



July 16, 2009

State investigating abuse reports at private prison

By Stephenie Steitzer
ssteitzer@courier-journal.com

FRANKFORT, Ky. — The state Department of Corrections is investigating allegations of sexual abuse against as many as 16 Kentucky women housed at the privately run Otter Creek Correctional Center in Wheelwright.

Kentucky State Police also are investigating allegations, reported June 23, that a Hawaiian inmate was sexually assaulted by a corrections officer at the women's-only, Floyd County facility.

State police expect to present that case to a Floyd County grand jury in the next several weeks, spokesman Mike Goble said, adding that detectives also are looking into allegations made by inmates since the June 23 report.

In addition, the Hawaiian Department of Public Safety is investigating two alleged incidents at the prison, according to The Honolulu Advertiser.

The 656-bed facility is owned and operated by Nashville-based Corrections Corp. of America. The company has contracts with Kentucky and Hawaii; 433 women from Kentucky and 165 from Hawaii are housed there.

Lisa Lamb, a spokeswoman for the Department of Corrections, said in a statement that officials traveled to the prison last week and returned this week to investigate allegations of "inappropriate sexual contact or assault involving Kentucky inmates."

Lamb said officials are reviewing reports dating to 2006, including incidents that were previously investigated.

"We are re-investigating every allegation regardless of the disposition," she said. "In some instances this requires interviewing inmates who have been released."

Lamb said Kentucky officials are sharing information with Hawaii officials.

Officials in Hawaii could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Otter Creek Warden Jeff Little referred questions to Corrections Corp. spokesman Steve Owen.

Owen said the company, which has owned the facility since 1998, is cooperating with Kentucky and Hawaii officials and is conducting its own investigation.

"We certainly have been in very close communication and constant communication with officials at the (Kentucky) Department of Corrections," he said. "We are obviously going to continue to fully support and cooperate with their investigation."

Owen said the company is reviewing an anonymous list of allegations sent to Hawaii officials to

determine whether they are new or are allegations that already have been reviewed.

An October 2007 report of a sexual assault of a Hawaiian inmate led to the firing of a corrections officer. He was subsequently charged with a misdemeanor sex offense.

Kentucky has a \$19.6 million contract in fiscal year 2009 with Corrections Corp. to house 1,295 inmates at Otter Creek, the Marion Adjustment Center in St. Mary and the Lee Adjustment Center in Beattyville.

Hawaii has a \$3.6 million contract with Otter Creek, which is to expire in October.

The company manages 75,000 inmates at 64 facilities in 19 states and the District of Columbia, according to its Web site.

Reporter Stephenie Steitzer can be reached at (502) 875-5136. The Associated Press contributed to this story.
