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6 jobs lost for inmate's indignity

Officials say a female inmate was kept naked at Zephyrhills Correctional Institution for several days. The warden resigns.

By MOLLY MOORHEAD
Published October 7, 2004

ZEPHYRHILLS - The warden and five other officers at Zephyrhills Correctional Institution have lost their jobs after the discovery that a suicidal female inmate was held naked at the prison for several days.

Investigators said they found no evidence the 27-year-old woman, the only female inmate at the prison, was sexually abused.

It is unclear why the woman was not given a prison garment, or how many days she was without it, said Sterling Ivey, Department of Corrections spokesman in Tallahassee.

Ivey said the departures of the six employees, all men, were a result of their failure to follow prison rules.

"That's the whole bottom line on why these individuals are no longer working with us," he said. "It's not because there's anything else going on there."

Warden Gary Thomas; assistant warden Ray Mulally; Col. Donald Leigh, the third in command; and chief health officer Dr. Stephen Shanklin all resigned in the past few days. The prison psychiatrist, Dr. Noah Jeannette, was fired Wednesday.

Prison Maj. Leonard Kuhns was demoted five levels and transferred to the state prison in Brevard County.

Ivey would not release the woman's name, citing federal privacy laws protecting patient health information.

He said the woman was transferred from a Broward County prison to the psychiatric wing at Zephyrhills because she had threatened suicide.

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She is serving one year and 11 months on charges of having sex while HIV positive and committing battery on a law enforcement officer, Ivey said.

She has been sent back to the Broward facility, still under suicide watch, and is tentatively scheduled to be released in February.

The woman was the only female inmate at the Zephyrhills facility when the incidents occurred, and none are being held there now.

Ivey said the psychiatric facility for women has been moved to the Broward prison, a change that was in the works before the recent incident. Zephyrhills still houses male inmates with mental health needs.

Prison policy requires that suicidal inmates be given a garment called a sarong.

"It's a heavy, coarse, canvas material that the inmate cannot rip, the inmate cannot use as a mechanism to commit suicide with," Ivey said.

But in this case, the woman was not offered the garment.

She had been at the Zephyrhills prison since July 30, but Ivey said the ongoing investigation does not indicate she was held naked during her entire two-month stay. She went back to Broward on Saturday.

"We know (she was without clothes) for multiple days, for several days," he said.

The woman's cell was private, with a solid steel door that has an opening for a food tray and a small plexiglass window at the top. No cameras are inside the cell, Ivey said.

"It is definitely is not a fishbowl," he said.

She was kept apart from the prison's 600-plus male inmates but may have been guarded by men on staff.

"There would have been male officers in the wing," Ivey said. "We have male officers that work at other female prisons, so it's not uncommon. The officers would not have worked alone on the wing. There would have been multiple officers working on the wing."

The incident came to light Sept. 30.

John Burke, the corrections department's deputy assistant secretary of health services, "heard a rumor that an inmate at Zephyrhills had been without clothing," Ivey said.

From there, the DOC's office of inspector general launched an investigation. Ivey said he was not able to name the officer who decided not to give the woman a sarong.

"We didn't look to point blame at any one individual," he said. "These are

the senior ranking officers at the prison who didn't make sure the policies were followed."

A new warden and assistant warden already have been named.

Ken Miller, who worked in the department's regional office in Orlando, will take over the helm. Barry Reddish, former supervisor at the Florida State Prison, is the new assistant warden.

[Last modified October 7, 2004, 00:28:15]

Tampa Bay headlines

▶ [6 jobs lost for inmate's indignity](#)

Obituary

▶ [Holocaust survivor Sam Gross dies](#)

Past 14 Days 

**BACK
TO TOP**

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