

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bureau Of Corrections Working Alongside D.O.J. On Investigation Into Treatment Of VI Prisoners Held In Off-Island Facilities

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections said in a statement issued to The Consortium late Monday that it has been working in concert with the Department of Justice on an investigation into the treatment of Virgin Islands prisoners being held in off-island facilities.

The statement follows an account of Virgin Islands prisoner Hector Ledesma published on The Consortium Wednesday, which detailed unthinkable and inhumane treatment exacted on Mr. Ledesma at the Red Onion Supermax Prison in Virginia, that violates not

only Virgin Islands law, but human rights.

"The Bureau of Corrections takes all allegations of inmate's civil rights violations very seriously. The Bureau is aware of Inmate Hector Ledesma's allegations and is working in tandem with the Virginia Department of Corrections to address these allegations," reads the statement.

It continues, "The Bureau of Corrections is working with the Virgin Islands Department of Justice to ensure that all inmates being housed by off island facilities are treated with dignity and that their human and inmate's rights are met. The Bureau of Corrections conducts yearly visits with off island housing facilities, during these visits the Virgin Islands delegation reviews inmate's files and conducts one on one interviews with the inmates. Once the Office of the Director is made aware of any grievance or allegation that affects inmate's rights an investigation is immediately opened."

Attorney General Claude Walker announced D.O.J.'s investigation last week, while expressing reprehension at the allegations. "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.

Irvin Julien, executive assistant at B.O.C., said VI inmates sent to mainland facilities could be held in any of the partner prisons -- including Red Onion, which is a supermax facility -- irregardless of the crime. And he reiterated a statement made by Governor Mapp in March 2016 about repairing the local prisons before returning the facilities to their former populations.

"Director Mulgrav's goal is the same as Governor Mapp's, which is we have to repair the Golden Grove Facility as well as CJC in St. Thomas," Mr. Julien said. "But in repairing the facilities, we also have to have the adequate services to provide to these individuals. It made sense to say, maybe we could house these inmates with partners because we work in partnerships with other facilities."

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, Mr. 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.

Asked whether Mr. Mulgrav had known of the complaints from Mr. Ledesma, as stated by Mr. Ledesma in his tell-all account, Mr. Julien said while Mr. Ledesma may have registered his grievances, the concerns probably never arrived to Mr. Mulgrav's desk, as there are various channels letters must go through before reaching Mr. Mulgrav.

But Mr. Ledesma said in the account sent to The Consortium that the message was not delivered by letter, but rather in person during a visit by Mr. Mulgrav and other B.O.C. officials to Red Onion.

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."

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