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Delaware County will return its privately run prison to public control The George W. Hill Correctional Facility will return to county control in the spring.

Delaware County will terminate its contract with the private company that runs the county jail, beginning the process of returning the facility to public control after years of debate. The move was authorized in a unanimous vote of County Council at a meeting Wednesday night. By next spring, the GEO Group will transfer all management duties of the George W. Hill Correctional Facility to the county. The jail, in Thornton, was the last privately run facility of its kind in Pennsylvania. The decision by the council at its meeting late Wednesday came after a recommendation last week by the county's Jail Oversight Board to exercise the early termination option in the county's contract with GEO. County Councilman Kevin Madden, who also serves as chair of the oversight board, said in a statement that the decision was made with the well-being of the jail's inmates in mind. "It is for the health, safety, and vibrancy of our entire community that we must ensure that those dealing with addiction and mental health disorders get the treatment that they need, and that we bring all stakeholders together to reduce recidivism in our jail system," Madden said. "Those goals are in direct conflict with the motives of a for-profit prison operator, whose business model is predicated on keeping jail cells full." In recent years, George W. Hill has come under scrutiny amid reports of inmate suicides, poor living conditions, and staffing shortages. Grassroots activists and former inmates had pleaded with County Council to intervene. Representatives from GEO have called the criticism overblown and said returning the facility to public control would be more expensive and have little impact on the safety of the inmates. GEO currently handles all staffing, medical, food, and maintenance costs at the jail. The county maintains a small staff of public employees who act as administrators overseeing day-to-day operations. The Jail Oversight Board spent months analyzing the cost of transitioning the facility back to county control. It hired two management firms to estimate these costs and found that the county would save as much as \$10 million annually by running the prison itself and contracting out other services, as surrounding counties do with their jails. In a statement Thursday, a spokesperson for GEO said the company hopes the county can achieve its goals and objectives by taking over the jail. "Throughout our long-standing partnership with Delaware County, we have always acknowledged the county's right to terminate the management contract," the spokesperson said. "As government service providers, we continuously maintain the highest standards and look forward to working cooperatively with the county and its consultants to realize a smooth, seamless, and safe transition."