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Former guard at Carswell medical center accused of sexual abuse of inmate

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FORT WORTH -- A former correctional officer at Federal Medical Center Carswell was indicted this week on a federal count of sexual abuse of a ward -- yet another case in which women have accused staff at the prison of a sexual offense.

Kraig D. Lavan of Granbury is accused in an indictment of engaging in a sexual act with an inmate. The woman was in "official detention" at the time, according to the indictment. The medical center, at Naval Air Station Fort Worth, provides specialized services to female inmates with medical and psychiatric illnesses.

Lavan, who does not have an attorney listed in federal records, previously worked at the Hood County Sheriff's Department for at least three years and 10 months, according to a 2009 federal bankruptcy filing. He could not be reached for comment.

A sexual act between a guard and inmate isn't considered consensual, even if force is not a factor. "Federal law states that consent is never a defense in staff sexual abuse cases and that any sexual relationship with an inmate is a crime," according to a 2009 report by the Justice Department inspector general.

The indictment says that the sexual abuse occurred around Nov. 2. Lavan worked at the facility from April 2010 until November 2011, when he resigned, Carswell spokesman Marcus Williams said.

Asked about safeguards for inmates, Williams said, "We do take our responsibility seriously for sexual assaults." However, he said he could not detail security measures, such as cameras, due to security concerns.

The inspector general report found that 58 inmates at Carswell had reported allegations of staff sexual abuse from fiscal 2001 through fiscal 2008. That was the fourth-most complaints among institutions managed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Dr. Roger Guthrie, who was a physician at the medical center for more than four years, said he knew of at least a dozen cases of sexual abuse of inmates. Guthrie was fired from the center, but the case was settled through arbitration.

"Carswell said these were all isolated incidents," he said of the abuse cases. "That's ridiculous."

He added that correctional officers and inmates are both at risk in such an environment.

"There's just too much exposure for one individual to have control and power over an individual" inmate, he said. "And an inmate can claim she was sexually abused and ... the correctional officer, he has nothing to defend himself with."

Bureau of Prisons spokesman Chris Burke said he didn't know any federal requirement that more than one guard supervise an inmate.

"Any time an allegation is made ... we have a duty and an obligation to investigate it," he said. "The result of the investigation and allegation is turned over to FBI and U.S. attorney for further investigation and possible prosecution."

In 2004, a former correctional officer at Carswell was sentenced to 12 1/2 years in prison and ordered to pay \$207,175 in restitution to a woman he was convicted of raping at the prison's work camp.

More recently, Vincent Bassie Inametti, a chaplain at Carswell from August 2000 through September 2007, pleaded guilty in 2007 to two counts of sexually abusing an adult ward. He was sentenced to four years in federal prison.

Tahira Khan Merritt, who represented one of the women in a civil case against Inametti's employer, the Fort Worth Roman Catholic Diocese, said that most women at Carswell are imprisoned for drug-related crimes.

"Carswell has a dismal record for protecting women, the female prisoners, from sexual assault," she said. "That's what I found when I was investigating the case. There are rapes there. [The inmates] are not given medical attention. It wasn't a very safe place."

A program manager for Carswell's sexual abuse prevention program told the inspector general that staff there cannot automatically transfer inmates who make an outcry because they may require special medical or mental-health treatment that only Carswell can provide.

"Instead of moving an alleged victim, the warden prefers to reassign the accused staff member to prevent contact with the victim," the 2009 report found.

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