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(KRQE News 13)

County pays to settle jail rape suits

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ALBUQUERQUE (KRQE) - Three former female inmates who claim they were forced to have sex with a corrections officer and an inmate at the Metropolitan Detention Center will share in a \$925,000 settlement.

Bernalillo County has agreed to pay the women to settle a lawsuit in which they alleged jail Sgt. Torry Chambers and inmate Anthony Townes helped each other commit the sexual assaults between 2008 and 2010. The two men had become friends, the Albuquerque Journal reported.

Townes is now serving a 16-year sentence for rapes committed in 2007 while he was a guard at a contract prison in Albuquerque.

Chambers was charged but never indicted. He remains a corrections officer at the Metropolitan Detention Center, but officials say he has no access to female inmates.

"We leave the criminal investigation to law enforcement, and without any criminal conviction, there's nothing we could do," said jail spokeswoman Nataura Powdrell. "We did place him on modified duty."

Kayla Anderson, a spokeswoman for the district attorney's office, said the case against Chambers never went before a grand jury but that federal prosecutors are reviewing the case.

The women's attorneys said they hoped the settlement money, which includes legal fees and other costs, will help their clients to start new lives.

"They all come from a fairly rough background and made some mistakes," attorney Matt Garcia said.

The lawsuit claimed that Chambers raped one of the women once after he entered her cell and once after asking her to clean a cell in the infirmary, where Townes was working as an orderly. On both occasions, the lawsuit said Townes kept watch for Chambers.

Another woman was allegedly raped by Townes after Chambers had escorted him into the woman's cell in the infirmary.

The third plaintiff alleged she was required to "pay (Chambers) back" for special treatment and favors to her and others in her pod.

The lawsuit pointed to a U.S. Department of Justice report in 2008 that found the Metropolitan Detention Center had the third-highest rate of inmate sexual victimization in the nation as well as the third-highest rate of nonconsensual sexual acts and staff-on-inmate sexual victimization.

Jail Director Ramon Rustin said in an interview related to another lawsuit that new systems have been implemented to deter violence, but he acknowledged that the jail remains crowded.

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Garcia said some things at the jail may be improving.

"What I can tell you is that we don't have as many cases coming to us from MDC as we used to," he said.

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Wow, no wonder the City bailed from the MDC. By what tangled rhetoric may a 'Corrections Officer' claim that they can't investigate charges against an employee? glad to know my tax dollars are still paying an "alleged" rapist to remain at work. How does a jail guard 'become friends' with an inmate, without violating rules or standards??

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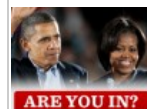
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