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Rome RYDC Officers Cleared of Encouraging Youth-on-Youth Violence

(ROME) — Today Commissioner L. Gale Buckner at the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice announced that three Juvenile Correctional Officers at the Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC) in Rome have been cleared of charges that they ordered youth-on-youth assaults at the female detention facility there.

"This was a disturbing allegation," said Commissioner Buckner. "We would not tolerate that kind of Officer Misconduct at any of our secure facilities. So I ordered an immediate and comprehensive investigation at the Bob Richards Regional Youth Detention Center to ensure the safety and security of residents in our care and custody. We are encouraged by the depth of the investigation that cleared the DJJ Corrections Officers in Rome," said the Commissioner.

The accusation was made by a youthful offender being held for trial on armed robbery charges. She was first reported as an aggressor – and later the victim in consecutive assaults during her detention at the Rome facility. The complainant claimed both assaults involving her had been pre-arranged by corrections officers in exchange for the promise of contraband food or other favors. Her allegations launched the extensive two-month probe by the DJJ Office of Internal Investigations after she suffered a broken nose during the second assault.

At the culmination of the official DJJ probe, investigators concluded evidence does not support the charges that Juvenile Corrections Officers (JCOs) in Rome bribed some youths to assault other residents for what the complainant alleged was to be a promised reward of a cheeseburger and a soft drink.

Statements from some staff and residents alike at the Bob Richards RYDC portrayed the accusations as based on "rumors going around," girls "talking trash," and youth in detention "telling lies on officers." The Juvenile Corrections Officers accused have maintained their innocence from the beginning and volunteered to be polygraphed.

Early in the inquiry, the DJJ Office of the Commissioner issued a statement cautioning news media against reaching conclusions before the full investigation had run its course. "It's not uncommon to hear allegations of corrections officers instigating violence between residents in any juvenile justice institutional setting," the official DJJ statement said. "However, no such allegations have been confirmed since the new head of the agency, L. Gale Buckner, was appointed DJJ's new Commissioner."

That statement was issued by mid-investigation. DJJ was already aware that the Juvenile Corrections Officers accused of the misconduct had all passed GBI polygraph examinations. The report shows accused Juvenile Corrections Officers Deborah Adams, Geynah Carmichael and India Jones showed no indications of polygraph deception when they denied their involvement in any prohibited activity promoting or encouraging fights between the female residents. Soon, more evidence would support the officers' denial of the fight promotion charge.

To finish the official 180-page Internal Investigations report, investigators would also interview more than 25 residents and staff, collect and document more than two dozen witness statements, review scores of logbook entries, and scan hours of CCTV closed circuit camera security tapes documenting the assaults from inside the Rome facility. When investigators signed-off on the Special Incident Report, their evidence further supported that Officers Adams, Carmichael and Jones would not be cited on Officer Misconduct charges related to promoting fights at the Rome RYDC.

(MORE)

Investigators did, however, find other evidence of DJJ Policy Violations and reported sufficient evidence to support the dismissal of JCO India Jones on Ethics and Conduct violations.

DJJ Commissioner L. Gale Buckner today announced the termination of Jones for “failure to execute sound judgment after a youth assaulted another youth at the Bob Richards RYDC on December 6, 2011”.. And based on Officer Jones’ own testimony that she “admittedly overheard (a female resident) state that she was going to assault (another resident) but failed to take precautions to prevent the assault from occurring”. Jones is also charged with failing to issue a disciplinary report to a female resident who assaulted another resident at the Rome RYDC.

Commissioner Buckner repeated her previous agency-wide warnings that she will not tolerate violations of DJJ policy and procedures, especially those which directly affect the safety and security of residents or staff at secure facilities.

“This is the first phase of disciplinary action to result from our Rome RYDC probe,” said Commissioner Buckner. “In the next several days the Department of Juvenile Justice will follow-up with other administrative actions based on policy violation findings from the Internal Investigations Report. Once again, we’ve wasted no time taking these administrative actions wherever they’re needed. Our DJJ investigators work round the clock and around the state to protect the public and serve the needs of our troubled youth,” said the Commissioner.

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