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Golden Grove Warden is Latest to Leave B.O.C. Amid Multiple Resignations and Terminations; New Director Described as 'Disrespectful'

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Ernice Gilbert **January 30, 2020**

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An aerial shot of the Golden Grove Correctional Facility on St. Croix By. Ernice GILBERT/VI CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — The Bureau of Corrections' newest director, Wynnie Testamark, has been described to the Consortium by multiple B.O.C. sources as very disrespectful to her employees, some of them senior staff at the bureau. These sources, a current and former employee of B.O.C., also said that the bureau, already struggling under a federal consent decree and internal issues, was made worse by the new director, who they say operates the penitentiary facility with little regard for the input of support staff.

This led to a wave of resignations and terminations. From the legal counsel, to the HR manager, accounting manager, health services director, compliance manager, three corrections officers, executive assistant — all of whom resigned — to the chief investigator who was terminated, and the lock smith, fire/life safety manager who was also terminated along with the grants and programs manager. There were additional resignations from the labor relations person and the administrator, according to two persons with intimate knowledge of the resignations and terminations, who requested anonymity to speak freely on what they described as a quiet crisis at the bureau.

The Consortium had contacted Ms. Testamark for comment. She answered the phone, listened to the publication's questions — from talk of her behavior to the resignations — and then said she was driving and would return the call. This was on Friday, Sept. 20, 2019. Ms. Testamark never returned the call.

The latest resignation was that of Golden Grove Correctional Facility Warden Joe Booker, whose last day at the facility is today. B.O.C. Public Information Officer Winthrop Maduro has said that Mr. Booker resigned amid an investigation of prison violations by some staff members and security issues, with the bureau appearing to say that those issues were a result of Mr. Booker's failed leadership.

But past and current B.O.C. employees say Ms. Testamark had diminished the standing of Mr. Booker, and they said she disrespected him publicly on multiple occasions in front of his staff.

"She wrote him up saying he failed to do his job, but she tied the guy's hand and he couldn't make any decision," a current B.O.C. employee told the Consortium. "She shouts at him. He said he had enough of her disrespect. She just shouts at people and she is just disrespectful. You can't be the director and shout at people how you want. She is running the place like she is the warden, but then when something goes wrong she blames him. She calls meetings and everybody gets it. You can't curse the warden in front of his chief and officers; you make him inefficient. And that's why everybody have been leaving... They can't deal with it."

This current employee added, "Morale is low. People right now are trying to leave. People are looking for jobs. Everybody trying to leave. Officers that can retire this year, they are all leaving. And she is bringing on her people, some of whom really have no correctional experience. She is very disrespectful.

"She just shouted after people. We've been here so long, we know the problems at corrections. There is no longer a structure. The warden is more knowledgeable. He could have been the director. We're broken. Everybody is ready for her to go."

This employee told the Consortium that the Parole Board recently lost quorum because two parole board members resigned. The employee could not say for sure, however, why the board members had resigned.

In July of last year, Ms. Testamark was castigated by Senator Kurt Vialet for testifying during a Senate hearing [that an 800-room prison was needed on St. Croix](#) to replace the current one in Golden Grove, which multiple B.O.C. directors have said is old and outdated.

"We're not talking about schools, we're not talking about economic development, we're talking about penal institutions. So I am very offended when this number has increased by some 800 projected beds that is embedded in your testimony," Mr. Vialet said. "These are the numbers that you have, so those numbers just got to be fluff. An 800-bed facility is embedded here. How? The

Virgin Islands never in its history has had so many prisoners. Even if we project a hundred more we're not going to reach those numbers.

“And we want preventative programs; we want to reduce the prison population,” Mr. Violet went on, adding that with the passage of the medicinal marijuana law, some inmates will need to be released because of decriminalized offenses.

Ms. Testamark responded by stating that the number of beds also include consideration in case of storms or emergency, where prisoners would need to be moved from one facility to the next.

Her response, however, did not quell the veteran senator's angst.

“You think the Government of the Virgin Islands has that kind of fluff? We want a shelter for the people of the Virgin Islands, not building fluff. So that whole number needs to be revisited. That whole paragraph is totally, dead wrong. Totally, totally off. And I don't know if this was through your consulting part or this is from your analysis, but when you come before the Legislature, present information based on the facts in front of you and what is taking place at those facilities now. Have those numbers; you're hired now,” chided Mr. Violet.

He then mentioned the director's salary, increased under the Bryan administration by \$15,000 to \$115,000 annually.

“You're the director. A hundred and fifteen thousand dollars to put this together, so I don't want to see fluff and this is fluff. I would love to see fluff in the Department of Education with facilities for our children, etc., but not penal.”

Following the castigating, Ms. Testamark said a 500-room prison on St. Croix would work.