Private for-profit companies are often contracted by governments to incarcerate citizens as well as hold migrants in indefinite detention. In 2012, the United States detained approximately 400,000 people in immigration custody in about 250 facilities at an annual cost of more than $1.7 billion. These companies regularly lobby in Washington, D.C., for more detention, even if it is not the most effective use of taxpayer dollars.1 When private prisons make money based on the number incarcerated and the longevity of sentences, they become a powerful lobby for maintaining and expanding the current system of mass incarceration. The United Methodist Church has noted that this growing privatization of prisons creates a perverse incentive to expand prison populations, even when this is more costly to taxpayers than alternatives to mass incarceration.2

---

2 See The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2004, Resolution 257, “Prison Industrial Complex”; “Private prison companies typically are paid on a per capita and per diem basis. Therefore, they have little incentive to rehabilitate prisoners or to prevent recidivism. Indeed, it is in their economic interest to have more crime, more incarceration and more recidivism, all of which lead to more profits” (p. 653).