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B.O.C. Will No Longer Accept Excuses For Poor Performance, Testamark Fires Back; Ex-Warden Responds

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Wynn Timer Testamark By. VI LEGISLATURE

ST. CROIX — In a fiery response to a Consortium article published Thursday that included comments from two sources — one a current and the other a former employee of the Bureau of Corrections at the Golden Grove Correctional Facility on St. Croix — B.O.C. Public Information Officer Winthrop Maduro said the Bureau would no longer accept excuses for poor performance, and described B.O.C. Director Wynn Timer Testamark as a no-nonsense person whose disposition — coupled with the fact that she's a woman — could be perceived as disrespectful in the male-dominated bureau.

“Wynnie Testamark is a no-nonsense woman in a male-dominated profession. That fact alone may lead to the perception by some that she is being disrespectful when demanding accountability. The bottom line is this: The Bureau of Corrections no longer makes – or accepts – excuses for poor performance,” Mr. Maduro said.

Ms. Testamark [was described to the Consortium](#) by the B.O.C. sources as very disrespectful to her employees, some of them senior staff at the bureau. These sources 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 the 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 latest resignation was that of Golden Grove Correctional Facility Warden Joe Booker, whose last day at the facility was Thursday. Mr. 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.

One of the sources also told this publication that two Parole Board members had resigned, leaving the board without a quorum and therefore unable to make decisions. Mr. Maduro said the resignations were apparently connected to an ongoing investigation. “The resignations by members of the Parole Board appear to be in response to an ongoing, internal investigation concerning alleged irregularities in parole decisions. The Bureau does not comment on ongoing investigations,” he said.

Mr. Maduro sought to bolster Ms. Testamark's leadership with comments from District Court Judge Wilma Lewis, who he said praised the Bureau during a consent decree hearing in December. “At the last quarterly hearing in the federal consent decree case in December, Judge Wilma Lewis expressed confidence in the Bureau’s leadership. The judge said that it was ‘quite clear’ to the monitor and to her that ‘we now have people in place’ at the Bureau ‘capable of getting the job done,’” the B.O.C. spokesman said.

“The Bureau gauges its progress by relying on the careful assessments of a federal judge with more than a decade of experience scrutinizing Bureau action – not on unsubstantiated statements by anonymous sources. The public should do the same,” he added.

The bureau has named Errol Browne as the acting warden until a permanent replacement is named by Governor Albert Bryan. Meanwhile, the former warden, Mr. Booker, issued a statement in an attempt to clear any narrative that may have tied his resignation to failures at the Bureau. He listed a myriad of accomplishments in his career and success during his two-year tenure at B.O.C.

"The Bureau of Corrections has been under a consent decree for more than two decades. When I joined the Bureau as a warden in 2017, it was immediately after Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which devastated the U.S. Virgin Islands. The prison compliance assessment ratings were low, particularly in the area of security. Despite the conditions, I joined a team of competent and

energetic senior management and correctional staff dedicated to improving the conditions of confinement at the prison.

"Under my tenure as warden, we weathered the effects of the hurricanes, implemented security measures, improved employee morale, and recruited and retained critical staff. The compliance assessment ratings increased to the highest ratings ever earned by the Bureau of Corrections in the history of the consent decree. The compliance assessment reports speak for themselves.

"While I will not delve into my reasons for resigning from the Bureau of Corrections or critique the Bureau of Corrections' current leadership, my resignation had absolutely nothing to do with any claimed internal investigation findings," Mr. Booker said in a statement.

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. Vialet 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. Vialet.

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."