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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 25, 2012

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Announcement of Personnel Actions at the Augusta YDC

(AUGUSTA) — Today the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice announced continuing progress in their ongoing investigations at the YDC facility in Augusta. DJJ investigators have uncovered more staff policy violators resulting in the terminations of two more Augusta YDC Juvenile Corrections Officers.

Department of Juvenile Justice Commissioner L. Gale Buckner announced the termination of Juvenile Corrections Officers Kenneth Payton and Dondale Stroman at the Augusta YDC facility. Each of these administrative actions was the culmination of ongoing probes conducted by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation working with DJJ Investigators:

- Juvenile Corrections Officer (JCO) Kenneth Payton was terminated from Augusta YDC based on misconduct policy violations for allegedly initiating a physical altercation with a resident under the care and custody of the Department.
- In a separate investigation, Juvenile Corrections Officer Dondale Stroman was terminated from Augusta YDC based on misconduct policy violations for alleged improper use of physical intervention techniques.
- Regarding a previous personnel action, DJJ clarified that while Juvenile Corrections Officer Tracy Banks has reportedly made public statements that he has resigned from the Department, he has yet to submit a written resignation. Banks was suspended for a sexual misconduct policy violation involving a resident under the care and custody of the Department. His official status with the agency remains as suspended with pay at this time.

All these individuals remain under investigation. Further details of these incidents are being withheld pending the conclusion of non-stop active investigations by the DJJ Office of Investigations and the GBI.

Today's termination announcements follow day-long interviews conducted at the Augusta YDC Tuesday by a team of twenty agents from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation working together with investigators from the Department of Juvenile Justice. Investigators interviewed the entire YDC Staff and some youth in their continuing search for evidence of sexual misconduct and contraband at the facility and for clues in the November 2011 murder of 19-year-old YDC resident Jade Holder.

As a result of that death, Commissioner L. Gale Buckner launched Safety and Security Teams to conduct unannounced and extensive inspections for contraband, security breaches and safety violations at all twenty-six DJJ secure facilities throughout the state in just seven weeks. Commissioner Buckner comes to DJJ as a 24-year veteran GBI agent, more recently experienced in corrections as former Chair of Georgia's Board of Pardons and Paroles.

While briefing a delegation of Augusta lawmakers at the State Capitol Tuesday, Commissioner Buckner told legislators the Department of Juvenile Justice is taking swift administrative and corrective actions wherever state investigators find DJJ corrections staff have committed misconduct or violated safety and security policies.

Commissioner Buckner says the agency has fast-tracked internal personnel procedures, wasting no time removing policy violators from positions of responsibility over Georgia's youth in detention. "DJJ appreciates the support of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, where the other half of this process will require more time to gather sufficient evidence to build any accompanying criminal cases," Commissioner Buckner said. "Meanwhile we're taking immediate steps here to fix the problems at DJJ we can control now. More terminations are expected."