

Thursday, January 22, 2009

**THE DEATH OF AN 18-YEAR-OLD INMATE ON RIKERS ISLAND LAST
OCTOBER LEADS TO NUMEROUS CRIMINAL CHARGES AGAINST THREE
CORRECTION OFFICERS AND TWELVE TEENAGE INMATES**

Bronx District Attorney Robert T. Johnson and New York City Department of Investigation Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn announced today that a grand jury has indicted three New York City Correction Officers and twelve adolescent inmates on charges ranging from manslaughter, conspiracy, enterprise corruption and other offenses stemming from an investigation into the death of an 18-year-old inmate at a Rikers Island detention facility.

The 58 count indictment handed up by a grand jury was unsealed today in State Supreme Court following a joint investigation into the beating death of Christopher Robinson. He was killed on October 18, 2008 in an inmate housing area at the Robert N. Davoren Center. Robinson allegedly was brutally beaten because of his refusal to go along with a violent extortion enterprise against adolescent inmates which was jointly operated by the indicted correction officers and their teenage accomplices.

The four month investigation into the fatal beating uncovered numerous other alleged criminal acts against adolescent inmates, including assaults, acts of coercion, larceny and extortion. The crimes charged in the indictment involve nine different victims on nine separate occasions between July 10, 2008 and October 18, 2008.

District Attorney Johnson said: “If these allegations are true, the behavior of the Correction Officers was worse than that of some of the young detainees under their supervision. What is most disturbing however is that this conduct turned a detention facility for adolescents into an incubator for violent criminal activity sanctioned by adults in positions of authority. We intend to prosecute this case vigorously and hold these defendants accountable for their actions. They must be punished for conveying to the young people in their charge the message that crime does pay.”

Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said: “The most chilling revelation of this investigation is that three New York City Correction Officers joined in a systematic and brutal scheme of intimidation and gang assault by and upon adolescent inmates in their custody. That scheme led to the death of an 18-year-old inmate. This is the worst case I have seen involving the City’s Correction Department in my experience in the past seven years. The City is resolved to see that the institutional conditions and practices that allowed the intimidation and violence to thrive are corrected quickly and decisively.”

New York City Department of Correction Commissioner Martin Horn said: “The death of Christopher Robinson was tragic and shocking. If the charges against Correction Officers are true, they are a stain on the well-earned reputations of officers who perform their difficult and dangerous tasks every day with integrity and compassion. Even with more than 100,000 people in our custody every year, Christopher Robinson’s death was the first homicide in a city jail in four years, yet it is one death too many. The city’s jails are safer than ever, but that is not enough. We will continue our efforts to make every person in our jails safe and I send a message to all of our staff: those few who fail to live up to their oath of office and our standards, will not be tolerated.”

This sweeping indictment charges Correction Officer Michael McKie, 31, of Brooklyn, Correction Officer Khalid Nelson, 34, of Staten Island, and inmates Joseph Hutchinson, 18, of Manhattan, Anquant Bryant, 18, of the Bronx, John Bae, 18, of Queens, Quashawn Babrow, 17, of Brooklyn, and Treyquan Washington, 18, of the Bronx, with Enterprise Corruption. These defendants are facing a maximum sentence of up to 25 years imprisonment if found guilty of this Class B felony offense.

The indictment also charges Bryant, Hutchinson, and Shaddon Beswick, 18, of the Bronx, with Manslaughter in the 1st degree, Gang Assault in the 1st and 2nd degrees, and Assault in the 2nd degrees, in the death of Christopher Robinson. Bryant, Hutchinson and Beswick are facing a maximum sentence of up to 25 years imprisonment if convicted of manslaughter, the most serious offense in connection with Robinson's death. Beswick was not charged with Enterprise Corruption.

A third Correction Officer, Denise Albright, 43, of Manhattan, was charged with Conspiracy in the 4th and 5th degrees, Assault in the 2nd degree, Coercion in the 1st and 2nd degrees, and Attempted Grand Larceny in the 2nd degree. Albright was not charged with Enterprise Corruption, however it is alleged that she was "acting in concert" with her colleagues McKie, Nelson and others in connection with an inmate assault on August 27, 2008. She is facing a maximum sentence of up to 15 years imprisonment if convicted of the most serious offense charged, Assault in the 2nd degree.

It is alleged that Officers McKie and Nelson acted as managers for an organization referred to as "the Program" which operated within the Robert N. Davoren Center. McKie and Nelson would cede responsibility for maintaining order to inmates known as "the Team" whom they personally selected. In exchange for maintaining order in the unit, McKie and Nelson

authorized the “Team” to extort personal property from their victims and to coerce them in a variety of ways. It is also alleged that McKie and Nelson acted to conceal evidence of these crimes.

According to investigators, inmates who went along with the Program agreed to turn over a percentage of the monetary value in their inmate commissary account and also give up some of their phone privileges to the “foot soldiers and enforcers” of the Program. Victimized inmates could also be forced to give up their shoes or items of clothing. Inmates who refused to go along with the Program were punished by being assaulted by the inmate “enforcers” upon authorization by defendants McKie and Nelson, in most instances would designate the date, time, location and manner of the “beatdown”. McKie and Nelson allegedly facilitated the assaults by allowing the “enforcers” access to remote areas in the housing unit. The indicted Correction Officers allegedly attempted to conceal their participation in the Program by failing to intervene or stop the inmate assaults, making false reports about the assaults or directing inmate victims to make false reports regarding the assaults or acts of extortion, and by using violence or the threat of violence to ensure the victims’ continued participation in the Program.

Six other inmates are also facing conspiracy and other charges stemming from this investigation: Efrain Centeno, 18, of Queens, James Kelly, 18, of Brooklyn, Joel Beltran, 19, of Brooklyn, Adam Palacios, 18, of Brooklyn, Reginald Wiggins, 17, of Manhattan, and Robert Denis, 17, of the Bronx.

District Attorney Johnson, Commissioner Hearn, and Commissioner Horn thanked the following for their hard work and dedication that resulted in this indictment: Department of Investigation Inspector General Robert Gigante and Assistant Inspector General James Christo; DOI Investigators Robert Clarke, Jerome Cirrica and Rhonda Young; Department of Correction,

Chief of Department Carolyn Thomas, Assistant General Counsel Alexandra Fischer, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Investigation Division Richard White, Director, Investigation Division, Dennis Wall, Deputy Director, Investigation Division, Ruben Benitez, Captain Angel Camacho, Investigator Bruce Sutton, Investigator Luis Reyes, Investigator Michael Bardales, Investigator Chris Edgars, Deputy Warden Sybenia Collins, Intelligence Unit, Assistant District Attorney Thomas Leahy, Chief of the Rackets Bureau, Assistant District Attorney James Goward, Supervisor, Rackets Bureau, and Assistant District Attorney Maria Mostajo, Rackets Bureau.