

Today, colder, clouds, then sun, high 29. Tonight, frigid, partly cloudy, low 14. Tomorrow, remaining quite cold, partly sunny, breezy, high 23. Weather map, Page B16.

## Lawsuits Suggest Pattern of Rikers Guards Looking Other Way

By BENJAMIN WEISER

When two guards were accused last month of encouraging inmates in one Rikers Island jail to police themselves, leading to beatings and in one case the killing of an inmate, correction officials called the situation “an aberration” and said they had not seen such a case in other units involving other guards.

But New York City has been sued in recent years by more than a half-dozen Rikers inmates claiming to have been the victims of beatings by prisoners while guards looked the other way, or worse, ordered the attacks. The city settled one case for \$500,000, and another for just under \$100,000. A new lawsuit was filed Tuesday.

And last year, Bronx prosecutors charged that a Rikers guard ordered six inmates to beat two prisoners; one victim was hospitalized with a collapsed lung. The guard has pleaded not guilty.

None of the cases include allegations on the scale of those announced last month by officials in the Bronx district attorney’s office, who said that the two Rikers guards had recruited inmates over three months last year to serve as “managers, foot soldiers and enforcers” to maintain order in a housing unit for adolescent men. The guards are also accused of training the inmates in how to restrain and assault their

“These are institutions where inmate activity is monitored 24 hours a day, and it’s astonishing that this kind of behavior should go on for so long unchecked,” said Jonathan Chasan, a lawyer for the Legal Aid Society’s prisoners’ rights project, which is co-counsel in the new suit that was filed on Tuesday.

The city’s correction commissioner, Martin F. Horn, said in an interview that his agency was aware of the earlier cases and that he believed that steps had been taken to increase security and make it easier for the authorities to identify corrupt guards and inmates.

“I think it would be a mistake to say that the city was asleep at the switch because I don’t think we were,” Mr. Horn said.

“One could question whether the steps that we took were sufficiently effective. Certainly we are looking back, and we are concerned, and we want to learn from this and step up our efforts and review what we’ve done and say, ‘Was it sufficient? Was it adequate? Was it effective?’”

In the case last month, the Bronx district attorney announced charges against three Rikers correction officers and a dozen inmates in connection with what they said was a criminal extortion ring that included assaults, larceny and other crimes that occurred between July and



PATRICK ANDRADE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Robert T. Johnson, Bronx district attorney, left, and Correction Commissioner Martin F. Horn at a news conference last month.

neither was charged with participating in the death of Mr. Robinson. Both men have pleaded not guilty. A third officer was also charged with conspiracy.

There have been at least seven lawsuits filed in Federal District Court in Manhattan accusing guards of complicity or acquiescence.

**A correction chief says the city wasn't asleep at the switch.**

Another lawyer, Julia P. Khan, whose firm has two pending suits involving Rikers assaults, in 2006 and 2007, said, “The city’s been on notice because these lawsuits have been pending for quite some time, and the fact patterns are so similar.”

In one case, a guard unlocked the cell of an inmate named Camillo Douglas, allowing three prisoners who were known members of the Bloods gang to enter, the suit said. They struck Mr. Douglas repeatedly with brooms and metal shanks; they also attacked another inmate who rushed to his aid, the suit said.

Norman Seabrook, president of the union representing about 8,000 correction officers, declined to comment on the suits, except to say he believes that the officers are innocent of wrongdoing. He said that to the extent problems exist, “the managers in this agency are not properly supervising and training officers.”

The latest suit describes an assault in March 2007 by a prisoner that the authorities say was used by guards as an enforcer in the Rikers jail for adolescent males, the Robert N. Davoren center. The inmate, Tyreek Shuford, was beaten and left with his head bleeding and then was not allowed to visit the infirmary for two days, the suit said.

Jonathan S. Abady, another of Mr. Shuford’s lawyers, said “the case suggested there was ‘an in-fernal culture of normalcy’