

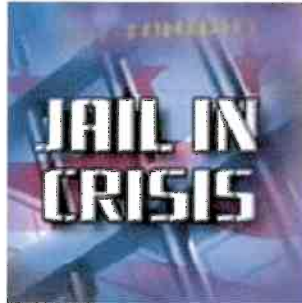


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Jail In Crisis: Questions Surround DC Jail Management

Written by 9 News

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There are new questions about the management of the DC jail.

Inmates have been shot and stabbed inside the walls of what's supposed to be a secure facility. And some say the people charged with keeping the jail safe have been out to lunch, literally.

Nine News reporter Stacey Cohan explains in this exclusive report that, just what goes on behind the walls of the DC jail remains somewhat of a mystery.

Reporters are rarely allowed inside. There has been no official report on an incident two months ago, when four inmates were shot.

But now there is evidence that corrections officials are breaking their own rules, says one DC attorney, Doug Sparks. Sparks is also a board member for the DC prisoners' legal services project.

"For at least one and a half hours a day, including today... posts on the cell block are abandoned," Sparks said.

What happens is jail guards go to lunch and what was the minimum of three officers on a cellblock, becomes just two. And according to documents obtained by 9 News, inmates get violent when they guards go on break.

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The jail is supposed to have another officer fill in while one takes a lunch break, but according to this 2003 report from a corrections consultant, the jail is not finding other guards to fill-in.

In a letter written by DC Corrections Director, Odie Washington, Washington admits there were only two guards on duty during the quadruple shooting in December explaining, "one of the officers momentarily stepped out of the unit."

But 9 News has learned that the missing officer has a very different version of events. In an official description of what happened, sources say the officer claimed to be out on a lunch break when the shooting occurred.

The Department of Corrections refused 9 News' request for an interview.

A spokesperson would only say that the jail continues its policy of keeping three correctional officers on the cellblocks.

Their word does not mean much to the mother of Givon Pendleton, who 9 News interviewed last year.

Pendleton was awaiting trial when he was fatally stabbed ten times inside the DC Jail. A report shows a guard on his cellblock "had gone to the culinary" when the stabbing happened.

"Everybody makes mistakes, but should they lose their lives? They are still human beings," Pearl Beale, Pendleton's mother said.

Sparks says enough is enough that he is, "sick and tired of everyone talking about it, studying it, suing them for lost family. It's cruel, it's unconstitutional and it's inhumane. And it's a disgrace for this city."

Washington will be answering questions about the state of the DC Jail on Monday morning, before the City Council.

The leader of the DC Correctional Officers Association is also slated to testify, Pamela Chase has previously complained the jail is so understaffed, that the guards are in danger.

To view Stacey Cohan's report, click "Play Video."