

Jun 15, 2022 coffeordie.com

A crackdown on corruption at US Penitentiary Leavenworth has netted sentences for three correctional officers and a nurse.

Before they were caught and fired, prison guards Janna Grier, 36, Jacqueline Sifuentes, 26, and Cheyonte Harris, 29, plus nurse Jeane Arnette, 61, took bribes to smuggle contraband into the Kansas penitentiary, including cell phones, tobacco, lighters, and sometimes narcotics, often getting paid by prisoners using Cash App, a money transfer program. Nicknamed "Wonder Woman" by her family, Sifuentes is going behind bars for 14 months. Grier will spend two years in a penitentiary. Honorably discharged from the Kansas Army National Guard, Harris received a 20-month prison sentence. Arnette drew a six-month punishment. Their criminal defense attorneys did not return Coffee or Die Magazine messages seeking comment. The sentences also shine a light on problems that plagued the troubled detention facility and its adjacent minimum-security prison camp, which are located roughly 4 miles north of the military's infamous US Disciplinary Barracks inside the US Army's Fort Leavenworth. US Penitentiary Leavenworth is a federal prison run by a private company, CoreCivic. In a sentencing memorandum penned by Eric Vernon, the attorney for Sifuentes, the facility was portrayed as reeling from staffing woes, its correctional officers often saddled with poor training. Sifuentes was recruited out of Texas to shore up the chronic staffing shortfall, Vernon wrote, given only a day's training on how to subdue violent inmates, and then turned out to guard the convicts. She had been promised a job monitoring surveillance cameras, without any direct contact with the prison population, Vernon added. In exchange for \$800 in bribes in 2020, Sifuentes smuggled into the prison four packages stuffed with methamphetamine, tobacco, and marijuana, all wrapped in duct tape and left in a staff restroom for an inmate to retrieve. Gary Stone, the attorney for Harris, wrote in his memorandum that contraband, including K2 - a synthetic cannabinoid also called "spice" - flowed through the prison unfettered. "Inmates were in possession of prohibited items and sold and traded things as currency on an open market," Stone wrote. "Her supervisors ignored the conduct and most of the time, writing a report or taking action was highly unusual." Stone wrote that one inmate became "kind of a friend" - Harris denied an intimate relationship - who spoke with her more than 100 times on the jail phone. The prisoner paid her roughly \$8,565 to smuggle into the prison tobacco and the weight loss supplement Hydroxycut, although she initially denied that when interrogated by the FBI. Arnette, the nurse, worked 13 months at Leavenworth between 2020 and 2021, receiving and sending out payments prisoners used to transact business inside the penitentiary. She also smuggled into the facility tobacco, cell phones, uninspected mail, and food. Grier admitted to authorities that she smuggled tobacco and lighters into the prison, but she didn't realize the contraband tucked into her bra included synthetic marijuana. Caught in the act of bringing in contraband in August of 2020, she was fired but persisted in trying to smuggle smokes and cell phones into the facility by recruiting unnamed staffers to do the dirty work. One of them was an FBI informant. In his sentencing memorandum, Grier's attorney, Thomas R. Telthorst, urged the judge to give her probation, not jail time. She didn't have a criminal record before her arrest, he argued, and would no longer have access to the inmate who convinced her to smuggle contraband, so she wouldn't be tempted to commit new crimes. But prosecutors blamed Grier's downfall on her own decisions to consistently violate her duty to keep inmates and staff at Leavenworth safe. They urged US District Judge Daniel D. Crabtree to put her behind bars for at least two years. "Through her conduct, Grier willingly exposed the inmates and staff at Leavenworth, as well as the broader community, to the very dangers she was supposed to safeguard against, and she actively undermined the prison environment, which is crucial to our system of justice," wrote Rebecca M. Schuman and Jacob R. Steiner, trial attorneys assigned to the Criminal Division of the US Department of Justice's Public Integrity Section. "A meaningful term of incarceration is required to promote respect for our anti-corruption laws and to restore faith in our nation's law enforcement institutions." The judge agreed with the prosecutors.