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THE NEWS TRIBUNE

THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE SOUTH SOUND

GEO secures $1.5B ICE contract for Tacoma facility

BY PETER TALBOT
ptalbot@thenewstribune.com

The federal contractor that operates the immigration detention center in Tacoma, the GEO Group, announced Thursday that it secured a contract to continue operating the facility for ICE for 10 years. The deal is valued at about $1.5 billion.

The Northwest ICE Processing Center on the Tacoma Tideflats holds people suspected of being in the country illegally or awaiting deportation. Its capacity is 1,635.

The GEO Group, a Florida-based company, operates correctional facilities around the world. It has owned and operated the detention center in Tacoma since 2005. In its Thursday announcement, the company said it expects its new contract to generate revenues of about $140 million per year. When the company secured its 2015 contract to operate the facility, it said it expected to generate $57 million in annualized revenues.

The company said its services to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement are expected to include security, maintenance and food services. GEO is also expected to provide access to recreational amenities, medical care and transportation services. The contract runs through Oct. 27, 2036.

"The Northwest ICE Processing Center plays an important role in helping meet the need for federal immigration processing center bedspace," George Foley,

SEE ICE, 4A



BRIAN HAYES bhayes@thenewstribune.com

Northwest ICE Processing Center holds and processes detainees, on Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025, in Tacoma



LIESBETH POWERS lpowers@thenewstribune.com

La Cocina de Jalisco served tacos from its food truck during a Bites on Broadway food truck event in downtown Tacoma in August 2026. Some arguments for escalating punishment of unlicensed vendors focus on the "unfair advantage" compared to properly permitted businesses, whether brick-and-mortar restaurants or food trucks.

Council votes down ordinance on food vendor penalties

BY KRISTINE SHERRED
ksherred@thenewstribune.com

Should the people behind pop-up food tents selling al pastor tacos and little white carts stacked with sliced fruit be fined and arrested for not having proper health permits?

The Pierce County Council narrowly declined to adopt legislation this week that would have granted the Sheriff's Office a major new role in an issue that health officials say has ballooned into a food-safety problem they have been unable to solve.

After about 90 minutes of discussion involving several amendments, public comments, and council debate ranging from concerns over equity to available resources for already strapped agencies, the ordinance failed to muster enough votes to pass at the Oct. 27 meeting. Concerns arose predominantly from council members representing the county's biggest cities, including Democrats Rosie Ayala (District 4), Bryan Yambe (District 5) and chair Jani Hitchen (District 6). Robyn Denson, a Democrat representing District 7, also voted no. Vice chair Paul Herrera (District 2) was joined by fellow Republicans Amy Cruver (District 3) and bill sponsor Dave Morell (District 1) in voting in favor of the ordinance as amended on Tuesday.

The "mobile food vending units" ordinance (O2026-564) was immediately perceived as controversial. Most public comments were negative. The council's public-safety committee, which includes Morell, Hitchen and Yambe, forwarded it "without recommendation" on Oct. 12, but the conversation at the time did not make clear whether it had enough support to pass — at least not without significant changes.

For almost two years, health departments across Washington state have been clamoring over a reported rise in unpermitted food vendors on street corners and convenience store parking lots, which they say pose a public health risk. Some officials have alleged a coordinated network — a hub-and-spoke model involving an organized food-production and equipment supplier sending pop-ups out onto the streets — although evidence supporting that theory remains scant, The News Tribune reported this summer.

Local health agencies have sent inspectors into the field to confront vendors, usually with an education-first approach and a goal of helping them secure a proper permit, but they say their efforts have fallen flat. The state Department of Health has convened roundtables to swap stories and solutions, but neither consensus on the best approach nor a noticeable dent in the numbers has emerged. The rate is higher in Western Washington, where King and Pierce counties each reported shutting down a couple dozen in 2024 and then more than 100 in 2025. In Spokane and Benton-Franklin, the totals in that time span jumped from just a few to low double-digits.

In January, Everett adopted legislation similar to Morell's proposed ordinance. He discussed it with the mayor, he explained to The News Tribune in an interview, who told him that the unlicensed vendors all but disappeared from the Snohomish County waterfront city once word of the criminal threat spread.

The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, he continued, was frustrated by their limited enforcement abilities.

"I came to the conclusion, 'We've given you a year to figure this out. We're not making progress,'" said Morell before the Oct. 27 vote. "Whatever enforcement they thought they were doing was getting ignored. They would see the same vendor just pop up eight blocks away."

Unable to confirm the source or preparation of the food off site and seeing scarce if any refrigeration on site, health officials "just knew that eventually someone was gonna get sick — who's gonna get blamed

SEE VENDOR, 10A

Landlords investigated for text campaign violations

BY SIMONE CARTER
scarter@mcclatchy.com

If you live in Tacoma, you might have gotten the text.

"We're gathering input for housing research for the City of Tacoma and need your help. Give yours," read the Oct. 20 message, which included a link to a website with a survey featuring questions about Measure 1, an initiative that aims to boost tenant protections and enforcement in the city.

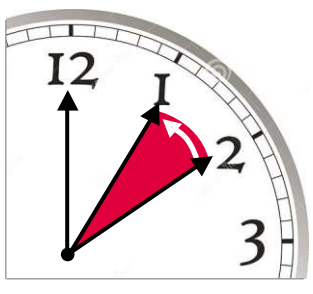
On Oct. 23, staff with the state's Public Disclosure Commission regulatory agency opened a complaint into the landlord group behind the messages. The PDC cited allegations that the Rental Housing Association of WA PAC may have violated campaign-finance law by omitting required sponsor identification on anti-Measure 1 political ads.

The complaint says that the 61,905 text messages promoting the push poll, hosted by the now-defunct website progressives4responsiblerenting.org, cost $4,018.78.

PDC staff flagged the complaint as "high impact."

"Sponsor Identification on Political Advertising is important because it informs recipients of the advertising of the name and address of the spon-

SEE LANDLORDS, 2A



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