

American Correctional Officer

Intelligence Network

ROLL CALL BRIEFING

November 30, 2008

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Undersheriff at Morris jail is accused of assault:

Union president files charges claiming he was struck during argument

Friday, November 07, 2008

BY LAWRENCE RAGONESE

Star-Ledger Staff

A union president at the Morris County Jail has filed assault charges against Undersheriff Ralph McGrane, who runs the lockup, charging he was physically assaulted during a heated discussion regarding union matters last week.

Officer Donald Del Vecchio, president of PBA Local 298, said McGrane approached him at a jail loading dock during a work shift and angrily confronted him in a profanity-laced conversation while repeatedly pointing his finger in the officer's face. He said McGrane slapped his hand and struck him three times in the upper chest and shoulder area.

Del Vecchio filed a criminal complaint Wednesday in municipal court in Morris Township, where the county jail is located. A probable cause hearing has been scheduled for Nov. 18 before Judge Robert Nish, according to court officials. Officials familiar with the matter said there is a videotape of the incident that will be available to the court.

This is the latest in a series of problems dating back five years between McGrane and union representatives that has bubbled over into the legal arena. A federal civil rights lawsuit filed by five officers was recently settled for \$240,000 plus \$2.2 million in legal fees paid by taxpayers.

McGrane yesterday declined comment in the latest allegation. Sheriff Edward Rochford, who is McGrane's boss, defended his jail chief, calling the assault charge "ridiculous." He said McGrane approached Del Vecchio to intercede in a running dispute between the heads of the jail's two unions.

"Ralph felt he had to stop this stuff," said Rochford. "He may have put a hand on Don's shoulder, but that's it. There's no assault here."

Del Vecchio disagreed, saying, "The sheriff is avoiding the issue and not dealing with what is a continuing problem with the chief."

The county in August settled a series of federal lawsuits filed against McGrane, Warden Frank Corrente and Rochford's agency by officers who charged the county punished them for speaking out on working conditions and tried to break their union. When the case was settled for just \$240,000, Rochford and McGrane said that result showed the charges were not justified.

"I think this vindicates the operation of the jail and the way we've managed it," McGrane said at that time. "Not one of their claims was substantiated."

Del Vecchio, a corrections officer in Morris County for 11 years, is serving his third year as union president. He was not involved in the previous lawsuits. But once they were settled this summer, he said McGrane became more aggressive in dealing with employees, filing many "nickel and dime" administrative charges against the staff, and was angered by the union responses.

County Administrator John Bonanni said he is aware of Del Vecchio's complaint but is precluded from discussing it because it is a personnel matter. He said it would be handled by the self-insured county's Insurance Fund Committee.

The lawsuits settled in August charged jail management violated staff's rights to free speech and union activities. The plaintiffs alleged they were reprimanded for speaking out on issues such as the jail's sick-time policy and staffing needs, saying responses included internal affairs investigations, suspensions and verbal abuse.

McGrane long contended the suits stemmed from a sick-time policy he instituted that made it tougher for officers to take days off. He called it a change from a "loose, do-whatever-you-want" attitude that preceded his 1998 hiring.

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Immigration lockup hired 92 guards without vetting

A privately run immigration lockup in Tacoma hired nearly 100 security guards without background checks, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) didn't catch the practice for two years, court documents show.

**City of Tacoma Denies Any Responsibility. "Very Professional" TPD Chief Ramsdale
"Nothing we can do - as long as they obey the law" Councilmember Julie Anderson**

By Gene Johnson
The Associated Press

A privately run immigration lockup in Tacoma hired nearly 100 security guards without background checks, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) didn't catch the practice for two years, court documents show.

Sylvia Wong, an administrator in charge of hiring at the Northwest Detention Center, pleaded guilty this week in federal court in Tacoma to one count of making a false statement, for lying to investigators.

In her plea agreement, she admitted that soon after starting work in November 2005, she began hiring guards without background checks "because of the pressure she felt to get security personnel hired at the NWDC as quickly as possible." ICE auditors discovered early this year that 92 guards had been hired without the checks. The agency acknowledges that some of the guards have been fired after subsequent background

checks but won't say how many. "In response to this investigation we have implemented a multitiered vetting process ... so that no contractor or federal employee has sole responsibility to process and approve employment documents," ICE spokeswoman Lorie Dankers said Thursday. "We have taken proactive steps to prevent this from happening again."

The Northwest Detention Center opened in 2004 and holds about 1,000 people accused of immigration violations, mainly detainees from Alaska, Oregon and Washington. It's run by the for-profit, Florida-based GEO Group Inc., with yearly reviews to ensure the facility meets ICE standards. A GEO Group spokesman has not returned several inquiries from The Associated Press about Wong's case, the latest on Thursday. Her lawyer did not immediately return a call. Assistant U.S. Attorney Nicholas Brown said any pressure Wong felt to hire guards quickly was self-imposed and did not come from higher-ups. If anything, he said, she was mostly trying "to make people happy."

When guards are hired at the detention center, they are supposed to undergo a preliminary background check. If they pass, they are given "entry on duty" forms allowing them to begin work pending a more thorough check, which can take several months to more than a year. The plea agreement said that when Wong hired the guards, she fabricated "entry on duty" forms, allowing them to start work without any background check.

In February, ICE discovered that the guards had been hired without the checks and searched Wong's office. The next month, when agents questioned her, she insisted she had not manufactured the forms — hence, the "false statement" charge against her.

Brown said he did not know precisely how many of the guards Wong hired had been fired, but characterized the number as relatively small. Asked what the number was, Dankers said, "I'm going to decline comment on that." Asked why, she replied, "Because I am." She later called back to say policies prohibited her from discussing staffing levels — even though the number of fired guards has nothing to do with current staffing. According to the plea agreement, the detention center has up to 200 security, administrative, medical, food service and maintenance workers. Wong faces zero to six months in detention when she is sentenced in February.

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2 Attacks Latest In Violence at Pr. George's Jail Guard, Inmate Were Injured In Separate Fights This Month

By Ruben Castaneda
Washington Post Staff Writer
Sunday, November 30, 2008; C01

Within the past month, a Department of Corrections officer at the [Prince George's County](#) jail was critically injured during a fight with a detainee, and in a separate incident, an inmate used a homemade shank to stab another inmate during a fight in a lockdown section of the facility.

The injured officer was not immediately provided with medical care, and three days later was admitted to a hospital in critical condition, according to law enforcement sources and court records.

The stabbing occurred in a housing unit in which only one inmate at a time is supposed to be out of his cell. One of the inmates in the fight disabled the lock on his cell door to go after the other inmate, a jail source said.

Vicki D. Duncan, a jail spokeswoman, declined to comment on the stabbing and did not respond to an e-mail and a phone call about the attack on the officer. [John Erzen](#), a spokesman for County Executive [Jack B. Johnson](#) (D), said officials had no comment because the incidents are under investigation.

The attacks are the latest in a series of troubling incidents affecting the Upper Marlboro jail this year.

Authorities are investigating the death of [Ronnie L. White](#), an inmate who was found dead in his cell in June, less than 48 hours after he was charged with killing a county police officer. The state medical examiner ruled the death a homicide.

Also that month, then-Department of Corrections Director Alfred J. McMurray Sr. was fired two days after officials discovered that four handguns were missing from the jail's armory. The handguns have not been recovered.

In March, three jail officers were suspended amid an investigation into allegations that guards conspired to smuggle cellphones to inmates. One of the suspended guards was suspected of being a member of the Bloods street gang, according to court papers.

The attack on the corrections officer, Cpl. Onur Cinar, occurred about 9:30 p.m. Nov. 1, according to court records.

According to a police charging document, inmate Levar D. Payton, 23, of the District became involved in an argument over property that was being issued to him as he was being reclassified and moved to another part of the jail.

Cinar ordered Payton to move along, and when the inmate refused, the officer tried to escort him from the area, according to the charging document. Payton punched Cinar in the face, and the officer fell to the ground, injuring his head, according to the charging document.

Payton was charged with first- and second-degree assault on Cinar.

Although Cinar reported feeling dizzy, corrections supervisors did not summon paramedics, according to a jail employee, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the source has not been authorized to speak publicly. According to the jail's protocols, all supervisors in the chain of command, including acting Director Mary Lou McDonough, should have been made aware that an officer had been injured in a fight, the source said.

Instead of receiving medical attention, Cinar lay on a table for about two hours, the jail employee said. Later, a fellow officer drove Cinar to a hospital, the source said.

The county fire department's records show no evidence that a corrections officer was transported from the jail to a hospital Nov. 1 or 2.

A law enforcement source, who spoke on condition of anonymity because Payton is awaiting trial, said Cinar was treated and released from [Prince George's Hospital Center](#).

On Nov. 4, three days after the attack, relatives found Cinar unconscious and unresponsive in his [Montgomery County](#) home, the law enforcement source said. Cinar was taken to [Suburban Hospital](#) in Bethesda, where he was admitted to the intensive care unit in critical condition, the source said.

Cinar was released from Suburban Hospital on Nov. 14, according to hospital records.

Efforts to reach Cinar and his relatives were unsuccessful.

On Nov. 18, three weeks after Cinar was attacked, one inmate stabbed another in the H-6 housing unit, a lockdown section. In a lockdown unit, inmates are supposed to be confined to their cells 23 hours a day, and only one inmate at a time is supposed to be in the section's common area.

According to police charging documents, Robert Hilton, 21, of the District stabbed fellow inmate Anthony L. Green, 22, of Hyattsville during a fight in the cellblock.

"During the fight the suspect pulled out a piece of metal and stabbed the victim in the back and in the head," according to the charging document, which accuses Hilton of first- and second-degree assault.

Green and Hilton were arguing. One of the inmates disabled the lock on his cell and went after the other. It was not clear who left his cell and who was in the common area when the fight started.

Green was taken to Prince George's Hospital Center, where he was treated and released, according to the charging document.

November 28, 2008

Private Prison Profits Soar Through Prisoners in the Immigration System

Private Prison Profits Soar Through Bipartisan Pork

by Dave Bennion

Published November 26, 2008 @ 08:00AM PST

Tom Barry at Border Lines, a blog I just added to my feed list, discusses the commodification of prisoners in the immigration system. Keep in mind that most immigration violations are civil, not criminal, violations. Even crossing the border without a visa is only a misdemeanor.

To understand how well the prison business is faring and how immigrants are key to prison profits, you can listen in on the prison firms' quarterly conference calls with major Wall Street investment firms. In early November, the country's prison corporations reported soaring profits.

Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the country's oldest and largest prison corporation, boasted that it enjoyed a \$33.6 million increase in the third quarter over last year, while earnings rose 15%. Formerly known as Wackenhut, GEO Group, the nation's second largest prison company, saw its earnings jump 29% over 2007. Another private prison firm that imprisons immigrants is Cornell Companies, and it reported a 9% increase in net revenues in the third quarter.

This at a time when the rest of the economy is tanking. And these profits come straight from taxpayers' pockets, when we are already bailing out the financial industry.

Private prisons have been booming over the past eight years. From 2000 to 2005, the number of private prisons increased from 16% of all prisons to 23%. All of the increase in federal prisons has been in prisons owned or operated by private firms.

Immigrants are the fastest growing sector of the federal detainees and prisoners, and there's hundreds of millions of dollars to be made by enterprising businesses and governments. The annual ICE budget for "detention and removal" is \$1.2 billion.

In addition, the Justice Department's Office for the Detention Trustee has hundreds of contracts with local governments and private prison firms that provide beds for immigrants. Both ICE and OFDT have special

offices that oversee the outsourcing of its immigrant prisoners. OFDT even boasts of its “enterprise” system of detention.

Private prison companies aren't worried that the Democratic Party sweep will mean that fewer immigrants are sent their way because of party promises of enacting comprehensive immigration reform. GEO Group's chairman George Zoley on Nov. 3 assured investors: “These federal initiatives to target, detain and deport criminal aliens throughout the country will continue to drive the need for immigration detention beds over the next several years and these initiatives have been fully funded by Congress on a bipartisan basis.”

Not only has the DHS crackdown on illegal immigrants have bipartisan support in Congress, it was the Democratic Congress, say private prison chiefs, that increased the 2009 budget for the crackdown. “The President only asked for a program funding of \$800 million,” noted Zoley, “It was the Democratic chairman [Homeland Security subcommittee] ... that added another \$200 million to this program.” That would be Senator Byrd of West Virginia. Is this what we can look forward to from "more and better Democrats"?

Democrats should not be fattening profits of private prison operators on the backs of immigrants. End corporate subsidies to immigration jails! http://immigration.change.org/blog/view/private_prison_profits_soar_through_bipartisan_pork