



Maryland Classified Employees Association, inc.

MCEA Press Release

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Involuntary Strip Searches Performed at the MCTC Institution Provoke MCEA Leaders to Fight Back Strong

MCEA (the oldest and largest independent labor organization serving Maryland public employees) will be filing grievances on behalf of its members against the Maryland Correctional Training Center (MCTC) located south of Hagerstown. On Tuesday morning, August 12, nine MCTC prison employees were involuntarily strip searched without adequate oversight by proper authority. This incident stemmed from previous findings of drugs in the prison.

The employees were strip searched as a result of alleged positive readings on an Ion Scan, a mechanism designed to test for drug residue. The searched employees were not allowed to see the results of their scan and then were immediately strip searched afterwards. There were no traces of drugs on the employees anywhere. Amongst the employee victims that were strip searched were one educator, one psychology associate, a few correctional officers and the rest medical staff and case managers. Due to this inexcusable event, the employees are now suffering from embarrassment, humiliation and devastation, for they felt the procedure was unethical and out of line.

A special Maryland Division of Correction Contraband Interdiction Team (CIT) had been brought in upon Warden D. Kenneth Horning's request. Commissioner Michael Stouffer attended a staff meeting at the MCTC on Thursday, August 14, two days after the illegal searches. He did apologize for the wrong-doing and acknowledged that the strip searches should not have taken place based on the scan readings. He also informed everyone the Warden wanted to be cautious to make sure the prison was drug-free and that procedural changes are now being made.

MCEA Area IV Governor Larry D. Kump is adamant about protecting MCEA members and in doing whatever he can to protect the fairness and rights of employees in the state prisons. He strongly urged every employee to file individual grievances. He commented, "The employees are the ones being treated like the criminals here, and this is outrageous. For all the dedicated work they do, these acts are simply disrespectful and intolerable. This also sends a wrong message to the inmates and staff and shows employees are not worthy of trust. How do you expect to help the inmates learn trust and prevent further criminal violence when these kinds of heinous acts are taking place?"

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Prison employees throughout the Division of Correction (DOC) have been increasingly harassed in their workplace duties. Recently, at MCI-H in Hagerstown, one employee was even forced to unwrap a stick of gum before being granted permission to enter into the prison. Prison employees remain extremely supportive of effective security and public safety and agree to the tried and true methods to monitor employees, such as metal detectors, reasonable “pat-down” searches, urine tests, etc. However, although the “Ion Scanner” procedure is touted by the DOC as “proven,” many experts doubt its accuracy. In this situation, the incompetent use of the ion scanner and the follow-up extreme degradation of prison employees were abusive to the point of criminality. Furthermore, the lack of effective management overseeing this procedure showed malfeasance and nonfeasance. This incident only underscores the reasons prison employees are being driven to seek other employment and why others are increasingly reluctant to even accept jobs in a prison workplace when its environment is made hostile by management.

Larry D. Kump also added, “This is just another example of why every state employee needs to be a member of MCEA. You can’t afford not to belong, and just being a good employee does not protect you from tragedies such as this. It always takes two for workplace justice: MCEA and You!”

MCEA Board Member Roy Gilleo remarked, “Who’s next? What else is this agency going to do to degrade its employees?”

MCEA’s Chapter 67 President (Public Safety Non-Custody Employees) Ward Clem is also very active in taking proactive measures to remedy this matter. He stated, “I’m not sure when valued employees became liabilities instead of assets. Clearly the people in power would rather be reactive and degrade their employees, rather than introduce proactive measures, such as no more contact visits between inmates and family members. It has become increasingly apparent that inmates have more rights than staff. This is clearly a problem that needs to be resolved at once.”

MCEA Labor Relations Specialist Ron Smith concluded, “I am doing everything I can to assist these MCEA members and what has been inappropriately subjected upon them. They are in the right hands!” At this time, MCEA Legal Counsel is also reviewing the circumstances and DOC rules to determine the possibility of criminal and civil claims. Additionally, MCEA has issued the Governor of Maryland a request to directly intervene into this matter.

With all these MCEA Leaders in action, justice is sure to be served, for MCEA leads the way for state employee workplace justice. MCEA fights for all members’ rights to make sure they are protected and heard. MCEA will go to great lengths to ensure that any injustice or unethical matter will never occur again, for their most important job is to protect their members.

MCEA would like to extend a special thanks to Delegates Christopher Shank, Andrew Serafini and LeRoy Myers for their continued advocacy on behalf of workplace justice. At a marathon private meeting on Wednesday, August 13, these delegates lent their compassionate cooperation to meet with the affected prison employees and MCEA Leaders to discuss their concerns and rights. They were extremely supportive of the distressed and angry employees and also promised to strongly protest on their behalf.

More information about MCEA and Chapter 10 (MCI/MCTC Correctional Employees), Chapter 54 (Maryland Correctional Teachers), Chapter 67 (Public Safety Non Custody Employees) and Chapter 88 (Roxbury Correctional Institution) are available at www.mcea.org. For additional information, please call Vanessa DiDomenico (MCEA Communications Coordinator) at 1-888-611-MCEA, Ext. 211.

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