

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Golden Grove Breached Twice In One Week; Contraband Enter Facility

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ST. CROIX -- In November, two female corrections officers were arrested for their attempts to smuggle prison contraband, including drugs, into the Golden Grove Correctional Facility. In announcing [the first arrest](#), made on Friday, November 11, Bureau of Corrections Director Rick Mullgrav said the arrest was a result of beefed up security at the prison.

The second arrest was made on November 20, less than two weeks following the first attempt. Bureau of Corrections sources with intimate knowledge of the incidents said there was more to the situation than what is being reported, as it makes little sense, according to these sources -- who requested anonymity to freely speak on the matter --

that two women would risk their jobs and freedom in the span of two weeks, by smuggling contraband into the prison for the same inmate. This inmate, housed in the detention facility, is apparently feared by many -- even corrections officers, according to the sources.

On November 24, just four days following the second arrest, the Golden Grove Correctional Facility was breached. A person or persons had cut through the perimeter fencing behind detention housing unit of what is called 9Alpha (where the feared inmate is housed), and contraband was brought into the prison. Yet, even with knowledge of the breach, Mr. Mullgrav did not initiate a shutdown of the facility, which is normal protocol when such incidents occur. The fencing was patched on the same day, but it was breached again three days later on November 27 in the same area, according to an internal document obtained by The Consortium, seen [here](#).

It was only then that Mr. Mullgrav initiated a partial shutdown of the facility and conducted a shakedown of 9Alpha, with corrections officers combing through prison cells as they searched for contraband, according to the sources. They found roughly 5 cellphones, according to one source. It was not certain whether other contraband, such as knives, guns or drugs had been smuggled through the two breaches.

The Consortium contacted Mr. Mullgrav, but the director redirected the publication to Calvin Herbert, acting warden of the facility. Attempts to reach Mr. Herbert, however, were unsuccessful. The Consortium also left a voicemail on Mr. Herbert's office answering machine, but at time of writing, a response was not returned.

The publication received a call from Bureau of Corrections Public Information Officer Regina Watson, who acknowledged the incident, but declined to comment.

"Because it is an active investigation, there's not really much that can be said at this time, but they're working on improving everything at the facility," Ms. Watson said, referring to Bureau of Corrections leadership.

Mr. Mullgrav was in the U.S. when he was contacted by The Consortium, on a trip that saw him visiting the Arizona prison where Virgin Islands inmates are housed. Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter participated in the same visit, and [expressed concerns](#) over some matters regarding the V.I. inmates.

Problems at Golden Grove

The same sources that revealed the breach info to The Consortium, relayed a litany of other problems affecting the facility, which paints a picture contrary to what is being disseminated to the public. A generator that is supposed to power the entire facility in case of power outages only powers certain parts of the prison; metal detectors that Mr. Mullgrav said he placed at both entrances of Golden Grove were inoperable; and many prison cells are leaking severely when rain falls, making for unsanitary conditions for inmates.

Women resign

In June, Mr. Mullgrav [told The Consortium](#) that following salary increases that were initiated by Governor Kenneth Mapp, some Bureau of Corrections employees saw their

salary go from \$2,000 to \$4,000 monthly. He said the new reality helped in boosting employee morale.

"A large amount of the officers are very happy to have received their payment. Some people who have been here for up to 12-13 years had not seen a pay increase, so that means a lot to them. And it means a lot to the bureau too because at least we can compensate them in some manner for the amount of years they have contributed," Mr. Mullgrav said. He noted that being a correctional officer was a dangerous and hard job, and that the pay increases were well-deserving.

But during his tenure, at least six women have either resigned or retired. They include former Warden Mildred Trotter, H.R. Director Yvonne Lawrence, Mental Health Counselor Ava Murray, Investigator Angela Boyd, Special Assistant to Director Amy Griles, and Assistant Warden Diane Prosper. Ms. Trotter, the last warden to resign, was an acquaintance of Mr. Mullgrav. He said she left to take care of her mother, who had fallen gravely ill.

Progress with consent decree

Yet, even as much work remains at B.O.C. under Mr. Mullgrav's leadership, the director has made a lot of progress on the consent decree front.

In August, B.O.C. officials learned at the bureau's quarterly settlement agreement hearing that four out of the six goals set for said quarter were met. While noting that there was more work ahead, Judge Gomez, who oversaw the hearing, was generally pleased with the gains made and the direction the bureau had taken.

"I am heartened by your improvements," Judge Gomez said. "Out of all the consent decree cases I have in front of me, this agency has done the most in the least amount of time."

Security Expert David Bogard also testified that B.O.C. had made significant steps toward compliance and explained to Judge Gomez why all of B.O.C.'s goals had not been met.

"It takes more than just policies and procedures," Mr. Bogard said. "Creating administrative directives and enforcing them are more difficult than it may appear. For many years officers and staff have done business in a particular way and it takes more than just a change of rules and regulations to change that. You are changing a culture. These changes cannot and will not happen overnight."

Mr. Mullgrav said that the bureau was working hard to meet all of the court's directives.

"The changes being made at the Bureau of Corrections is territory-wide and are very challenging. It requires that the officers are retrained to meet new standards in performing their duties," he said. "This is not an easy task, however, many of the officers and staff have eagerly embraced the challenge. Progress has been made, not as rapidly as we would like it to be, but the hard work is being put forward. With all of the challenges that the staff and officers have to deal with on a day-to-day basis, whether it may be the physical plant or resources, I know this team is committed and doing an outstanding job, and I thank them for their relentless dedication."

Correction: Thursday, Dec. 8, 2016

A previous version of this story, because of a text error, stated that Venita Charles had left Golden Grove. Ms. Charles is currently employed at the facility, after receiving promised pay that was long delayed. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.

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