

The Virgin Islands Consortium

B.O.C Silent on Report of Over 30 Covid-19 Cases at St. Thomas Prison; Bureau Said to be Deducting Pay From Corrections Officers in Quarantine

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ST. THOMAS — The number of people infected with Covid-19 at the Alexander A. Farrelly Criminal Complex has grown from 20 to over 30, according to a corrections officer working at the facility, who requested anonymity to share details on what he said had become a major Covid-19 outbreak, with Bureau of Corrections officials opening two additional rooms to place inmates.

The Consortium, since Friday, has been requesting details from B.O.C., and was told exact numbers on the new infections would be provided early this week. However on

Tuesday, B.O.C. Spokesman Winthrop Maduro said he had not received further details on the new cases.

The disease, according to this St. Thomas corrections officer privy to the details of the outbreak, had spread beyond prisoners to corrections officers and other staff.

"They had so many cases that they opened two clusters, which are the two largest clusters" to house inmates, this corrections officer said. "One is housed with 21 inmates, which is full, and the other one houses 20 and they are up to 15 in that unit." This corrections officer said staff were recently told to get tested a second time even though some had already tested negative for the virus, because of the latest surge.

Corrections Officers were also being deducted pay for time out as a result of either being quarantined or waiting on test results, according to this corrections officer. The officer said a previous memo had advised B.O.C employees that if they felt they were ill with the virus, they should stay home until tested and results received.

On August 12, Mr. Maduro [confirmed](#) to the Consortium that five corrections officers employed at the Golden Grove Correctional Facility on St. Croix were sent home to quarantine after coming into contact with individuals infected with the virus. "The persons on St. Croix were told to go home and self-quarantine after they reported coming into contact while off-duty with persons who tested positive for COVID- 19," he said. Asked whether the five employees would be tested, Mr. Maduro said, "They are encouraged to take all precautions."

Asked for statement on corrections officers' pay being deducted, Mr. Maduro did not provide a comment.

When B.O.C. first announced [20 Covid-19 cases at the prison in St. Thomas](#), the bureau said it was working with a number of government arms, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to contain the virus. "BOC is working collaboratively with the CDC, DOH, V.I.P.D., the V.I. courts, and the criminal justice community at large to mitigate the introduction and spread of the coronavirus at any BOC facility. BOC will update the community as more information becomes available," stated the release issued two weeks ago. Since then, the bureau has not produced another release to update the public on its efforts and the number of infections at the St. Thomas facility.

The Consortium on Monday asked Governor Albert Bryan how the virus managed to infiltrate the seniors home and prison on St. Thomas, Mr. Bryan responded with one word, "Covid."

There was a pause, then he added, "In St. Thomas we have coronavirus at a community-spread level where we felt we needed to shutdown. The reason it is called community spread is because you don't know where it's coming from, and the reason why we shut down is because we don't know where it's coming from. We still don't, and we're just trying to get people to stop moving.

"It's not like there weren't protocols in place or anything, it's just... If you have prison guards, nurses, personnel, medical personnel moving from place to place, people coming in, eventually it's going to happen. It's a matter of when, not a matter of if, so all we can do is try our best to keep it to a minimum and then deal with the situation as quickly as

possible."

When asked whether there would have been a different outcome to the current surge in cases if stricter action had been taken earlier, the governor responded with sarcasm. "You mean if I had a crystal ball that could have seen what was going to happen...?"

He added, "The only action I think that we have done that's any different is shutting the bars." Reminded that he had halted the lodging reservation system in the territory, which discouraged visitors from traveling here, the governor asserted, "So what you're saying we should have never opened the territory at all; I don't think that's really feasible. We shut down the territory because we want people to stop moving." Mr. Bryan said the only thing that could have been done differently to keep people safe was if the administration had never allowed bars to reopen.