

NEWS

Corrections contractor charged with sexual misconduct with inmates, false rape accusation

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A state Department of Corrections contractor hired to monitor inmates after their release from prison and drive them to and from work is accused of using her position to pressure them into sex.

At first Taressa Jolene Browning, 31, denied ever having sex with any inmates, but when told Kitsap County sheriff's deputies were going to search her car for evidence of sexual activity, Browning changed her story and accused the man of raping her, according to court documents.

Browning was hired on Dec. 11 to be a facility monitor by Progress House, a company the state uses to operate its Peninsula Work Release facility on Lloyd Parkway in Port Orchard. Browning allegedly started committing the crimes Jan. 4.

Deputies were called Jan. 8 by a Corrections supervisor after one inmate reported he had sex with Browning and another reported she had propositioned him, causing him to worry if he didn't have sex with her Browning would retaliate against him. Browning was placed on leave.

A Corrections spokeswoman said Progress House confirmed Browning cannot go to any facilities pending the outcome of the criminal and administrative investigations.

The man who reported having sex with Browning in her car told detectives he did not want to, but he told detectives he was afraid she would retaliate against him and have him sent back to prison.

Further, after Browning was placed on leave, she continued to go to the man's work at a fast-food restaurant — bringing her daughters with her once — and disrupted business until she was banned from the store, according to court documents. The general manager of the store

said the man was a “great employee” and would hide in the back of the restaurant until Browning left.

A female inmate on work release who also received rides from Browning told detectives that Browning had told her she had sex with the man. Further, the woman said Browning asked her to keep an eye on the man, saying “He’s mine.”

While being interviewed by detectives, at first Browning “adamantly denied” having sex with the inmate and said he was spreading lies about her. When detectives told Browning they were going to impound her car to search for evidence of sexual activity, “Taressa then claimed (the inmate) had raped her,” according to court documents.

Browning said she was embarrassed and “didn't think anyone would believe her” and didn't want her family to know, according to court documents.

Detectives found suspected evidence and sent it to the Washington State Patrol Crime Lab for analysis.

Prosecutors added a charge of malicious prosecution, a felony, to the crimes Browning faces for saying the inmate raped her.

Browning was also charged Tuesday in Kitsap County Superior Court with first-degree custodial sexual misconduct, attempted first-degree custodial sexual misconduct and second-degree extortion. A warrant was issued Wednesday for her arrest. She did not immediately respond to a voicemail left on her phone by the Kitsap Sun.

“The Department of Corrections has a zero-tolerance policy for sexual misconduct per the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act,” Corrections Communications Director Janelle Guthrie said in a statement. “Our policies regarding sexual misconduct apply to all individuals, whether incarcerated in a prison or in a work-release facility or on community supervision as well as employees, contractors and volunteers.”

In 2015 another woman who worked for Peninsula Work Release was charged in Kitsap County Superior Court with solicitation of first-degree murder after being accused of asking facility inmates in 2008 to kill her husband. Heidi Lorraine Smith admitted to talking about killing her husband with one of the men but said she was joking. Prosecutors dropped the charges after Smith's attorney argued that the statute of limitations had run out.