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SOUTH CAROLINA

Sexual assault claim at juvenile justice facility leads to investigation, DJJ says

BY DAVID TRAVIS BLAND

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A look inside the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice as they discuss the ongoing changes that are taking place. BY MCCLATCHY



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COLUMBIA, SC

State police and the Department of Juvenile Justice are investigating an alleged sexual assault at a Columbia facility.

On Dec. 15, a fight broke out between female youths at the DJJ's Midlands Evaluation Center, according to department spokesperson Jarid Munsch. The center is off Broad River Road near St. Andrews Road and houses juvenile suspects from ages 11 to 17 while they undergo psychological and other assessments for court consideration.

The alleged sexual assaulted stemmed from the fight, Munsch said.

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“We take all criminal and administrative allegations very seriously, as the safety and security of our youth is Priority 1,” he said in a statement.

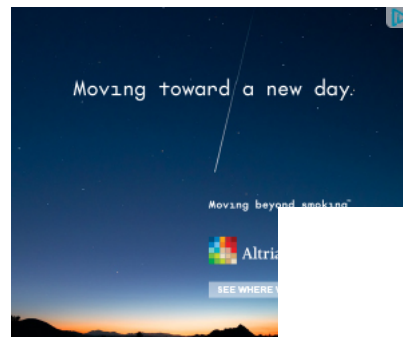
The statement is unclear on how many people were involved in the fight and alleged assault.

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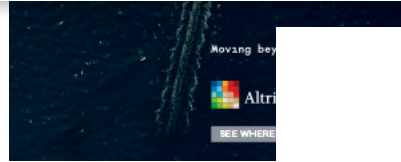
Because the investigation is ongoing, it “would be presumptuous to comment any further on the claims being made,” Munsch said.

DJJ Director Freddie Pough called the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division to investigate the sexual assault claim because of the division’s “expertise in handling cases of this nature.”

A SLED spokesperson offered few details other than to confirm agents were investigating.

The sexual assault investigation is an “active ongoing proceeding,” SLED spokesperson Tommy Crosby said, adding that no further details were being released at this time.

Internal inspectors with DJJ are looking into the administrative handling of events “to determine the necessary personnel disciplinary actions and or procedural improvements,” Munsch said.



In 2017, the State House’s Legislative Audit Council released [a scathing report](#) that said DJJ employed unqualified workers and didn’t comply with the Federal Prison Rape Elimination Act, a law passed in 2003 to help prevent sexual assault in prisons . The council recommended actions for the agency to take to function properly.

The department pushed back, saying it already enacted many of the changes the council asked for.



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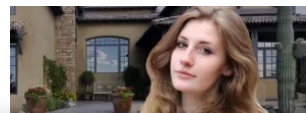
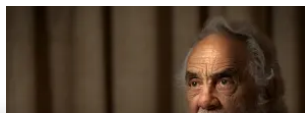
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David Travis Bland won the SC Press Association’s 2017 Judson Chapman Award for community journalism. He joined The State in 2018. He writes about crime, law enforcement and the criminal justice system. He graduated from the University of South Carolina in 2010.

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