



PRESS RELEASE

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**Eight Former SCDC Employees Plead Guilty to Federal Crimes
Associated with Accepting Bribes to Smuggle Contraband into SCDC
Facilities**

Columbia, South Carolina --- United States Attorney Sherri A. Lydon announced today that Jamal Early, Frank Pridgeon, Miguel Williams, Catherine Prosser, Holly Mitchem, Robert Hill, Ebonynisha Casby, and Sharon Johnson Breeland, all former employees of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC), have pleaded guilty in federal court to offenses associated with accepting bribes to smuggle contraband into SCDC facilities.

“Those who violate the public trust by taking bribes to smuggle dangerous contraband into our prisons endanger inmates, prison staff, and the general public,”

said U.S. Attorney Lydon. "The U.S. Attorney's Office and our partners at SCDC will not rest until we have rooted out the corruption in our prison system."

"When a correctional officer brings contraband into an institution, it breaks a public trust and makes the institution and our state unsafe for everyone," said Bryan Stirling, Director of the South Carolina Department of Corrections. "They deserve to spend time behind bars."

The specific guilty pleas are as follows:

- On September 19, 2019, Jamal Early pleaded guilty to Use of an Interstate Facility to Facilitate Bribery. Facts presented in court showed Early, a former correctional officer at Ridgeland Correctional Institution, accepted bribes to smuggle tobacco and A-PVP (a synthetic narcotic) into prison. He faces a maximum penalty of five years in federal prison.
- On September 18, 2019, Frank Pridgeon pleaded guilty to Honest Services Wire Fraud. Facts presented in court showed Pridgeon, a former correctional officer at Kershaw Correctional Institution, accepted bribes to smuggle cocaine, marijuana, tobacco, and cell phones into prison. Pridgeon faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison.
- On September 13, 2019, Miguel Williams pleaded guilty to Use of an Interstate Facility to Facilitate Bribery. Facts presented in court showed Williams, a former correctional officer at Perry Correctional Institution, accepted bribes to smuggle tobacco and liquor into prison. Williams faces a maximum penalty of five years in federal prison.
- On September 13, 2019, Catherine Prosser pleaded guilty to Possession with Intent to Distribute Marijuana. Facts presented in court showed Prosser, a former correctional officer at McCormick Correctional Institution, accepted bribes to smuggle marijuana into prison. Prosser faces a maximum penalty of five years in federal prison.
- On September 13, 2019, Holly Mitchem pleaded guilty to Use of an Interstate Facility to Facilitate Bribery. Facts presented in court showed Mitchem, a food service worker at Tyger River Correctional Institution, accepted bribes to smuggle tobacco and K2 into prison. Mitchem and faces a maximum penalty of five years in federal prison.
- On September 13, 2019, Robert Hill pleaded guilty to Use of an Interstate Facility to Facilitate Bribery. Facts presented in court showed Hill, a horticulture specialist at Tyger River Correctional Institution, accepted bribes

to smuggle marijuana, K2, tobacco, and cell phones into prison. Hill faces a maximum penalty of five years in federal prison.

- On September 10, 2019, Ebonynisha Casby pleaded guilty to Use of an Interstate Facility to Facilitate Bribery. Facts presented in court showed that Casby, a correctional officer at Lieber Correctional Institution, accepted bribes to smuggle a watch and jewelry into prison. Casby faces a maximum penalty of five years in federal prison.
- On August 6, 2019, Sharon Johnson Breeland pleaded guilty to Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine. Facts presented in court showed that Breeland, a correctional officer at Broad River Correctional Institution, accepted bribes to smuggle methamphetamine into prison. Breeland faces a maximum penalty of twenty years in federal prison.

These guilty pleas are the result of a partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the United States Attorney's Office, and SCDC to investigate the smuggling of contraband into prisons by staff at SCDC. The investigation has uncovered a number of SCDC employees who accepted bribes to smuggle into prison various contraband such as cell phones, narcotics, or tobacco. Previous recent prosecutions by the United States Attorney's Office of SCDC employees for these types of offenses have resulted in prison time for the offenders.

Assistant United States Attorney William Camden Lewis of the Columbia office is prosecuting the cases.

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