

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Maim And Mentally Ill Among Golden Grove Inmates Shipped To U.S. Prisons; B.O.C. Employee Says

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Ernice Gilbert **March 09, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- A Bureau of Corrections employee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity fearing backlash, told The Consortium late Tuesday that among the Golden Grove Correctional Facility convicted inmates transferred to U.S. mainland facilities, were maimed and mentally ill prisoners.

"Sick, mentally ill, in wheelchair -- everybody went. Rough day," the Golden Grove employee said. "The guys with leg one, they put them all on that plane. One or two could hardly walk. What was the reason behind this? Usually, you ship out the ones you can't control, [but] they emptied the sentences population. The education program population is gone, we're basically running a detention center now."

Indeed, Governor Kenneth Mapp revealed at a Government House press conference on Tuesday that with the bulk of inmates in U.S. prisons, Golden Grove now has only 53 sentenced inmates and 167 detainees.

Bureau of Corrections Director Rick Mullgrav at the same press conference said that there were many benefits to shipping the inmates to the mainland facilities. He said the Golden Grove population, which stood at over 400 before Tuesday's transfer, was too great a number for the employees at Golden Grove, and argued that the stateside facilities were better equipped not only in manpower, but other resources -- including educational and rehabilitation programs -- and would do a better job with the inmates. But perhaps one of the Mapp administration's main reasons for shipping 105 prisoners out of the territory yesterday was to make room for a state-of-the-art facility, although a timeline on construction remains vague.

Another reason for the transfer is cost.

The prisoners were sent to facilities in Arizona and Florida, both of which are [part of the Corrections Corporation of America](#) (C.C.A.). According to Mr. Mullgrav, the transfer of prisoners on Tuesday came at a zero cost to the Government of the Virgin Islands, as C.C.A. covered transportation. Governor Kenneth Mapp said it costs the territory \$82 daily to house the inmates in the mainland facilities, which amounts to \$8,610 per day or \$258,300 monthly for the 105 inmates. There are approximately 257 U.S. Virgin Islands inmates who are being held in mainland facilities, according to the governor.

Even so, the transfer represents vast savings for the government, Mr. Mapp said, as the cost to house the inmates locally is \$150 daily -- which amounts to \$15,750 per day and \$472,500 monthly for 105 inmates.

"We are committed to professionalizing the institution, and the continued movement of convicted felons out of the territory is the mantra of this administration," Governor Kenneth Mapp said on Tuesday. He also chided Superior Court judges, stating that the court was not doing its job of hearing cases in a timely fashion, which has caused detainees to sit in prison for multiple years for simple charges.

"We have detainees sitting in Golden Grove, some for as high as seven years, waiting for a trial. Five years, three years — some of these persons are charged with aggravated assault, destruction of property, burglaries," Mr. Mapp said. "Yes, there are one or two that have been charged with murder; but at the end of the day, housing a detainee at a cost of \$150 a day at the Bureau of Corrections, and waiting as long as seven years and seven months for a trial, is totally unacceptable."

Mr. Mapp said his administration would accept some level of responsibility as work continues within the Department of Justice to improve resources and capacity, "but the reality is — and I've discussed this matter with the presiding judge — that the court simply is not moving on its dockets. We have judges who are being paid in the Superior Court, [and] some simply don't report to work on a regular basis; do not move their court calendar; cannot respond to simple motions to move the administration of justice forward," Mr. Mapp added.

“We have citizens in our community who are filing petitions for mandamus with the Supreme Court — which is simply asking the Superior Court judges to do their jobs — and having the Supreme Court act on those petitions to make a decision to move a trial forward.”

Mr. Mullgrav said while families were not given notice before the transfer, C.C.A. would provide video calls as a method of communication. Mr. Mullgrav was unable to give a timeline as to when the videoconferencing would start, however.