Abolitionist Law Center Declarations Contained False Statements, Misrepresentations
County Police, Jail Officials Discuss Initial Findings of Investigation

Allegheny County – Initial inquiries in an investigation into recent claims put forth by the Abolitionist Law Center in statements by incarcerated individuals indicate that the statements contained false statements or were misrepresented or distorted. This is according to four of the seven men who spoke with the out-of-state attorney while incarcerated.

The declarations of the seven individuals were provided by a reporter at the Pittsburgh City Paper who sought comment from the jail on the allegations contained in them. If true, the allegations could have been the basis for disciplinary action up to and including termination, as well as potential criminal charges. Accordingly, County Manager William D. McKain CPA and Warden Orlando Harper requested the investigatory assistance of the Allegheny County Police Department and its Internal Affairs division.

“We take every single allegation made at the jail seriously and will investigate them fully, and that includes those allegations that the men who made these declarations stand by,” said County Police Superintendent Christopher Kearns. “It was disappointing to learn during these voluntary interviews that these men found errors, false statements, and things that they did not say or were misrepresented in the very declarations that have their names on them.”

Internal Affairs officers interviewed five of the six men who remain in the facility, as well as the one individual who has since been released from the facility. All interviews were voluntary. One person declined to be interviewed. During those interviews, three of the men indicated that they did not know or request to speak to Ms. Jaclyn Kurin, the attorney who certified the statements. Instead, they were notified of a video attorney visit but when they reported for it, found that Ms. Kurin was the attorney who had requested it. One of the men believed that he was talking with her about a possible lawsuit regarding a 2020 incident. Another reported that Ms. Kurin said she was calling random people in the facility.

Ms. Kurin is not licensed to practice law in Pennsylvania. She is licensed by the District of Columbia Bar and is listed as an active attorney in good standing.

Among the findings so far from the investigation, interviewed individuals:

• Stated that someone wrote the declaration for him and that nothing listed in it has happened to him personally, but are incidents that he has heard about
• Advised that several of the items in the declaration were his explanation to the attorney of how things are handled when she asked questions but were not accusations or statements he made
• Adamantly denied saying that the SERT* officers on a floor were intimidating or that he was scared; indicated instead that they come to the pod and then move on and that his description of what they wear was in a response to a question from Ms. Kurin
• Indicated that two of the items listed in their declaration are false – their age is wrong (26, not 45) and they have never been on the pod indicated in one of the items
• Outright denied that they ever said some of the items in the declaration, while confirming others and asked what some of the statements even meant
• Stated that what is in the declaration was him asking questions about how things work and why some things impact other pods, rather than what was presented
• Adamently denied making any statement regarding SERT* officers because he doesn’t think they’re a threat or intimidating; added that Ms. Kurin is the one who told him the officers have rubber bullets and she showed him pictures of them in the video meeting
• Clarified that outside recreation is optional and are not forced to wear flip-flops and indicated that if they choose to go outside, they wear whatever footwear they have

The investigation remains open. The Jail Internal Affairs Division is locating and preserving relevant video and speaking with involved correctional staff as well as any additional follow-up resulting from the investigation.

When complete, the findings will be turned over to the county manager and the jail administration.

*The declarations refer to SERT, but the Allegheny County Jail utilizes a Correctional Response Unit (CRU) team. Its members rove throughout the facility to provide support to correctional staff and unit needs including initial medical response, staffing coverage, security patrols, and other support related to the safety and security of the facility.

The jail administration is also looking into the allegations and reviewing actions by correctional employees to verify the reports and determine whether violations of policy were made. If officers did not follow the jail’s policies, those staff will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination on a parallel path.

"We hold all of our staff members to the highest possible standard and we take all allegations seriously," said Chief Deputy Warden of Jail Operations Jason Beasom. "We are always looking for ways to improve our policies and procedures to continue to provide for the care, custody, and control of our incarcerated population. While we continue our investigation, our initial findings indicate that many of these claims are completely without merit."

Among the findings so far:

• Maximum- and minimum-security individuals are not mixed on some pods and classifications are reviewed every 60 days and determinations made not just on charges, but also on institutional conduct; in review of incidents on the three pods referenced in the declarations, there was only one incident going back to October 2021
• Incidents such as an elevator not working, short staffing, or a shakedown have all occurred and those do result in a lockdown of the facility for security reasons; however, once the issue is resolved, operations return to normal and recreation time is again offered
• Determined that opportunities for recreation time are not being communicated consistently on all pods; leadership is developing a process that correctional staff will be expected to follow so all incarcerated individuals are aware of the opportunities
• Recreation time is offered on split shifts for security reasons and to ensure physical distancing opportunities; incarcerated individuals who ignore orders to return to their cells when time is over may be issued an infraction
• Many of the reports of less than four hours of recreation have been due to isolation or quarantine restrictions due to COVID-19 on the advice of medical professionals – leadership will work to ensure that the reasons for that are communicated to those on the pod; in other instances, records and video confirm that incarcerated individuals have elected to cut short the recreation time, or refused it
• There has been no memo or other document to corrections officers regarding taking recreation away on 8E; absent a court order indicating otherwise, all individuals in segregated housing can utilize communication devices until they are found guilty of an infraction

This inquiry also remains open as leadership seeks to identify involved individuals to determine what occurred based on the allegations and will review all incidents to determine if disciplinary action or a review of policy is appropriate. When complete, the findings will be turned over to the county manager.
“For the past few days, we have dedicated a great deal of time and effort to investigate these claims only to find out that the men who made them say that some of this is not what they said, that statements were misrepresented, or that they were responding to questions and information provided by the attorney taking the statement,” said Warden Orlando Harper. “The ACJ, like so many other organizations across the country, is dealing with COVID outbreaks. We have more cases among our incarcerated individuals today than we did just a few days ago and our time and attention needs to be on ensuring the safety of all of the individuals here, not chasing after false claims.”

The Allegheny County Jail is accredited by the American Correctional Association (ACA). It is one of three ACA-accredited Adult Local Correctional Facilities in Pennsylvania.

# # #