

CCA Attempts Cover-Up of Assault by Warden at Tennessee Prison

Late last year, a prisoner at the CCA-operated Hardeman County Correctional Facility (HCCF) in Tennessee notified *PLN* that the prison's warden, assistant warden and internal affairs officer had either resigned or been fired or transferred. The staff changes reportedly resulted from an excessive use of force incident and unrelated criminal charges.

A public records request submitted to the Tennessee Dept. of Correction (TDOC) pursuant to T.C.A. § 10-7-503 resulted in a number of documents that shed light on what happened at HCCF.

On May 16, 2007, a violent altercation occurred in the chapel between Muslim prisoners and CCA guards. HCCF warden Glen Turner personally participated in the interrogation of several prisoners after the fight. While questioning prisoner James Ingram, who insisted he had not been involved in the incident, Warden Turner threw him to the ground and punched him several times, causing an injury above his eye. Ingram was restrained at the time.

According to Jerry Lester, the TDOC's acting Internal Affairs Director, state officials were not informed about Warden Turner's excessive use of force "as it was never reported at the facility. It was not until July 19, when the TDOC received notification from inmate Ingram's attorney of his intent to file civil suit, that anyone at the facility began to acknowledge the excessive use of force by Warden Turner." In short, CCA had attempted to cover-up the incident.

Warden Turner was initially suspended with pay, then resigned on August 19, 2007. He was charged with assault and official misconduct. On Sept. 18 he plead guilty to a charge of official oppression and received one year judicial diversion.

HCCF Assistant Warden Sarah Rice resigned on Oct. 25, 2007. The official reason given was "job dissatisfaction." However, several HCCF prisoners claim she had been involved in a cover-up of Warden Turner's use of force and would have been fired or demoted had she not quit. Another Assistant Warden at the Hardeman County prison, Jeremy Hensley, was transferred to a different CCA facility about the same time.

James Ingram, the HCCF prisoner who was injured by Warden Turner, was placed in administrative segregation and transferred to a state prison. He has since filed a federal lawsuit alleging Eighth and Fourteenth Amendment violations related to the assault and denial of medical care. See: *Ingram v. Turner*, USDC MD Tenn., Case No. 2:07-cv-02798-JDB.

In an unrelated incident, on Oct. 20, 2007, HCCF's internal affairs officer, Keith H. Huggins, 30, was transferred to work at a CCA prison in Mason, Tennessee. He had been accused of assaulting customers at The Palace, a nightclub in Jackson where he worked as a bouncer on his off-hours. Huggins was charged with aggravated assault in connection with a June 17 fight that left a customer with a broken jaw and other serious injuries. He entered a "best interest" plea in April 2008 to a misdemeanor assault charge, and was placed on probation for 11 months and 29 days. He is still employed by CCA at the Mason facility.

CCA is presently in the process of building a 2,000-bed for-profit prison in Trousdale County, Tennessee. If the above trend continues, some of that bed space may be needed to house abusive employees from the company's other facilities.

Sources: *Documents produced by the TDOC (available on PLN's website), Jackson Sun, Tennessean, Jackson District Attorney's office*