



NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Media contact: Kevin Captain
Volusia County Community Information
386-822-5062

Corrections Director Mark Flowers served with notice of intent to dismiss

Volusia County Corrections Director Mark Flowers has been served with a notice of the county's intent to fire him after a seven-month investigation revealed that he created a hostile work environment through threats and attempts to coerce employees and also violated the rights of inmates.

Flowers was served with the notice of intent to dismiss Friday morning. The action came following an intensive investigation that included interviews with approximately two dozen corrections employees and a review of more than 15,000 text messages sent and received by Flowers. Many of the employees expressed feeling uncomfortable with things that Flowers had directed them to do and also voiced a general loss of respect and trust in his leadership.

Before the disciplinary decision is finalized, Flowers has until Monday afternoon to respond to the notice of intent to dismiss.

Multiple employees said that at Flowers' direction, inmates were sent to the disciplinary unit called 10A without due process and inappropriately denied communications and commissary privileges as well as basic hygiene items. Employees said that Flowers wouldn't give an explanation to staff or the inmates for his actions and often would tell inmates: "This is my house." On more than one occasion, Flowers reportedly ordered an inmate who had been placed in unit 10A to be given a crayon and paper as a means of communicating with his attorney.

Where the formal disciplinary process was followed, the rulings were in many cases ignored. For instance, the investigation revealed that one inmate who had been ordered by a jail hearing officer to spend 25 days in unit 10A was instead kept there for 182 days. According to the interviews, these actions and lack of explanation for why they were being disciplined agitated inmates and made the environment more dangerous for the corrections officers. Some of the employee complaints against Flowers date back to 2021.

"Based on the results of our internal investigation into the hostile work environment, which ultimately turned into an Internal Affairs investigation, we found instances of mismanagement as well as ongoing violations of VCDC policies by you," Flowers' boss, Public Protection Director Mark Swanson, wrote in the notice of intent to dismiss. "I concur that your ability to continue leading the Department of Corrections has been irreparably damaged by your behaviors."

The county's Human Resources (HR) Department launched the investigation on May 20 after a group of corrections employees came to HR to complain about the working conditions under Flowers, including being yelled at, disrespected and having their jobs threatened. In one example, Flowers reportedly ordered an inmate who was under a suicide watch to be moved to a dorm where there were many other inmates and just one officer. When the employee refused Flowers' order because the mental health team hadn't lifted the suicide watch, Flowers got angry and sent the employee home for the rest of the day. Employees also said that Flowers has a habit of quickly changing course on directives and orders.

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The Public Protection Department, which includes corrections, subsequently initiated a separate internal investigation after the employee complaints uncovered allegations that Flowers had directed the mistreatment of inmates. Both investigations substantiated several violations against Flowers.

"Information collected from staff and inmates indicates that Dr. Flowers continuously violated the policies of the Corrections Division and ordered staff that reported to him to also violate those policies, making staff uncomfortable in performing their duties and risking their safety in dealing with inmates who were not being treated in accordance with established practices," the HR investigation concluded. "It appears that Dr. Flowers has lost the trust of his command staff and many of the officers."

Flowers filed his own written complaint in August alleging that an internal affairs investigation had been mishandled. As a result of the allegation, the county has requested an independent review by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

"Any suggestion that the termination was retaliation or in any way related to Dr. Flowers filing the complaint is absolutely and unequivocally false," said County Manager George Recktenwald. "He was under investigation for three months before he ever filed the complaint. The reality is that the allegations that were substantiated during our investigation were so egregious that it was impossible for Dr. Flowers to continue in his job. His own actions and his mistreatment of his staff and inmates left us no choice."

Flowers was hired on May 17, 2014 and was promoted to corrections director on June 3, 2017. Prior to receiving the notice of intent to dismiss, Flowers had been on paid administrative leave since Aug. 15. Warden Steven Smith continues to serve as the acting corrections director.