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Vermont outlining steps in women's prison investigation

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The Associated Press

Published: 12/6/2019 10:19:37 PM

Modified: 12/6/2019 10:28:32 PM

MONTPELIER — A criminal investigation by the Vermont State Police has been in progress at the women's prison in South Burlington for two months, Human Services Secretary Michael Smith said Friday.

The criminal case was referred to the state police by the Department of Corrections, Smith said in a news release.

Smith also outlined steps his office will take after the weekly newspaper *Seven Days* described sexual misconduct and drug use involving inmates and guards at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility.

Smith said that "in the near future," his office would take a more active role in monitoring day-to-day operations at the jail. His office will set up a mechanism that will allow inmates and correctional officers to make complaints outside the Department of Corrections and will pursue mandatory sexual harassment prevention training for correctional officers and supervisors.

The agency also will evaluate recruitment and retention policies at Corrections, with a focus on developing and maintaining a more diverse workforce.




Smith said he planned to meet Friday with officials from the Attorney General's Office to discuss the next phase in the investigation without interfering with the ongoing criminal investigation. He also also reached out to the U.S. Attorney's Office to see if officials there wish to play a role in the investigation.

Seven Days reported Wednesday what it described as credible allegations of sexual harassment or assault by more than a dozen officers since Chittenden became a women's prison in 2011.

Republican Gov. Phil Scott on Thursday promised the state would investigate the case.

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