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B.O.C. Director Upbraided by Sen. Johnson on Performance; Says She Was Hired Because of 'DNA, Not Resume'

Government / **Published On March 24, 2021 06:21 AM /**

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Wynnie Testamark, director of the Bureau of Corrections and Senator Franklin Johnson had a heated exchange during a Committee on Homeland Security hearing Tuesday, with Mr. Johnson questioning the director's leadership and the hiring of wardens from outside while bypassing employees at the facility with decades of experience. He also said Ms. Testamark was hired because the Bryan administration's deputy chief of staff, Kevin Rodriguez, is her uncle and not based on her resume.

The senator did not mince words as the bloodletting unfolded, telling Ms. Testamark in a straightforward manner that he was concerned about the direction B.O.C. is headed — concern born from the senator's over 20 years as a corrections officer. “My passion comes from working in

that facility for 20 plus years, and I can look at it today and see it going down in the ground," he said.

Asked about the experience and qualifications of some of the people she has hired, Ms. Testamark listed some of her qualifications but was interrupted by Mr. Johnson. "I am not asking about you, I am asking about the people you hired since you've been on board. I must say I am very disgusted, very depressed, very upset in the manner that you've been running this Bureau," he assailed.

The tensions began during an earlier conversation after an inquiry by Mr. Johnson relative to the qualifications of the warden and assistant warden employed in the St. Croix District. Ms. Testamark started to relay the employees' law enforcement experience, but was again interrupted by the senator, who said, "Let's be direct, how many years of corrections do they have?" Mr. Johnson did not receive a response.

He then added, "You promote from outside. You have all these lieutenant, sergeants, working in that department for fifteen, ten, twenty years. You're saying to me none of them have the qualifications to act in these positions?"

Ms. Testamark responded, "Those positions are appointed by the governor and the governor reserves that right."

Mr. Johnson was not satisfied and continued to drill down on a warden's experience in matters relative to the B.O.C. He then referred to a document that showed the qualifications a warden should possess. The document was forwarded to Mr. Johnson by B.O.C.

Ms. Testamark did not budge and repeated the same response that those positions are governor-appointed and that the governor, Albert Bryan, reserves the right to choose.

Ms. Testamark was asked by Mr. Johnson whether she had a relative in Government House, to which she responded, "I am here to give an update on the Bureau of Corrections; I will not engage in hearsay."

Mr. Johnson saw his question as important because, "The officers say every minute, when they ask something, you say it's not going to change because I have an uncle. Just for the record Mr. Kevin Rodriguez is your uncle, so you came with DNA, not a resume."

Senator Novelle Francis began his questioning by stating, "Director, I expect you to be a tough director, I can't believe you're breaking under some questions." She promised that she was not.

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger asked Ms. Testamark whether she was related to Mr. Rodriguez and whether statements made by Mr. Johnson were true. She confirmed that Mr. Rodriguez is her uncle but stressed it had nothing to do with her being hired.

Ms. Testamark said the governor did not know the two were related, and, "I was hired on my resume, not by my DNA."