



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Avery D. Niles, Commissioner

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GAINESVILLE RYDC BUSINESS MANAGER ARRESTED

DJJ INTERNAL AFFAIRS FINDING: FORGED DOCUMENTS SENT TO CENTRAL OFFICE

(Gainesville RYDC) Commissioner Avery D. Niles of the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice announced today that Hall County Deputies have arrested the business manager of the Gainesville Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC) on nine counts of making "False Acknowledgements or Oath by Authorized Officer."

Gainesville RYDC Business Manager Lakita Edwards was arrested at her Hall County home after DJJ Investigators took out warrants charging her with allegedly forging the signature of the RYDC's Personnel Technician onto job applicant background packets. Edwards is also accused of applying unauthorized notary seals to those official DJJ background packets, then submitting the documents to DJJ's Central Office for processing.

"This type of unethical business practice will not be tolerated anywhere in the workplace in this agency, regardless of employee rank or position," said DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles. "I gave clear warning when I came on board last month that policy violators at DJJ will face serious consequences. There is no room here for corrupt or criminal behavior. I also endorse a policy for transparency in this department when we must take strong measures like this arrest."

The document forgeries were first discovered during DJJ's own internal review process. An alert Central Office staff member determined that the Gainesville RYDC Personnel Technician whose signature had been forged on the packets was actually listed on extended leave during the timeframe from July 1st through October 1st 2012, when the pre-employment packets in question were processed and submitted.

"Our Investigators found there was no way the Gainesville RYDC Personnel Technician could have signed and sealed those packets while away on leave," said DJJ Commissioner Niles. "A closer examination by our Internal Affairs uncovered a total of nine packets with forged signatures and unauthorized seals."

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Commissioner Niles said DJJ investigators have determined this was an isolated incident involving an employee who acted alone in an apparent attempt to circumvent the department's system of checks and balances. But he said no evidence was found to suggest the employee sought or received any personal gain from the forgeries.

As a precautionary follow-up to the investigation, DJJ Staff carefully reviewed all pre-employment documents submitted to DJJ Central Office by Business Manager Edwards during the timeframe. DJJ completed supplementary background clearances for each job applicant that came through the Gainesville RYDC office at that time. DJJ has determined that no viable candidates received special treatment or were negatively impacted by the forgery incidents or the subsequent investigation.

Bond for Gainesville RYDC Business Manager Lakita Edwards has been set at \$9,000.00. She will be on suspension pending further administrative action. Commissioner Niles indicates the investigation continues at this time.

Commissioner Niles' core message since his November 2012 appointment by Governor Nathan Deal has emphasized that the critical duties of the Department of Juvenile Justice are to uphold and enforce policy, ethics, and safety and security measures at Georgia's juvenile justice facilities so both DJJ detainees and staff can function in safe and secure learning environment.

(END RELEASE)