

North Carolina Corrections Officers Sentenced on Federal Civil Rights Charges

Washington, D.C. — June 9, 2008 — Former federal corrections officers Willie Powell, Christopher Conner, and Travis Ruffin were sentenced today in federal court in New Bern, N.C., for their roles in an assault on an inmate, the Justice Department announced. Powell was sentenced to 30 months of imprisonment to be followed by 3 years of post-release supervision and was ordered to pay \$3,701.63 in restitution; Connor was sentenced to 6 months of imprisonment to be followed by 2 years of post-release supervision and was ordered to pay \$3,701.63 in restitution; and Ruffin was sentenced to 2 years of probation and was ordered to pay a \$500 fine.

On March 12, 2008, a federal jury convicted Powell and another corrections officer co-defendant, Marquis Young, on each of the following counts: one count of depriving the civil rights of another while acting under color of law; one count of conspiracy; and two counts of false statements. The sentencing hearing for Marquis Young is scheduled to occur July 7, 2008. Conner had previously pleaded guilty to depriving the civil rights of another while acting under color of law, and Ruffin had pleaded guilty to making a false report following the beating. Connor and Ruffin both testified at the trial of Powell and Young.

The evidence at trial showed that on March 26, 2006, Powell, Connor and Young assaulted inmate Demarrieo Davis at the Rivers Correctional Facility in Winton, N.C., to punish Davis for an earlier verbal altercation. Davis sustained significant injuries as a result of the beating, including swelling to the head, blurred vision, intense pain, and multiple abrasions and lacerations. Shortly after the beating, Powell and Young conspired with Connor and Ruffin to submit false use-of-force reports to conceal the attack. Later, on May 24, 2006, Powell and Young also gave false statements to Department of Justice special agents in an attempt to hide the assault.

"The Justice Department vigorously prosecutes law enforcement officers who step outside the law and abuse the rights of others, as well as those who try to cover up those abuses," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Grace Chung Becker. "This unlawful behavior undermines the tireless efforts of the vast majority of law enforcement officers throughout our nation who perform their duties with honor and professionalism."

This case was investigated by Special Agents Lonnie Davis and Susan Howell from the Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General, and was prosecuted by John Richmond and Jared Fishman from the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

The Civil Rights Division is committed to the vigorous enforcement of every federal criminal civil rights statute, such as those laws that prohibit the willful use of excessive force or other acts of misconduct by law enforcement officials. In fiscal year 2007, the Criminal Section convicted the highest number of defendants in its history, surpassing the record previously set in fiscal year 2006. The Division has compiled a significant record on criminal civil rights law enforcement prosecutions. During the last seven years, the Criminal Section obtained convictions of 53 percent more defendants (391 v. 256) in law enforcement prosecutions than the previous seven years.