

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I. Jails On Lockdown As Prisoners Transfer To U.S.

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According to a press release made available on Tuesday by the Bureau of Corrections (BOC), in an effort to come in alignment with an agreement reached between the Bureau and the U.S. Justice Department, 78 inmates were transferred this morning from prisons in the territory to cells on the mainland. Because of the transfer, which BOC officials are calling unexpected, prisons on St. Croix and St. Thomas are now on lockdown.

"In seeking to further comply with the settlement agreement by increasing the officer to inmate ratio, we must transfer inmates to the continental United States," Bureau of Corrections Director Julius C. Wilson said. "Our staffing numbers are too low for the current inmate population, which poses a potential security and safety issue for inmates and personnel."

[Two months ago](#), the Territory and the Corrections Bureau were ordered to court by Chief Justice of the District Court of the Virgin Islands Wilma Lewis, to explain why they should not be held in contempt for failing to abide by a court-monitored settlement agreement established to bring reforms to the Golden Grove prison on St. Croix.

"Despite nearly thirty years of litigation, multiple enforcement orders, and countless admonitions from this Court, the prisoners and staff at Golden Grove Adult Correctional and Detention Facility ("Golden Grove"), as well as people in the surrounding Virgin Islands community, continue to be at risk of serious harm from Defendants' ongoing failure to comply with court-ordered measures remedying unconstitutional conditions at the facility," the U.S. Justice Department's motion read.

The prisoner transfer happened suddenly, according to the release, and Wilson said the Bureau realizes family members of inmates "are concerned and alarmed, however our security staff were diligent in application of the criteria which led to the selections."

The transfer includes inmates from the Golden Grove Adult Correctional and Detention Facility on St. Croix, and the Criminal Justice Complex on St. Thomas, although St. Thomas' complex mainly holds prisoners awaiting sentencing, and short-term prisoners. Inmates selected were chosen based on "time left on sentence, conduct, and general management."

The U.S. Justice Department motion, filed in August, added that the failures of the Territory and the Corrections Bureau have not been without consequence, and listed the ramifications of said failures the Golden Grove staff and prisoners, along with members of the St. Croix community, have suffered.

They include:

- A prisoner escaped in May that prison staff discovered only after a woman in the community reported to police the prisoner had raped her and police contacted the prison inquiring about the inmate's whereabouts.
- At least three prisoner-on-prisoner stabbings, two in May and one in July.
- The attempted escape of five prisoners who were caught by the VIPD, not Golden Grove officials in June 2014.

According to a statement released today from BOC, "Further details of the transfer cannot be revealed at this time; however, inmates' relatives will receive notification and contact information following the arrival, processing and placement of those transferred."

The lockdown is expected to be lifted by the end of the week; however, until that time, all visitations, facility activities and other programs at the prisons will remain suspended.