

ALERT

For all Component 1 members
August 8, 2009

Minister blames corrections staff for ID-switch escape

FRONT-LINE CORRECTIONS officers are going to be pretty upset by Public Safety Minister Van Dongen's comments blaming staff for a well-planned prisoner escape from the North Fraser Pretrial Centre in Port Coquitlam, says BCGEU Component 1 chairperson Dean Purdy.

In midweek, two remanded inmates at the facility swapped ID and court appearances, which allowed one to escape when a judge ordered him released for time served.

After the escaped inmate was apprehended Friday, Van Dongen promised an immediate investigation. And in the media he tried to shift the blame for "human error" on to front line workers.

But Purdy says the minister is jumping the gun blaming staff.

"The investigation hasn't even been conducted," says Purdy.

"Worse, he seems to be trying to shrug off any responsibility for the chronic problems of overcrowding and staffing shortages that we feel are the root cause of the incident.

"His government has been well aware of these for a number of years but they've done absolutely nothing to try and solve them."

"It's these circumstances that create an intense pressure cooker in which we work," says Purdy. "We're bound to have these kinds of incidents—especially in a remand centre like North Fraser with its high turnover.

Purdy is demanding that any investigation into the incident be broadly-based.

"We think that a proper review must look at all the factors including staffing shortages and overcrowding," he says.

Meanwhile, Purdy was also critical of big pay boosts of up to 35 per cent given to top government bureaucrats by the Campbell Liberals.

Victoria said the raises were necessary because the deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers were among the lowest paid in Canada and suffer from recruitment and retention problems in their respective occupations.

Purdy says B.C. correction officers and deputy sheriffs are also among the lowest paid peace officers in the country.

But Victoria has turned a deaf ear to union proposals for pay adjustments for our members to deal with the recruitment and retention crisis.



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