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Delco Jail Oversight Board recommends terminating \$259M contract with prison operator GEO Group

Delaware County's Jail Oversight Board has voted on a partial takeover of services and formally recommended terminating the \$259 million contract with GEO Group, the for-profit company that runs the controversy-plagued county prison. The bottom line: Control of the George W. Hill Correctional Facility, Pennsylvania's only privately managed county prison, will likely return to the hands of county government. The board's action Tuesday evening set the stage for an Oct. 6 vote by the five-member County Council to officially terminate the contract - and deliver on one of the major campaign promises of the 2019 election that gave Democrats every seat and wrested control from the Republican Party for the first time since the Civil War. If the council chooses next week to cut ties with GEO Group, the vote would trigger a 180-day notice and transition period. The partial takeover of services would focus on the four key areas - food, medical, commissary, and maintenance - that were the subject of a request-for-proposals process over the past few months. Full deprivatization of the prison would be a more gradual process. County Councilman Kevin Madden, who chairs the nine-member Jail Oversight Board, said his vote Tuesday evening came down to what a society should envision the role of a jail to be. "We as a county as a whole, as residents and taxpayers, we will also be better off with a county jail that is laser-focused on reducing recidivism and improving the health of our entire community, instead of maximizing its profits," Madden said. A for-profit company is "diametrically opposed" to the interests of the community, he said. While stressing the financial viability of a return to county management, county Executive Director Howard Lazarus also touched on the issue of values as he voted to recommend that GEO Group's contract be terminated. "I'm committed to this change, we will put the resources in place to make it successful. And we will do better by the people who are placed in our care for the time that they're with us," Lazarus said. WHY News reached out to GEO Group for a comment. A company spokesperson responded with a statement acknowledging the county's legal authority to end its management contract with proper notice. "As previously stated on several occasions, we do not dispute the county's authority to terminate the contract, but we do dispute the misleading and misinformed findings of the county's financial and management analysis, along with any reason for termination that is unsound and politically motivated. We will work in cooperation with the county to transition the management to the county so it can outsource the services to multiple private entities," the statement said.