cash cow: ICE

- The use of pretrial electronic monitoring is growing but immigration is the biggest source of profits for BI. The company holds a virtual monopoly on immigrant electronic monitoring.

- Under the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP), BI has signed four multiyear contracts with ICE since 2004 to monitor immigrants. Total value of the contracts is more than $800 million.

- BI has about 50,000 immigrants on electronic monitors under ISAP, up from 15,000 in 2015.

An infamous parent company

- GEO Group is the largest private prison operator in the world, with income of $2.3 billion in 2018. GEO runs 69 “secure facilities” in the US. This includes about a third of all immigration detention centers, holding nearly 9,000 people. GEO bought BI in 2011 for $415 million.

- GEO has a long record of abusive practices in their facilities, incurring 34 workplace penalties totaling over $7 million in fines since 2000. In 2009 a Texas court awarded the family of Gregorio De La Rosa $42.5 million in their lawsuit against GEO. De la Rosa was beaten to death in a GEO prison in 2006. Javier Hernandez of Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice called GEO’s Adelanto Detention Center, “the deadliest detention center of 2017,” after the death of three people in the facility.

Electronic monitoring is another form of incarceration

We want real alternatives, not digital prisons. For more information visit mediajustice.org/nodigitalprisons and challengingecarceration.org.