

The Austin American-Statesman–September 9, 1999

Staff Writer– Claire Osborn

SUIT: PRISON FIRM IGNORED LOCKHART SEX ABUSE CLAIM

A guard at a Lockhart prison operated by Wackenhut Corrections Corp. sexually assaulted a female inmate for four months, but the company took no action against him, according to a federal lawsuit.

Officials are investigating allegations of sex between guards and inmates at Travis County's state jail, which Wackenhut also operates. The lawsuit involving the Lockhart state jail, a minimum-security prison that the state pays Wackenhut to run, was filed in July 1998 against the corrections company and former guard Charles Brookshire.

The case is pending in U.S. District Court in Austin. Brookshire, who was a lieutenant at the prison, is accused of sexually assaulting the woman from May 1996 to that August, according to the lawsuit.

"I can hardly imagine a prison rape case being worse," said **Don Tittle**, the Dallas lawyer representing the woman. "Brookshire's threats to her were that if she ever told anyone, he would contact her parole board and make certain she was not paroled," **Tittle** said.

The woman reported the alleged assaults after she was released from the jail, he said. The state prison system's Internal Affairs Division investigated and found that the sex was not consensual, according to the lawsuit.

Wackenhut officials didn't fire Brookshire even after the investigation, the lawsuit alleges. He resigned only after he was implicated in a separate sexual harassment incident, according to the lawsuit. Brookshire could not be reached for comment

Officials with Wackenhut and the prison declined to comment. The results of the state investigation were referred to Herb Hancock, one of a group of special prosecutors who are paid by the state to investigate criminal cases in Texas prisons. Hancock said he initially decided not to present the case to a grand jury. "I didn't feel like we could prove that the public official had sex and coercion was involved," he said.

Hancock said, however, that he now has decided to take the case to the grand jury because he has received additional information involving further allegations of wrongdoing at the Lockhart prison. He declined to provide details.