

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Feb. 14, 2018
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Two officers arrested at SMCI in first shakedown of 2018 under Operation Zero Tolerance

JACKSON – Two officers at South Mississippi Correctional Institution in Greene County have been arrested after they were caught with contraband during the first major shakedown of the year under Operation Zero Tolerance.

Jadajah Rawls, 21, a correctional officer trainee hired in November, and Diane Phillips, 64, a correctional officer since February 2014, were booked into the Greene County Jail on Tuesday under state law 47-5-193, which prohibits contraband in a correctional facility.

Officers seized a cellphone concealed on Rawls and \$750 cash and \$1,420 in Green dot numbers from Phillips on Tuesday morning.

“We are finding people who are trying to supplement their salaries by doing these types of illegal things,” Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said during an appearance before the Senate Judiciary B Committee meeting Tuesday afternoon to update lawmakers about the department. She mentioned the shakedown while responding to questions.

“But we have a zero tolerance because of it,” Hall said. “The end result is I am continuing to lose staff, and that makes my understaffing problem that much greater.”

SMCI officers were surprised when the shakedown in Area II included searching them as well as the inmates at the south Mississippi prison in Leakesville. With contraband continuing to be found in facilities, other than being thrown over the perimeter fences, it is getting into the hands of inmates from staff and visitors, Hall said.

Therefore, staff as well as inmates will be searched in the second phase of Operation Zero Tolerance, she said.

“It’s important that we weed out those officers who don’t belong among our hardworking, honest employees,” Hall said. “We will make the adjustments to do the best we can to carry out our public safety mission.”

In addition to the money found on Phillips, \$535 also was found hidden in a wall.

Other seized contraband items include 50 sharpened items, 27 Smart phones, 41 cellphone chargers, four flip phones, six cellphone batteries, three MP3 players, 20 sets of ear buds and Bluetooth devices, 14 packs of marijuana, 55 packages of spice, seven suspected packs of crystal methamphetamine, one suspected pack of cocaine, 11 packs of tobacco, numerous unidentified pills and assorted other items.

“One officer reportedly said during the shakedown at SMCI that she now feels safe for the first time in 16 years,” Hall said. “That is good to hear because these shakedowns are designed to do just that – to help staff and inmates be secure.”

Rawls and Phillips face termination. If convicted, each could serve from three to 15 years in prison, pay a \$25,000 fine, or do both.