

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VI Inmate Opens Up About Unthinkable Abuse He And Others Endure At Out-Of-State Prisons

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Editor's Note: What you're about to read below is the account of a Virgin Islands prisoner who was shipped to mainland prison facilities where he said he received unthinkable, inhumane treatment; treatment that is in violation of Virgin Islands law, but has been allowed to continue by the Mapp administration under the leadership of Bureau of Corrections Director Rick Mulgrav.

In March 2016, [the Mapp administration shipped 105 VI inmates](#) to mainland facilities, bringing the total of VI inmates doing time in mainland prisons to 257 at the time.

To justify the move, Governor Kenneth Mapp said it was cheaper to house the inmates off island. During a press conference in March 2016, the governor said it costs taxpayers \$150 daily to house inmates without additional medical costs that accumulate over the course of their incarceration. By contrast, he added, it would cost the local government \$82 to house the same prisoners in the chosen stateside facilities.

But according to the account below, it appears the Mapp administration has failed inmates in ensuring their safety and humane treatment.

My name is Hector Ledesma. I have been incarceration for the past 13 years and 9 months. I was recently doing time in Virginia Red Onion Super-Max State Prison. I was sent there from Citrus Count detention center. Upon arrival to Red Onion I was placed in a locked down cell with stool all over the walls. I was told to remove my clothes and give it to the officers, so I did. I was then locked in that cell with no clothes. The officers refused to give me showers for three months, they refuse to give me any soap, toothpaste and other hygiene. The first time I brushed my mouth my gums was so tender that they started to bleed. I was given no toilet paper and the toilet and sink in the cell was not working either. The officers refused to give me a bed mattress so I had to try to sit and lay o the cold iron for months. I was being STARVED FOR THREE DAYS of EVERY SINGLE WEEK. So, for three days straight per week I would receive no breakfast, lunch or dinner. I had to DRINK MY OWN URINE TO SURVIVE. I was BEATEN/AB-- USED by the officers all BECA-- USE I was from the Virgin Islands. I thought I was going to die, I felt like dying. I tried sending some type of letter to my mother over on St. Croix but one day SGT. Flemming came to the cell door with something in his hands, he looked at me and said 'what is this boy, you trying to snitch on us? Nobody could help you, don't you see that your own Government don't care about you, that's why they sent you up here.' I just ignored him. Next thing I knew my door was being buzz opened and in comes the officers, I moved back up on the wall and they kept coming after me calling me "Island Monkey." They said where you gonna run to, and started beating me up, they left me on the floor bleeding through my mouth.

On another occasion I was sitting with my head between my legs while I sat on the cold floor, and the officer said stand up you piece of shit before I come in there and F*** you up. So I took a little time to stand up and he called back up. When they came in my room, I said what was the problem, they said get on the floor now mother f***er, so I did as I was told. They then had the dog breathing and dribbling over me while they laughed. Sgt. Flemming then took his foot and put it on top on my buttocks and said don't f***ing move. Then he started to rub his foot on my butt and said nice ass, then he started rubbing harder, my penis and testicles started to hurt cause it was rubbing on the cold floor, so I tried to move and he punched me behind my head and said I told you not to move you piece of shit. When they left, again I was coughing out blood. Even writing this right now is killing me inside, having to relive those moments. I thought I was gonna die. I didn't know what to do. I felt like giving up. I drew a face with my blood on the wall. I used to speak to the face on the wall to try to give myself some type of hope some type of comfort, some type of energy so I wouldn't give up. I was so tired and beaten down. I didn't know how much more I could have taken. I spent nights crying inside. I prayed so hard. Just when I was thinking of a way to give up on life, I started thinking about my family and friends and I kept telling myself to be strong for them. I heard my Sister Demaris voice in my head telling me to keep fighting. Don't give up the family needs you.

I started thinking about a few people and the good they have done for me, and I told myself I have to find a way to stay strong, don't give up, don't surrender, keep pushing through, you have love ones waiting for you to be free. So I refuse to die, I refuse to give into the pressure. One day I took a chance and sent a letter to my mother and from what I was told, she received it, she cried out for me when she read it. I was telling her they trying to kill me and to get help asap and so on. I'm pretty sure she still has that letter. So my Mother went to B.O.C Golden Grove crying and spoke to Officer Morris among others and showed him the letter. They assured her that they was gonna help me but they did nothing. I kept getting TORTURED DAY IN AND DAY OUT with NO HELP.

One day B.O.C. Officials to include Director Mulgrav, Officer Morris, Classification Leader Ms. Dewese, Head of Medical Linda Caldwell came to Red Onion to visit us and see how The V.I inmates were doing. All of US told them about the abuse and mistreatment we are receiving. I even told them about the officers beating my mentally ill cousin Michael Ledesma unconscious. They bust his head open and let the dog bit him up, all because they was telling him to come off the bunk and he took too long to respond. Of course, he would. He is MENTALLY ILL, but they don't know how to deal with mentally ill inmates so they think beating the crap out of them is the right way. B.O.C officials saw him for themselves and still did nothing about it. They claimed said they would look into it because that's not the first time that they are hearing complains like this. They assured us that they were going to move us from that particular prison because of the abuse of not only Virgin Island inmates but reports of excessive force and abuse of other out of state inmates. I told them, by us coming to them about the treatment that the officers will retaliate and I was told not to worry because B.O.C will continue a check on us to make sure that we are okay. On my way back to my cell the two officers who were escorting me said to me, You rat mother***er, we told you that nobody gonna help you. You thought we were joking. We got something for you later. I said nothing. I just felt like BREAKING DOWN.

So later that night around 9pm I heard my door popped open and saw the same two officers standing there with an African American inmate. They said you bitch mother f***er, here's a present for you. So they locked us in and walked away, I knew what time it was, because they don't move anyone so late at night and they also do not mix race in the same cell unless you request it on paper. It's VI with VI, Spanish with Spanish and so forth. So I already knew I was about to get stabbed maybe to death. I jumped off the bed, there was inmate AJ with a shank in his hand, so I stood there with a wire in my hand and my shoes ready to fight for my life. But then one guy yelled out to me through the AC vent. He said VI what's going on down there. I told him nothing I'm good. When inmate AJ heard my accent he said oh shit you from the islands. I said yeah and what. He said what the f*** did I get myself into and told me the cops lied to him. They told him that they gonna put him in a cell with A White Snitch, deal with him and they gonna look out for him, they gonna send him to a lower land prison. Inmate AJ then said dude I don't want no problems with no VI people. I got love for you guys. I love the VI so I told him what are we gonna do about this then cause you can't stay in this cell with me when I already know your motives. AJ then gave me the shank/knife and said dude that's proof that I don't want no problems with the VI. So three days after the officers realize nothing was done to me and they ask him why the f*** is He still breathing. AJ then told them he is from the VI he ain't no white dude like you told me. I sent word to my mother to alert B.O.C officials about this retaliation on my life. My mother emailed Director Mulgrav,

Linda Caldwell and Ms. Dewese about the latest incident and the only reply my mother got was from Director Mulgrav asking who she was. And once again they did nothing to help. That's when I was convinced that B.O.C. left me there to die.

The following day the same officers brought a charge against AJ. The charge was that he disrespected them which was a lie. They wanted him out of my cell to try put someone else, but the same day AJ had to go to what we call Kangaroo Court for the write up, that same exact day I was So Blessed that some Marshals came to get me for another case back in the VI. My life was spared because of my accent and also because the Marshals came for me for another case. I tried seeking help and was unsuccessful. Last December I spent about three weeks on St. Croix in Golden Grove, my first night sleeping up by booking control, at night two officers opened my door to check on me and saw me lying down under the bed under the iron and asked me what was wrong with me and why I was sleeping under the bed on the cold floor, and for a moment I realized I was back in the VI. I slept under the bed because I figure whenever the door open the officers coming in to beat me so I felt safe under the bed. While I was in Puerto Rico Federal Prison I did the samething as well. I had 15 different roommates because nobody lasted there with me. I was losing it. I was losing my mind. And still my torture and abuse is still going unnoticed.

As I write this, I am on St. Thomas prison, the Annex and I'm still having problems mentally and to this day I have received no help and there are still V.I inmates in Red Onion along with Wallens Ridge prisons in Virginia getting tortured and abused. One of the sad things is that we're just up there filling slots for other inmates who left. It's a vicious cycle. Those two prisons are max prisons for high risk deadly inmates. If you ask BOC's Director to contact BOC's classification for the prison records of any VI inmate housed in those prisons, you would be shocked to learn most of these inmates are inmates with good behavior. I know of VI inmates sent to these supermax prisons without a single write up while incarcerated in the Virgin Islands, but they are in a super max prison. It's a cycle that needs to end. They rotate us and sell us like slaves. They sell us off to the lowest bidder. I believe, if the contract for, lets say Red Onion, states that 15 VI inmates will be housed there, then what happens is everytime an inmate gets release or moved from Red Onion State Prison, BOC just sends another body to fill that vacancy.

It's sad because the Virgin Islands is such a small and beautiful place where everybody knows everybody. How could you send away your own people to racist, homosexual, abusive, gang prisons to be hurt? There is no rehabilitation in those prisons. Those prisons just fill you up with hate. There are no programs for us up there and by law their should be.

VI Code says "the Director of Corrections is authorized to enter into agreements to use the correctional or detention facilities of the United States Bureau of Prisons; or the correctional facilities of any state or local government or private correctional entity located in the United States, its territories, possessions, commonwealths or the District of Columbia, which are accredited by the American Correctional Association, when the Director of Corrections determines that detention and/or correctional facilities within the Virgin Islands are inadequate to serve the best interest of the inmate or the general interest or welfare of the Territory; provided that as a condition of the prior to the transfer of any inmates, the Director of Corrections shall ascertain and ensure the availability of educational and/or vocational programs at the institution they are to be transferred to for

the purpose of enabling such inmate to gain marketable skills, and provided further that no inmate is to be transferred to any institution lacking any such program(s)."

Also on December 28, 1979 Ali vs. Gibson, civil number 76-535, Mr. Ali argued about his illegal transfer to an out-of-state prison was a violation of his due process because you are not allowed to send away an inmate to state prison without giving him or her an advance notice and a hearing as to why you are sending that inmate away.

Title 5 V.I.C.s 4501 Through s4503 Indicates the proper procedure for sending VI inmates to out-of-state prisons. As of currently, they are sending us away to these abusive prisons for no reason knowing fully well of the abuse we receive in those prisons. To this day, I still dream and have cold sweats whenever I think about what I went through up there and what my fellow VI inmates are still going through up there. These prisons are setting us up for failure. It feels like we are being set up to come right back in prison, be killed, or continue a life of crime. We want none of these things for ourselves. However, we are a byproduct of what has happened to us, of what our VI government allowed these out-of-state prisons to do to us. There is no rehabilitation. In the 13 years and 8 months I have been incarcerated what I have learned more than anything else how to survive. I have gained alot of pain in my heart from being away in out-of-state prisons away from my loved ones. There is a sincere disappointment that our VI Government has allowed state prison officials to take advantage of me and my fellow VI inmates. Please end this cycle. People keep saying stop the violence. Well you should start from in the prison system. Help us. It's cheaper to educate than to incarcerate. Don't wait until it's somebody you love to want to help. Bring us home to our families or put us in better state prisons so we can get the proper care, treatment and education that we need. This will allow us a chance of being successful when we return to our community.

Feature Image: Red Onion State Prison

Submitted Tuesday by: Cydmarie Cruz, cousin of inmate Hector Ledesma.