



ROLL CALL BRIEFING:

May 31, 2009

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Gangs are thriving behind N.J. prison walls, report says

by Chris Megerian/Statehouse Bureau

Tuesday May 19, 2009, 11:03 AM

Violent gangs are thriving behind New Jersey's prison walls and the Department of Corrections isn't doing enough to stop them, according to a report released today by the State Commission on Investigation.

Investigators said jails are like a "branch office" for gang members who are able to easily sell drugs, communicate by using smuggled cell phones and launder money with official inmate accounts.



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The report says that incarceration is not an obstacle to gang members, who are able to easily sell drugs, communicate using smuggled cell phones and launder money using official inmate accounts.

(Continued on page 2)



Mel Evans/APA guard tower and razor wire at New Jersey Department of Corrections Riverfront State Prison. A report says gangs are thriving in prison, and not enough is being done to stop criminal activity behind bars.

"That is an intolerable situation for everyone with a legitimate interest in the safe and proper functioning of this system," the report says.

The SCI, a fact-finding agency that examines crime and corruption and which reports to the Legislature, recommended widespread changes within the Department of Corrections, including better oversight of inmate finances, reforming prison hiring practices and improving inspections to prevent smuggling.

"Law-abiding citizens whose tax dollars support these prisons must have confidence that when criminals are prosecuted and incarcerated, those individuals are removed from society and placed in secure custody for the duration of their sentence, not provided with access to something resembling a branch office for the recruitment of new members and the furtherance of a criminal enterprise," the report says.

SCI Chairman Cary Edwards said the two-year investigation included field surveillance, document analysis and interviews with witnesses. The commission first examined street gangs in 1993, then concluded in 2004 that gangs were the "new face of organized crime" in New Jersey.

"They're just as organized as the Mafia," Edwards said.

Law enforcement efforts are succeeding in putting more gang members behind bars, the report said, but that has created new challenges for state prisons.

"The growing influx of convicted gang members has transformed the prison system into a breeding ground for gang-related criminal activity at a level far more expansive than ever before," the report said.

Prison staff monitor inmate phone calls, read mail and receive some training on how to deal with gangs. But, the report said, it is not enough.

"Those who manage and staff these institutions go to work every day in what amounts to a defensive holding action against worsening odds. And all too often, as they reach for practical tools to get the job done properly, they find the system lacking," the report says.

Corrections spokesman Matt Schuman said the department has not yet reviewed the report, and declined to comment on it.

He said the department is fighting gangs, and cited a rehabilitation program at Northern State Prison in Newark and the use of dogs trained to detect cell phones. Schuman said 75 were confiscated since October. According to the report, a top Corrections official believes up to half of all state prison inmates are involved with a gang, either by choice or through extortion.

The SCI identified an East Coast chapter of the Bloods as the primary catalyst for criminal activity behind bars. During a November hearing, state investigators said the Bloods -- which reportedly account for about half of all incarcerated gang members -- exploit corrupt prison guards to smuggle drugs and other contraband.

Shawn Williams, president of the National Alliance of Gang Investigators Association, said the biggest problem is the proliferation of cell phones, which allows inmates to circumvent monitored prison phones.

"It's a pretty regular thing for gangs who are in prison to use throwaway phones to run their criminal enterprise on the outside," he said.

Williams said gangs operate seamlessly in prisons, with members finding illicit ways to make money behind bars. "If he has any rank in his gang at all, he's not going to stop once he gets locked up," he said. "That's his way of life." Eugene Atherton, a former Colorado corrections official who works with national organizations on prison security issues, said prisons around the country aren't receiving enough resources to handle the growing problem. "It's one



of those unfunded challenges," he said.

Edwards, a former state attorney general, said some problems can be tackled without more money, noting that the Department of Corrections' investigative operations need fundamental restructuring. The division is responsible for both internal affairs and gang suppression, creating a toxic relationship with the guards needed for gathering basic intelligence, Edwards said.

He also said police and prison officials need to do a better job sharing intelligence on gang activity.

"The typical law enforcement problem is that the right hand never knows what the left hand is doing," Edwards said. For the complete Gang Report contact ACOIN at ACOIN1@aol.com

Del. Inmate Gets 21 More Years in Guard Assaults

Posted: May 4, 2009 06:38 AM MDT

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP)- A Delaware inmate has been sentenced to another 21 years in prison for assaulting prison guards.

Forty-five-year-old **Kevin L. Dickens** was initially locked up on an assault charge for hitting a census worker, but he has gotten additional time after alteractions with guards. Dickens' attorney says Friday's sentence means his client now will be serving essentially a life sentence.

In January, Dickens was found guilty on nine counts of assaulting corrections officers. He was accused of hitting a guard with the open end of a pair of handcuffs as he was being unshackled and, days later, throwing feces at guards. He's already facing additional assault charges and is due to appear for a hearing later this month.

Prison's violence had been rising before guard's 2008 slaying

Michael Doyle - McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON – Spit and unsavory liquids are weapons within the forbidding confines of U.S. Penitentiary Atwater.

So are fists, feces and food trays. And in the months preceding the June 2008 slaying of Atwater guard Jose Rivera, newly obtained records reveal inmates were improvising madly as they escalated their war with correctional officers.

The number of reported inmate assaults on Atwater staffers quadrupled between 2005 and 2007, Bureau of Prisons' records obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show. When Rivera died on June 20, 2008, the high-security prison was on track to again exceed its previous year's assault record.

"These guys are clever," said Andy Krotik, spokesman for the Atwater-based Friends and Family of Correctional Officers. "They have all day to sit around and figure out how to make weapons."

Inmates assaulted Atwater staff 142 times between Jan. 1, 2005, and Sept. 4, 2008, the Bureau of Prisons records show. The number of reported assaults leaped from 13 in 2005 to 38 in 2006 and 57 in 2007. Through the first eight months of 2008, the number of reported assaults reached 34.

Now under the stewardship of Hector Rios Jr., its fourth warden in the past eight years, the Atwater prison has by several accounts become a safer and more orderly place. Though up-to-date individual prison assault records weren't available, Krotik said Atwater conditions have "dramatically improved" since Rivera's murder.



"It's completely different now," said Krotik, a former Atwater city councilman.

A spokesman for the Atwater prison could not be reached to comment. But at the national level, Bureau of Prisons officials have identified at least some favorable trends. Nationally, the number of assaults on federal prison staff characterized as "serious" declined steadily from 128 in 2005 to 82 in 2008.

"We have not experienced an increase in the rate of serious assaults on staff over the past several years, but there is a sense that the assaults are more severe," Bureau of Prisons spokeswoman Traci Billingsley stated in an e-mail. Krotik and Billingsley both credited tighter controls on inmate movements, beefed-up staffing and the transfer of what Billingsley called "problematic" inmates into more restrictive prisons. Under union and political pressure following Rivera's murder, the Bureau of Prisons also made protective vests available to staff.

"They have not adopted everything we wanted them to, but they have taken substantial steps," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced.

Two former Atwater inmates already serving life sentences, 40-year-old Jose Cabrera Sablan and 42-year-old James Ninete Leon Guerrero, now face the death penalty if convicted of Rivera's killing. Prosecutors say Guerrero held Rivera while Sablan stabbed the 22-year-old Navy veteran with an eight-inch pick-type weapon.

Rivera was the first worker killed at the Atwater prison since it opened in 2001, but he was neither the first nor the last to be attacked.

The Bureau of Prisons reports are summaries that lack crucial context. On Oct. 21 2006, for instance, an Atwater inmate was simply reported to have been "aggressive toward staff." On another date, an inmate was reportedly "combative."

But often, the reports detail the myriad dangers prison guards confront. On Jan. 31, 2008, for instance, an Atwater corrections officer was reported to have cut his hand due to "razor blades taped to unit officer's door handle." A week later, an inmate threw his food tray at a staffer, striking him in the chest. On separate occasions over the next several weeks, Atwater staffers reported being kicked, spat upon and punched.

During one representative week in November 2007, reports show that at different times unnamed Atwater inmates "threw food tray at staff," "swung elbow at staff," "spit on staff" and "(struck) staff with closed fists." Spit, in particular, is plentiful. Seventeen of the Atwater assaults reported since January 2005 involved spitting. Spit can be disease-laden, but there are more revolting things. Repeatedly, inmates throw urine and/or feces at the guards. Eight of the reported inmate-on-guard assaults at Atwater involved urine and/or feces, and 21 involved what was simply called "unknown liquid."

Half of the reported assaults have taken place in the prison's Special Housing Unit. This is where officials send inmates for added discipline; conditions are particularly spare, and inmates do not always respond well.

McClatchy Newspapers 2009

Two Federal Officers Stabbed at Big Sandy

U.S.P. Big Sandy, On 5-21-09 at 7:55am, a staff needs assistance call was made from R & D, an inmate in route to being transferred to ADX-Florence assaulted 2 staff assigned to R & D with a plastic homemade weapon (shank). The inmate had been taken from SHU to R & D by an Acting Activities Lieutenant alone. When an ISO initially began a strip search on the inmate to process him for the bus, the inmate grabbed the officer in a head lock and then pulled an approximately 6" Plexiglas shank out of his rectum and began stabbing one staff member in the neck area, when another ISO immediately responded, the inmate then stabbed him below the eye and cheek area. Both staff were taken to the local hospital, required stitches, and have now been released and are home.

Mike Schnobrich, ADX Florence



Cell phone planted at prison yields two arrests

May 13, 2009

A contraband cell phone planted by law enforcement and corrections officials in Baltimore's Supermax prison was used to record inmate conversations, uncovering multiple crimes, including a home invasion plot that resulted in a killing. Kevin Dorsey, 26, and Rodney Lockett, 25, were charged Tuesday with the armed robbery in which two people were shot and one died. More charges will likely follow from the investigation, dubbed "Operation Dial-a-Cell," said U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein. Cell phones are routinely smuggled into prisons, where they're used to pass the time, continue illegal operations and intimidate witnesses. Gov. Martin O'Malley recently asked for permission to test signal-jamming technology that could make the devices useless, but in the meantime, local and federal law enforcement officials are trying to turn them into tools. A seven-month investigation that included wiretaps on illegal prison cell phones recently led to the federal indictment of 24 people believed to be members of the violent Black Guerrilla Family gang.

- Tricia Bishop

New York: Religious Medallion Knife

Please see attached pictures of religious medallion that is actually a knife.

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Ohio: Juvenile officer's death ruled a "homicide"

William Hesson's heart stopped after he was struck in the abdomen.

By Darren Toms, Newsradio WTAM 1100

Friday, May 22, 2009

(Cleveland) - There could be criminal charges coming in the April death of a guard at a juvenile detention facility.

Cuyahoga County Coroner Dr. Frank Miller has ruled the April 29 death of 39-year-old William L. Hesson a "homicide." The North Canton man was a guard to the Cuyahoga Hills Juvenile Correction Center when he was involved in an apparent attack.

Coroner's spokesman Powell Caesar says the cause of death was "a sudden disturbance of the heart rhythm due to blunt impact to the ...abdomen."

Hesson, died at South Pointe Hospital in Warrensville Heights after being transported from corrections center. Hesson's death is being investigated by Ohio State Highway Patrol and toxicology tests were taken.

Hesson and his wife Julia have three kids, and Julia is expecting a son in September.

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Guard's killing seen as red flag

Closing of facility destabilizing DYS system, union says

Saturday, May 23, 2009 3:04 AM

By Alan Johnson

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The union representing Ohio Department of Youth Services employees says it is "shocked and saddened but not surprised" that the death of a juvenile-corrections officer was homicide.

Conditions in state youth prisons are "a disaster waiting to happen," Eddie L. Parks, president of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association, said yesterday.

Parks responded to the Cuyahoga County coroner's ruling that William Hesson died of sudden disruption of his heart rhythm caused by a blunt impact to his abdomen. The incident happened April 29 at Cuyahoga Hills Juvenile Correctional Facility in Highland Hills, near Cleveland.

Hesson, 39, of North Canton, died later in a hospital.

"You can't make the kind of major reforms DYS is making, then suddenly close an institution and move youth and staff around the system, without experiencing some kind of disruption," Parks said in a statement.

Hesson apparently is the first juvenile-corrections officer to die from an assault in the 28 years of the Department of Youth Services.

His death and the transfer of Ohio's most-violent juvenile offenders from the Marion Juvenile Correctional Facility, which will close June 6, have prompted DYS employees and the union to voice safety concerns.

The Dispatch recently reported that violence against youth services staff members shot up 21 percent in the past year.



Union officials contend that the Marion decision has destabilized the system.

"This didn't have to happen," said Annie Person, head of the union's DYS assembly. "We believe DYS needs to take a step back and reassess some of the changes that are being made."

State officials have declined to release further information about Hesson's death, citing an ongoing criminal investigation by the State Highway Patrol.

However, *The Plain Dealer* of Cleveland reported last night that an 18-year-old man, who was 17 at the time of the incident, has been charged with murder and felonious assault.

Cuyahoga County assistant prosecutor Michael Horn told *The Plain Dealer* yesterday that the man will be tried as an adult.

Authorities said the man, whose identity wasn't released, is from Vermilion, in Erie County.

The *Sandusky Register* reported this week that the man originally was sentenced on delinquency counts of gross sexual imposition and sexual imposition. He later was charged with aggravated robbery, assault and delinquency in connection with an August 2008 outburst at his court sentencing, the paper said.

Dispatch reporter Randy Ludlow and the Associated Press contributed to this story.

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Supermax too full for detainees

By Bruce Finley
The Denver Post

Moving any large number of terror detainees from Guantanamo Bay to Colorado's Supermax would require either shuffling current residents out of the Florence prison or expanding its capacity and resolving a long-running battle over adequate prison staffing.

As President Barack Obama and congressional leaders point toward the Colorado federal prison as a possible new home for some of the detainees, one big problem is the bed-space crunch. Supermax's approximately 480 concrete cells already are jammed with the likes of Oklahoma City bombing co-conspirator Terry Nichols, Atlanta Olympics bomber Eric Rudolph and other notorious domestic criminals. There also are 33 international terrorists, including Sept. 11 conspirator Zacarias Moussaoui, 1993 World Trade Center bombing mastermind Ramzi Yousef and failed airline shoe bomber Richard Reid.

Only one bed was not filled Thursday at Supermax, U.S. Bureau of Prisons spokeswoman Tracy Billingsley said. So getting any more than a handful of detainees from Guantanamo to Florence would require considerable logistical maneuvers to clear room or an even longer-term solution through prison expansion.

The first step, according to the head of the union representing correctional officers, would be to increase staffing at Supermax. "There's a whole contingent of issues that have to be well thought out before we ever agreed to bring inmates of that caliber into our system," said Bryan Lowry, president of the National Council of Prison Locals, which represents federal correctional officers. "These inmates that are in there now are some of the most dangerous inmates in the nation. I don't know how you move them out just to move inmates from Guantanamo in. Alternatives have got to be explored."

State Rep. Buffie McFadyen, who represents the Florence area, believes one of the alternatives to be considered must be a more secure prison to house anyone brought from Guantanamo. "There's no hardened perimeter," she said of the current Supermax, noting that Congress has rejected several requests to build one. "They'd have to build a facility. I believe it would have to be a separate facility. It would have a different mission." U.S. Sens. Mark



Udall and Michael Bennet of Colorado both issued statements Wednesday opposing moving detainees to Colorado's Supermax.

However, freshman U.S. Rep. Jared Polis on Thursday took a different approach.

"Coloradans, like every American, want to keep these people from causing harm. We want to keep them locked up with no chance of escape. We want to put them in the best facility for that purpose," Polis said. "If (Supermax) is the best facility for the purpose of the country, then that's where we should lock them up."

Polis' position actually comes closest to echoing that of many locals surrounding the prison. Congress and Obama certainly must hash out how transfers from Guantanamo would fit with U.S. judicial principles, Fremont County Commissioner Ed Norden said. "If (suspected terrorists) are adjudicated and convicted, then, yeah, I think (Supermax) is an appropriate place," Norden said. "That facility was built to handle that kind of individual. But it causes problems when they are awaiting trial."

Once details were worked out, Florence residents probably would be supportive, Town Manager Tom Piltingsrud said.

They took the initiative on establishing Supermax in the first place, scraping together money to buy land and then donating it to the government for the complex, he said. They remain glad for the jobs it provides. "It's a recession-proof industry," Piltingsrud said.

There already is a housing development with a Gary Player-designed golf course close to the federal prison complex that includes Supermax. It has 100 units now but could have up to 1,500 when completed. Still, Florence Mayor Bart Hall has little worry about maintaining the security of the area, even in the event of a large-scale transfer from Guantanamo.

Hall noted that in rural Colorado, people are pretty self-reliant. "Most of us own guns," he said.

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