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NM prisons to consider crime stoppers, rape crisis hotlines as officials seek more prevention

RUSSELL CONTRERAS Associated Press

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — The state's corrections secretary said he wants all New Mexico prisons to have access to crime stoppers and rape crisis hotlines so inmates can feel free to report sexual assaults.

Gregg Marcantel told The Associated Press on Monday that the consideration is part of a larger push to emphasize whistle-blower laws aimed at fighting sexual assault in state prisons. He said officials also are looking at policy and procedural changes that could encourage more reporting.

"Something like this should be looked upon," Marcantel said. "Maybe we should have a multijurisdictional approach" in investigating reports of sexual assaults.

The comments come after a former inmate filed a lawsuit this month accusing Kenneth Carrejo, a former high-ranking prison guard, of repeatedly raping and threatening him. The civil lawsuit also said a warden tipped off prison officials about an undercover FBI investigation into the inmate's allegations.

Carrejo, who has retired, has not been charged with a crime. He could not be reached for comment Tuesday, and a woman who answered the phone at his parents' home said Carrejo was innocent and declined to comment further.

Last week, Marcantel said he ordered authorities to look into the claims that Anthony Romero, then warden of Central New Mexico Correction Facility in Los Lunas, attempted to interfere with a federal investigation.

Marcantel said based on information he's seen it doesn't appear that Romero broke any laws or violated any policies. Still, Marcantel said the state is fully cooperating with federal investigators in the case.

"Even though it did not happen on my watch, I need to own it," Marcantel said. "These sorts of allegations not only undermine the work of the men and women in the corrections department but also the public's trust in us."

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Monday that the consideration is part of a larger push to emphasize "whistle blowers" laws aimed at fighting sexual assault in state prisons.

Romero has been reassigned to an information technology project while state officials investigate.

A corrections department spokeswoman said Tuesday that Romero is not being made available to comment because of the pending litigation.

The inmate has not been named by the AP because he is the alleged victim of a sexual assault.

Under the one proposal aimed at prevention, crime stoppers and rape crisis 1-800 numbers would be posted around prisons. Marcantel said that would give inmates access to numbers and could "change the culture" in reporting.

The corrections department recently released a rape prevention video that will now be required viewing for all incoming inmates. The video gives tips on ways inmates can avoid sexual assaults.

The Obama administration last week ordered U.S. federal, state and local prisons to increase efforts to stop prison rape by issuing mandatory screening, enforcement and prevention regulations.

Justice Department officials announced the regulations on the heels of a new study showing that almost one in every 10 former state or local prisoners reported being sexually victimized at least once in prison.

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