



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

July 12, 2012

**FORMER SHIPROCK DETENTION OFFICER PLEADS GUILTY
TO CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OF INMATE**

ALBUQUERQUE – Sylvester Bruce, 44, a former detention officer with the Navajo Nation’s Shiprock Detention Center (SDC) in Shiprock, N.M., pleaded guilty today in federal court on charges related to the sexual abuse of an inmate during the summer and fall of 2010. Specifically, Bruce pled guilty to one count of violating the civil rights of the victim when he touched her breasts against her will. Bruce also pled guilty to making material false statements to the FBI when he denied taking pictures of inmates inside the cells of the SDC.

According to court documents, while the victim was incarcerated at SDC, Bruce repeatedly placed his hands under the victim’s shirt and bra, and grabbed her breasts, knowing that she did not consent to his actions. Bruce did so in areas of the jail that did not have surveillance cameras. Bruce further admitted that he lied to the FBI when he denied taking pictures of inmates in their cells, acknowledging that he had, in fact, photographed two female inmates asleep on a bed in their cell.

"Sexual assaults by corrections officers on those they are charged with keeping safe gravely undermine the very foundation of our judicial system," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "The Justice Department will vigorously prosecute these crimes and work to vindicate the rights of the courageous victims who report them."

Under the terms of the plea agreement, Bruce will be sentenced to a term of imprisonment of twelve months and a day. Bruce also will not be able to serve in a law enforcement capacity again, and will submit to federal and state sex offender registration requirements. Bruce remains on conditions of release under pretrial supervision pending his sentencing hearing, which has yet to be scheduled.

"Our system of justice is clear and unequivocal - every law enforcement officer must follow the laws they are sworn to enforce. While the vast majority of officers perform their duties to protect the public with professionalism and integrity often under very dangerous conditions, there are an unscrupulous few who do not," said U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales. "Every person in lock-up, regardless of the charge or crime of conviction, is entitled to be safe

and certainly should never be victimized by those responsible for guarding them. I commend the victim in this case for having the courage to step forward and assert her right to be free of sexual abuse, and for trusting the Department of Justice to protect her.”

“The FBI, as the lead agency for enforcing federal civil rights laws, will continue to vigorously investigate and bring to justice corrections officers who betray the great trust placed in them when they abuse the individuals in their custody,” said Carol K.O. Lee, Special Agent in Charge of the Albuquerque Division of the FBI. “I am proud of the fine work done by the FBI Special Agents in this case, and would like to express my gratitude for the assistance of the U.S. Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, the U.S. Attorney's Office, and the Navajo Department of Criminal Investigations.”

This case was investigated by the Farmington Resident Agency of the Albuquerque Division of the FBI and the Shiprock Division of the Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety, and was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark T. Baker for the District of New Mexico and Fara Gold of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division.

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