



Virginia Department of Corrections

CHAD DOTSON, DIRECTOR

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VADOC Director Releases Statement on Red Onion State Prison

RICHMOND – Virginia Department of Corrections Director Chad Dotson today released the following statement on Red Onion State Prison:

“The Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) has, on numerous occasions, invited all legislators to visit Red Onion State Prison (or any other VADOC facility) to personally observe facility operations and conditions, and to speak with inmates and staff. The recent round of stories about Red Onion are nothing more than bad-faith efforts to try to score cheap political points by advocacy groups who pursue prison abolition and policies that would make Virginians less safe.

“I want to thank those legislators who have made the effort to visit Red Onion and encourage those who have not yet visited to do so at your earliest convenience. We have, in particular, sent personal invitations Tuesday to every member of the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus (VLBC) in response to their statement.

“In recent months, six inmates at Red Onion State Prison have burned themselves using improvised devices that were created by tampering with electrical outlets. To be clear, these inmates did not set themselves on fire or self-immolate, as some reports have ludicrously suggested. Some of the inmates were treated for burns at the Department’s secure medical facility at the VCU Medical Center and cleared to return to the facility, while others did not require outside medical treatment. All six inmates have been referred to mental health staff for treatment, and it should be noted that several of these inmates have a history of engaging in self-harm.

“Virginia needs secure facilities in which to house the Commonwealth’s most violent offenders, and Red Onion State Prison serves that purpose. Red Onion is accredited by the American Correctional Association (ACA) and is in compliance with all ACA standards. Further, VADOC takes seriously the mental health of our inmate population – Red Onion has the highest percentage of mental health staff at this security level, based on population size. Finally, the Department has zero tolerance for any form of abuse and investigates all such allegations.”

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