

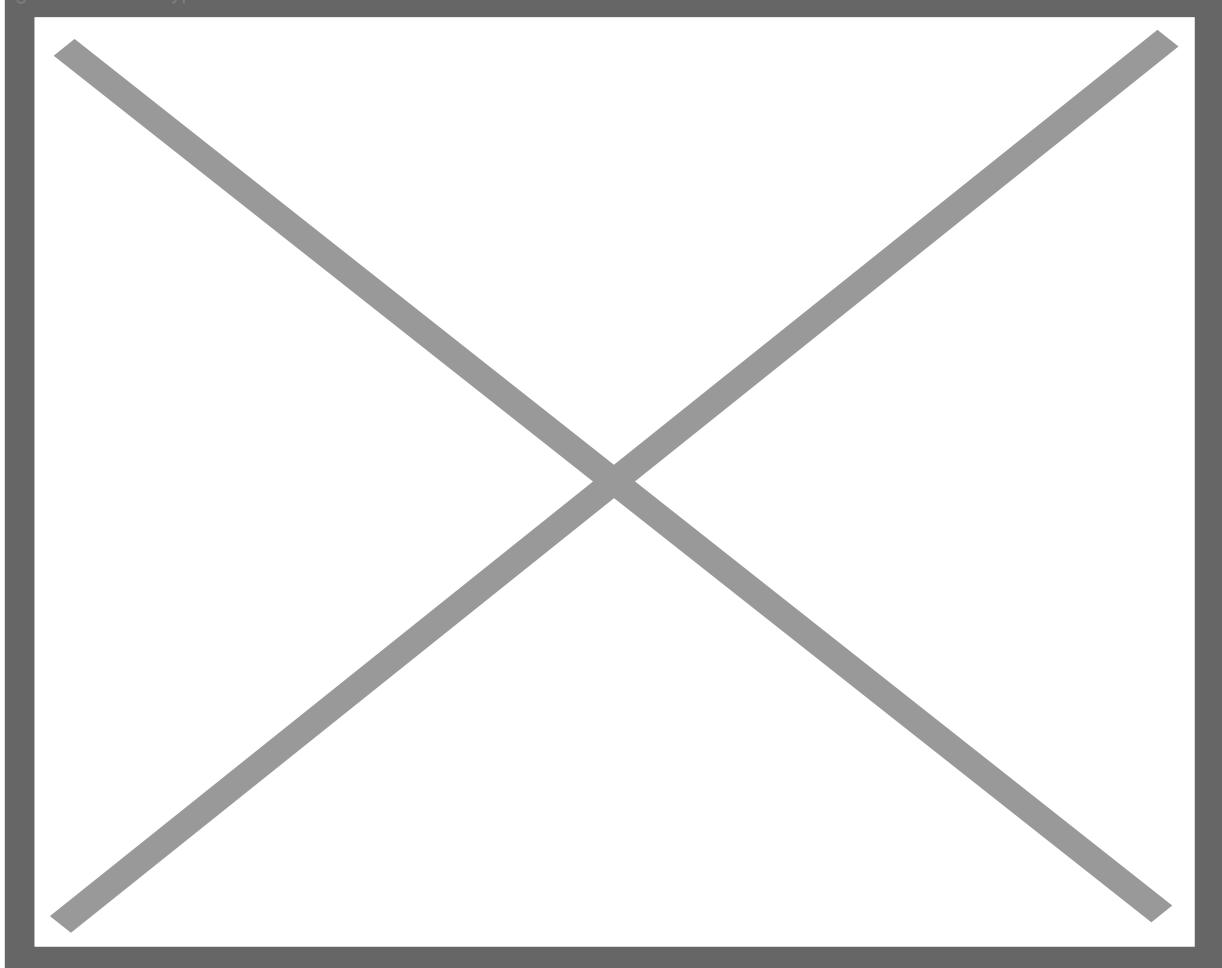
Senators Alarmed by Prison Contraband After Videos Capture Detainee Beatings Inside BOC Facilities

Amid evidence of smuggled cellphones and inmate-on-inmate assaults, lawmakers pushed Director Winnie Testamark for firmer action, demanding dismissals, prosecutions, and stronger safeguards as devices sell for \$1,000 and staff face scrutiny.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **December 05, 2025**

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The John A. Bell Correctional Facility on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Lawmakers have urged the Bureau of Corrections to crack down on the infiltration of contraband in the territory's detention facilities, as videos uploaded to social media platforms reveal the use of cellphones by detainees and inmates.

The content of those social media videos raises, in itself, another concern, as individuals in the care of the Bureau of Corrections are filmed assaulting one another.

Senator Kenneth Gittens, who said he has seen some of the videos, was deeply concerned by the interlinked issues. He addressed his concerns to BOC director Wynnie Testmark during Thursday's meeting of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety.

According to Ms. Testamark, "cellphones currently is going for \$1,000 a pop," highlighting the demand for the illicit devices. She affirmed to Senator Gittens that investigations are ongoing, and the BOC continues to work with "external stakeholders" to eradicate the importation of contraband into the detention facilities. However, there have been no arrests made recently on that basis.

Not wholly satisfied with her response, Sen. Gittens questioned what "permanent measures" have been adopted to combat both violence within the prisons and the unauthorized presence of the devices being used to record the assaults.

The Bureau, said Ms. Testamark, continues to "hold staff accountable." Security checks are part of regular operations, and staff are "restricted to a particular clear bag."

Still, Gittens called for more decisive action. "If it's they bringing it in, I expect for them to be fired and charged," he declared. He urged the Bureau of Corrections to more seriously consider the safety of both their employees and detainees. The lawmaker made another appeal for the government to "pull up our socks."

He painted a picture of the social media posting as "a needle in our behinds." It is Sen. Gittens's opinion that inmates are not sufficiently occupied within the prison system. "We're seeing the idle behavior taking place on social media," he argued.

Senator Franklin Johnson, who previously worked in the Bureau of Corrections for several years, was equally concerned. He questioned Ms. Testamark on whether any charges had been laid for the assaults within the prison. BOC's director shared that disciplinary hearings are heard internally. Senator Johnson wasn't satisfied.

"There was more than one individual that was assaulted, and these are charges that should go straight to the courthouse, not in-house," Sen. Johnson demanded. He lamented the lenient nature of repercussions meted out internally. "They should be charged in a court of law where they get sentenced to more time," he suggested.

Ms. Testamark later confirmed that some cases have been referred to the attorney general "for prosecution," but could not provide supporting statistics at the time.

"They've been punished by being in prison already, but now they're being beat down in prison," Senator Johnson lamented, advocating for the abused inmates and detainees.

Returning to the issue of contraband, Senator Kurt Vialt bemoaned that it is "such a serious issue." Based on the testimony that successfully smuggling contraband into the prison could attract a \$1,000 payment, Sen. Vialt noted that staff could view it as a "substantial business."

Like his colleagues, he urged the BOC to act swiftly and severely. "People only react when there's repercussion... You need to be firm in cracking down on that," he urged Ms. Testamark.

He also encouraged Director Testamark to maintain constant communication with the AG's office to ensure those responsible for assaults within the prison are dealt with appropriately. "We supposed to be following up every minute," Viallet insisted.

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