



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF **JUVENILE JUSTICE**

L. GALE BUCKNER, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE **OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS**



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AUGUSTA YDC ESCAPE INVESTIGATION UNDERWAY: SECURITY UPGRADES & ADVERSE ACTIONS ANNOUNCED

(AUGUSTA-YDC) Today Commissioner L. Gale Buckner of the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice announced several personnel actions and changes made at DJJ's Augusta Youth Development Campus related to accountability and performance on the job.

Administrative Actions and Personnel Changes:

- the placement of two Juvenile Corrections Officers on Administrative Leave
- the suspension of the Shift Supervisor
- the voluntary demotion of the highest ranking uniformed officer at the secure facility and
- the disciplinary suspensions of the Director and Assistant Director of the Augusta YDC

These actions follow a major incident last weekend when five youth escaped from custody at the YDC. The escapees ranging in age from fifteen-to-eighteen stole a car, set off a local police chase, and launched a two-city manhunt pursuing leads from Augusta to Metro Atlanta and as far away as Florida. All five escapees are now safely returned to custody.

Commissioner Buckner expressed both her appreciation for the assistance of state and local law enforcement agencies and her gratitude that no injuries occurred.

Commissioner Orders Escape Investigation:

Immediately following the recovery of the last escapee, the Commissioner instructed Juvenile Justice Investigators to focus their attention on an internal inquiry at the YDC to determine the facts and circumstances behind the Augusta escapes. Commissioner Buckner said, "During the course of our ongoing state investigation, DJJ safety and security policy violations were uncovered which compromised the ability of key staff members to prevent this escape and subsequently, to properly react and respond to it."

As a result of the initial phase of the DJJ investigation the Department of Juvenile Justice has taken the following actions:

Preliminary Investigation Phase - Personnel Actions Ordered:

The Commissioner of the Department of Juvenile Justice has requested the **Georgia Bureau of Investigation** to join the investigation on campus to rule out any possibility of criminal complicity on the part of DJJ Staff in the escape event.

Augusta YDC Juvenile Corrections Officer Dominique Harris was suspended with pay and placed on Administrative Leave effective Saturday, October 20, 2012 pending the outcome of an investigation of employee misconduct in connection with improper population count in the unit where the escape originated.

Augusta YDC Juvenile Corrections Officer Marc Johnson was also suspended with pay and placed on Administrative Leave pending the outcome of the investigation of the improper population count in the unit where the escape originated.

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

Disciplinary documents naming the YDC Director, Assistant Director, and Juvenile Corrections Captain read, "As a result of the escape, DJJ failed to protect the community, which is part of the agency's mission."

As a result, **Augusta YDC Juvenile Corrections Captain Ricky Smiley** accepts voluntary demotion to Juvenile Correctional Lieutenant, with a corresponding reduction in pay and was removed from his position as the highest ranking uniformed officer with responsibility over youth in detention at the YDC.

Augusta YDC Director, Ronald Brawner, has been placed on disciplinary suspension followed by departmental probation.

Augusta YDC Assistant Director, Melvin Womble, has also been placed on disciplinary suspension followed by departmental probation.

At this time, both Director Brawner and Assistant Director Womble have resolved and agreed to continue their DJJ responsibilities, to resolve the immediate facility problems, and to maintain fully acceptable job performance.

As DJJ and GBI investigators continue their probes into the YDC escape scenario, the Augusta Director and Assistant Director have been instructed to implement and oversee specific details and improvements needed to correct existing problems, strengthen safety and security practices, and ensure the operation of a sound facility:

Preliminary Investigation Phase - Security Improvements Ordered:

- ensure detainee movement and population counts are properly conducted
- ensure dorms are managed in a manner which prevents safety and security issues
- ensure staff frequently practice emergency drills in preparation for real crises
- ensure perimeter checks are conducted as outlined in policy
- ensure all staff members are familiar with the escape prevention plan, and
- ensure the emergency notification process for local law enforcement is structured to accurately reflect when notification times or attempted contacts are made to the Sheriff's Department

Commissioner's Pledge:

"We will not tolerate policy violations that breach the security of the Augusta YDC, compromise the safety of the youth we serve, the integrity of this agency, or the safety of the public," said Commissioner Buckner. "We have made many personnel changes at Augusta YDC during my term and it's not over yet. I will be making safety and security decisions wherever needed right up to my last day in this office."

Augusta YDC Status:

As of Wednesday, Augusta YDC was no longer under lockdown and schedules were returning to normal. Education classes are being conducted again. Several safety upgrades were being made on campus to address security deficiencies discovered as the joint DJJ – GBI investigation continues.

(END RELEASE)