



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF **JUVENILE JUSTICE**

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Avery D. Niles, Commissioner

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**COMMISSIONER FIRES TWO YDC OFFICERS IN ESCAPE PROBE
INTERNAL AFFAIRS CHARGES: SHIFT SUPERVISOR GAVE FALSE INFORMATION**

(AUGUSTA - YDC) Today Commissioner Avery D. Niles of the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice announced adverse actions in connection with the agency's ongoing internal affairs investigation of the October 19th escape from the Augusta Youth Development Campus.

Commissioner Niles announced the dismissal of Augusta YDC Corrections Sergeant Dorothy Blair and Juvenile Corrections Officer Dominique Harris.

"These corrections staff terminations are directly related to accountability and job performance at the time of the October escape at the YDC," said DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles. "These corrections officers failed to do their jobs and as a result of the escape, DJJ failed to protect the Augusta community."

The latest terminations at the state's juvenile justice agency follow what the new Commissioner called "a major security failure" at the Youth Development Campus when five youth offenders managed to elude a head count and escape from their secure residence unit. The escapees ranging in age from fifteen-to-eighteen fled the campus, stole a car, set off a local police chase, and launched a manhunt from Augusta to Atlanta.

With emergency assistance from state and local law enforcement, all five escapees were safely recaptured and returned to DJJ custody the same weekend. Subsequently, the offenders faced additional criminal escape charges and were transferred to separate facilities. DJJ Investigators were immediately ordered to focus their attention on an internal inquiry to determine security failures behind the escapes.

DJJ issued a statement confirming agency safety and security policy violations were uncovered which compromised the ability of key staff members to prevent the escape and subsequently, to properly react and respond to it.

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(PAGE TWO)

During the early stages of the internal investigation, Augusta YDC Juvenile Corrections Officer Dominique Harris was suspended with pay and placed on Administrative Leave. DJJ reported Harris's suspension was ordered pending the outcome of an investigation of "possible employee misconduct in connection with improper population count in the unit where the escape originated."

Commissioner Avery Niles announced today that the dismissal of JCO Dominique Harris is the "result of failure to properly supervise and maintain control of youth in his care, which contributed to the escape from Augusta YDC on October 19, 2012."

Augusta YDC Corrections Sergeant Dorothy Blair was also suspended with pay and placed on Administrative Leave following the October escape. DJJ reported her suspension was made pending the outcome of an investigation of possible employee misconduct "for failure to perform emergency procedural duties as the shift officer on duty at the time of the escape."

Commissioner Avery Niles announced today that the dismissal of Sgt. Dorothy Blair "is the result of her failure to properly conduct a perimeter check on October 19, 2012 -- and providing false information during an internal investigation into the Augusta YDC escape."

In October, DJJ publicly reported that to correct specific security problems following the escape, Augusta YDC administrators were immediately instructed to make the following safety improvements as well as others:

- to ensure detainee movement and population counts are properly conducted
- that dorms are managed in a manner which prevents safety and security issues
- that perimeter checks are conducted as outlined in policy

"The Augusta YDC escape incident is a prime example of why I place such importance on the enforcement of safety and security policies at the Department of Juvenile Justice," said Commissioner Niles. "I have cautioned DJJ Staff in Augusta and throughout the state that I will continue to seek out safety and security laxes and continue to crack down on violators anywhere they're found. More violations will mean more dismissals," Niles said.

"I will also continue to make unannounced security visits at Augusta and our other secure facilities across Georgia to ensure the safety of our youth in custody and the public we serve," the Commissioner said.

DJJ investigators continue their probe of several recent incidents at the Augusta YDC.

(END RELEASE)