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MDOC Busts Major Inmate-Led Smuggling Ring from Behind the Walls

JACKSON – For months, a state inmate has been paying several people, including a corrections officer, to smuggle cell phones, chargers, spice, tobacco, and other items into prisons, according to a Mississippi Department of Corrections’ investigation.

Four women, including the corrections officer and the relatives of inmates, have been arrested and a storage unit full of contraband seized.

“We have dismantled a significant criminal enterprise,” Commissioner Marshall Fisher said today. “This is another example of how inmates are involved in organized crime from behind the walls. I don’t like hearing we have staff involved because, once again, it takes the focus off all the honest, hardworking other employees who are grossly underpaid.”

Contraband was prepackaged and delivered to locations to be picked up by corrections officers or inmates, according to the investigation. In some cases, the suspects drove others to the prisons to throw contraband over the fence. Some of the contraband changed hands in Alabama.

The contraband was largely destined for South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI) in Leakesville, but packages also went to other prisons.

The amount of money involved and how long the ring operated have yet to be determined.

Arrested thus far are: Regina Mason, 43, of Hickory; Demetrice Taylor, 44, of Meridian; Rushia Keyes, 32, of Laurel; and Sherrice Richardson, 22, of Leroy, Ala., All have been charged with conspiracy to introduce contraband, and have been released on bond from the Greene County

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Jail. A conviction on the conspiracy charge carries up to five years, a maximum \$5,000 fine, or both.

Richardson was still in training at SMCI when she was arrested Jan. 25. The corrections officer trainee told investigators she received about \$700 from an inmate's relatives to smuggle in contraband. She was terminated immediately.

“The inmate leading this operation has not been charged, but he as well as two other inmates will face felony charges,” said Sean K. Smith, chief investigator for MDOC. Also, we expect to make more civilian arrests as a result of the details provided by the suspects.”

The probe by MDOC's Corrections Investigation Division started with information from a confidential informant. The location where the contraband was stashed was searched after MDOC investigators obtained a search warrant. Items seized include sticks and bags of spice in various sizes, bundles of tobacco, 126 cell phone chargers and four cell phone batteries, and an assortment of other items, such as spray paint, scissors, SIM Cards, and electric speaker wire.

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Media note: pictures are available upon request.