

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Department Of Justice Launches Full Investigation Into Treatment Of VI Prisoners Held In Off-Island Facilities

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The Department of Justice has launched a full investigation into the treatment of Virgin Islands prisoners being held in stateside prison facilities, Attorney General Claude Walker confirmed to The Consortium Thursday.

The investigation follows an account of a Virgin Islands prisoner published on The Consortium Wednesday, which detailed unthinkable and inhumane treatment exacted on this prisoner at the Red Onion Supermax Prison in Virginia, that violates not only Virgin Islands law, but human rights.

"I am appalled by the allegations made in the story, and the Department of Justice has initiated a full investigation into it," Mr. Walker told this publication Thursday. He said he would work with the parties involved, including Bureau of Corrections Director Rick Mulgrav, to get to the bottom of the matter. "What is described in the story is inhumane, and no prisoner from the VI should experience the conditions alleged in the article," Mr. Walker said.

He said part of the B.O.C. director's job is to visit mainland facilities where VI prisoners are being held, to ascertain that the treatment they receive is in accordance to law. But the account, written by prisoner Hector Ledsema, said Mr. Mulgrav had been made aware of the cruel treatment, however as of Wednesday had yet to act on the matter.

Here's an excerpt from the account that speaks to Mr. Mulgrav's knowledge of the conditions: "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 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."

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 locally 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.

During the press conference in 2016, Mr. Mullgrav said families of prisoners were not consulted before the move, and he was not sure when they would return to the territory. He said Golden Grove must be reconstructed before any such move, and was unable to provide a timeline for when construction would commence. Governor Mapp had said at the time that he would include in a capital budget financial provision for infrastructural work on the Golden Grove Correctional Facility, but that never happened.

The Consortium will be following the developments of the Department of Justice's investigation closely.

Below, some excerpts from the account of Mr. Ledsema, some of which is very graphic in description.

"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."

Read the full account [here](#).

[Watch the original video](#)

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