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Virginia Prison Guard To Face Charges Of Having Sex With Inmate

March 8, 2012 6:52 PM

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credit: PAUL J. RICHARDS/AFP/Getty Images

TROY, Va. (AP) — A former guard at a Virginia women's prison with a history of sexual misconduct is facing charges for allegedly having sex with an inmate.

John Bernard Bland Jr., 40, was arrested Feb. 28 and charged with three counts of carnal knowledge of a prisoner while he was a guard at Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women, Virginia's largest women's prison. Bland is scheduled to appear in Fluvanna County Circuit

Court on Friday to inform the judge whether he will hire an attorney or needs one appointed to represent him.

Bland is accused in three incidents in June and July of 2011 involving the same inmate, said Fluvanna County Commonwealth's Attorney Jeffrey Haislip. Haislip refused to further discuss the allegations.

Department of Corrections spokesman Larry Traylor said the agency investigated the allegations and turned over its findings to Haislip's office.

A telephone message left at Bland's home was not returned.

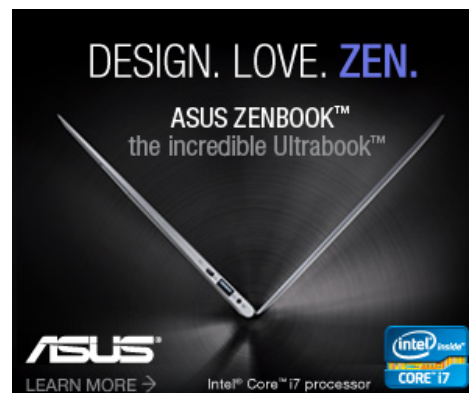
Problems with sexual misconduct have plagued Fluvanna since it opened in 1998. In 1999, an internal report sparked by a series of Associated Press articles detailing sexual abuse at the prison found that 13 guards had been fired or resigned over allegations of sexual assault, harassing or fraternizing with inmates. In January 2009, former security chief Patrick Owen Gee was sentenced to five years in prison after being convicted for having sex with female inmates in his office.

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Last April, Fluvanna officials were called to testify before a Department of Justice panel created to examine sexual victimization in prisons and jails after a report found the prison had one of the highest reported percentages of inmate rape and sexual misconduct in the nation. Survey data collected in 2008 and 2009 found 11 percent of inmates reported being sexually victimized by other inmates and six percent of inmates reported being sexually victimized by staff.



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Melissa Andrews, a former inmate at Fluvanna, testified that when she was at the prison, women would have sex with officers in bathrooms or closets where there were no cameras. She described sex between officers and inmates as an "exchange of services."

"Women would allow these officers to have sexual relations with them because they were lonely, wanted a better job, wanted more privileges, wanted less consequences for infractions, or just something to do," said Andrews, who spent more than eight years in Virginia prisons for robbery and other charges and said she was sexually assaulted by her roommate while at one prison.

Officials from Fluvanna testified they had made changes at the prison, including adding more female investigators to oversee allegations, locking more doors and installing more cameras.

Bland started working for the prison system in 1995 at Deep Meadow Correction Center in Powhatan County. He transferred to Fluvanna in 1999, a little more than a year after the prison opened. He was promoted to sergeant in 2003 and then to a lieutenant in 2008. He worked there until Nov. 29, 2011, Traylor said.

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