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DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
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Michigan Department of Corrections Investigative Review of the February 2, 2014 Escape from the Ionia Correctional Facility March 6, 2014

INFORMATION:

Michael David Elliot, #236879, escaped from the Ionia Correctional Facility (ICF) on Sunday, February 2, 2014, at approximately 1853 hours. Elliot is serving life sentences for four counts of Murder 1st degree and other dangerous felonies. Elliot was accounted for at 1325 hours and was not accounted for again until the 2100 hour formal count. During the 2100 hour count, staff was unable to locate Elliot. It was discovered he had escaped through the sally port by unraveling the wire fencing on both sally port gates. The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) Internal Affairs Division was assigned to review the escape, including the prisoner's activities between 1325 hours when he was accounted for and the time of his escape at 1853 hours.

METHOD OF ESCAPE:

Escape Scenario: A review of video footage determined that Elliot was dressed in white clothing which he had fabricated out of white thermal underwear that he had in his possession. Reviewing the video recording after the escape, Elliot was first observed crawling on his belly through the snow. He crawled across the Level II yard to a fence separating the Level II yard and the Michigan State Industries (MSI) Factory building. There was a gap between the bottom of the fence and the ground. Sweeping away snow and ice, Elliot wiggled under the fence. He then crawled on his belly across to the MSI building, staying below the microwave sensors (3 feet high) to the far side of the MSI building. Once he arrived at the back of the MSI building, he stood and ran the length of the building.

Elliot again crawled toward the internal sally port gate and lay in the snow as he unraveled the fencing. This action was on the bottom level of the sally port gate. It took Elliot about a half an hour to make a hole large enough in the fence to crawl through. He then crawled into the pit within the sally port and took a short break. After the break, Elliot crawled to the outer sally port gate. Again he unraveled the fencing, making a hole large enough to crawl out. Once outside of the outer sally port gate, Elliot again stayed low until he was away from the facility. Just before leaving the video's viewing, Elliot was observed standing up and walking north into a wooded area behind ICF.

Elliot walked out to Lincoln Road, then went east on Lincoln eventually to M-21. Once there, Elliot crossed over the highway and took a side street into Ionia, MI. While making his way to Ionia, Elliot broke into a garage. He stole a hammer, a box cutter and a roll of duct tape from this garage. In town, the prisoner approached a female driving a red Jeep Liberty. Elliot took the female hostage and drove the stolen Jeep to Elkhart, Indiana. They stopped for gas where he allowed the female victim to use the bathroom. After entering the bathroom, she locked herself in the bathroom and

called 911. Elliot then left her at the gas station and fled the area in the Jeep. The incident at the gas station occurred at 2350 hours. There is surveillance video of Elliot at the gas station, and the video was provided to police. A BOL (Be On the Lookout) was put out for the vehicle. The vehicle was located during the afternoon hours of February 3, abandoned in Shipshewana, IN. Local police agencies began a search of the area near the abandoned vehicle, but were unable to locate Elliot.

There was a considerable amount of activity going on at ICF while Elliot was making his way across the yard and working on the sally port gates. The staff at ICF was not monitoring the sally port area as they were watching monitors for the big yard. There were several prisoners milling around the yard, and mass movement was occurring. The Alert Response Vehicle (ARV) drove by the sally port on two occasions while Elliot was working on the fence. Elliott was dressed in white, blending into the snow. When the ARV approached, Elliot concealed himself in the snow. Once staff became aware of the escape, ICF emergency escape procedures were immediately implemented and the siren sounded at 2142 hours.

MICHIGAN STATE POLICE TASK FORCE/INVESTIGATIVE EFFORTS:

A task force was assembled, comprised of the Michigan State Police (MSP), Ionia Department of Public Safety, MDOC Absconder Recover Units (ARU), MDOC Emergency Response Teams (ERT) and several other local law enforcement agencies. MSP was the lead investigative agency. The MDOC's ARU and the MSP fugitive teams actively investigated leads in Saginaw, Brighton, and Lansing, MI. These were areas where Elliot was known to have family and contacts. Elliot also has a sister in Nashville, Tennessee. The US Marshal Service made several notifications out of state as did the MSP task force. All known locations, including the sister's residence and work locations in Nashville, were contacted. Some of the locations were put under surveillance by law enforcement agencies.

Inspectors and staff from ICF reviewed Elliott's file, including known family, contacts, telephone numbers and JPay correspondence. All leads were provided to the MSP task force. A command center and tip line was established at the Ionia County Central Dispatch in Ionia, MI. The tip line was staffed around the clock with all investigative leads being forwarded to the appropriate jurisdictions. The Ionia County Prosecutor agreed to authorize escape, carjacking and kidnapping charges for Elliot.

Elliot was arrested in LaPorte County, Indiana upon being spotted in a stolen vehicle by patrol officers, roughly 24 hours after his escape. Elliot led the officers on a short pursuit, which ended after officers deployed stop sticks and Elliot was arrested. Elliot was positively identified as the escapee and admitted to police that he escaped from a Michigan prison. Elliot was lodged in the LaPorte County Jail and is awaiting extradition back to Michigan.

FACILITY SECURITY REVIEW:

Following is a detailed list of investigative areas which were reviewed:

Prisoner Classification: Elliot was classified as a True Level II and an Actual Level II. A post-incident review determined he was properly housed at a Level II correctional facility.

Count Procedures: Count procedures were reviewed. Elliot was accounted for by housing unit staff on the count sheets at 1325 hours. Elliott was in the housing unit until being released for chow at 1609 hours. Elliot's activities after 1609 hours are detailed later in the report. Informal counts were not performed during the afternoon shift. Informal counts are required by ICF post orders and operating procedures, but they were not done.

Video: All available video of Elliot's escape was reviewed. Elliot is first seen on camera at approximately 1755 hours crawling through the snow in the area of the MSI building. Elliot then crawled under the interior fence to the back of the MSI building. He then went behind the MSI building, where camera coverage does not exist. He is then observed on the video as he came out from behind the MSI building. He crawled down an incline, past the microwave zones to the inside sally port gate. The video recorded Elliot working on the sally port gate for approximately a half an hour. He then entered the pit inside the sally port taking a short break. Elliot is then observed crawling to the outside sally port gate. He worked on the fence until he was able to make a hole in that fence. Elliot crawls through the hole on the outside sally port gate and escapes. He stayed low until he was away from the facility.

Control Center: Control Center activities, video officer monitoring activities and housing unit activities between 1300 and 1900 hours were reviewed to determine their activities during the escape. Copies of housing unit log books, control center log books, post orders, and operating procedures were reviewed. The review produced the following sequence of events: At 1400 hours, Control Center was staffed with two officers (Corrections Officers Demps and Gradisher) and Lt. Shundra Cheeks. At 1440 hours, the inside and outside zone checks were completed by CO Gradisher. The microwave zone report indicated at 1449 hours that the Zone 300 alarm was activated. The Zone 300 alarm was acknowledged but was not secured until 2024 hours. The Zone 207 was activated and acknowledged at 1450 hours, but was not secured until 2024 hours. The Zone 300 alarm system protected the inside of the sally port. The Zone 207 alarm system covered the outside sally port. The fact that the zones were not secured or re-set was determined to have been a critical error on the part of the control center monitor room officer. There are three steps needed to do the zone check. First, the officer at the fence activates the zone. An audio and visual alarm is activated. The monitor room officer, via radio, acknowledges the activation. The monitor room officer clicks a button on the computer/monitor screen which lights up a solid red line on the bottom of the screen. This line stays red until the zone is secured. Once secure, the light turns green. To turn the light green, i.e. securing the zone, a second click of the computer mouse secures or re-sets the zone. A green light will remain on the screen until activated again. Doing this test confirms the alarm system is re-set and active. This last step did not get accomplished for zones 300 and 207. Failure to re-set the zones played a major role in the escape.

The two zones were re-set or secured at 2024 hours by Lt. Cheeks who happened to enter the monitor room and observed that two zones (207 and 300) were showing red or not secured. Lt. Cheeks was alone in the control center at this time. Lt. Cheeks sent Officers Demps and Gradisher up to the break room to clean up after a pot luck dinner. Lt. Cheeks did not inform anyone that the zones were unsecured, nor did Lt. Cheeks dispatch anyone to the area to check zones 300 and 207. Lt. Cheeks never informed Officer Gradisher that the zones were unsecured. Lt. Cheeks left work at 2100 hours as her shift was up; she was relieved by Acting Lt. Barber. The prisoner was unaccounted for at 2115 hours and was found to have escaped shortly after that time. Emergency

lockdown procedures were immediately put in place and the escape procedures were implemented by ICF staff.

The siren was sounded at 2142 hours and Central Dispatch was notified of the escape. Local area police agencies were notified of the escape. The ERT was activated at 2147 hours and responded to ICF, deploying into the area surrounding the facility. The escapee was not located and a few hours later, information was received that he was out of state.

Perimeter or Alert Response Vehicle (ARV): The ARV activities were reviewed from 1400 through 2140 hours. A log of ARV rounds was prepared and showed that the ARV passed by the sally port area at least two times, and may have been as many as three to four times, while Elliot was making his way toward the sally port and while he was working on the sally port gates. The ARV passed by the sally port gates approximately 20 feet from the outside gate. The ARV officer did not observe anything out of the ordinary or observe Elliot while making the rounds. Also, the ARV officer did not see the hole in the fencing from the perimeter road. Additional ARV rounds were made after it was determined the prisoner had escaped.

Alarms: Microwave zones and fence alarms were reviewed for the sally port sensor systems. There were no actual alarms activated from the two zones (207 and 300) which cover the sally port area. Zone 300 covers the area inside of the sally port gate, with zone 207 covering the area just outside of the sally port gate and the area just outside the facility. The zones did not activate while Elliot was traversing their coverage areas. This was due to the fact the zones were found to have been shut off by the control center monitor room officer as was previously noted.

When the zones were tested near the beginning of the second shift, they were not re-set. The post orders and operating procedures for the monitor room were reviewed. If the zones had been reset, zone 300 would have detected the prisoner's presence in front of the inside sally port gate. A test was performed verifying the system's ability to detect movement by Internal Affairs Investigators and staff from ICF. The test confirmed that when the zones are active, a staff member following the same path of the prisoner would have his movement detected by the microwave zone. The test for zone 207 did determine that that microwave sensor is misaligned and emitting its sensor beam too high. The prisoner may have defeated this zone during the escape if it was active. Again, it was tested using the path of the prisoner. The staff member was able to crawl under the microwave sensor for zone 207 undetected. This was also found to be the case with zone 301, which is situated at the back side of the MSI building. This microwave sensor was also found to be misaligned and was pointing too high. Zone 301 was armed and active during the prisoner's escape. The prisoner defeated this sensor by crawling underneath the microwave beam.

E-flex: The e-flex zone which is on the internal chain link fence located between the Level II yard and the MSI building has been inactive for several years. This e-flex was not activated after the shock fencing was installed on the outer fences at ICF. Had this e-flex system been operational, it may have activated when the prisoner first crawled underneath this fence. The prisoner advised he got caught on the fencing at the bottom of this fence as he tried to crawl underneath it. This motion should have activated the zone fence alarm, had it been operational. This should be repaired and re-armed. This additional security level may prevent future escape attempts through this area and may have prevented this escape.

Alarm Report: Regional Maintenance pulled a detailed alarm report for this date as well as for several other dates at ICF. It was determined that there were numerous dates where the alarms were tested and acknowledged; however, they were not re-set or secured for several hours at a time. Administrators at ICF advised that this is sometimes done during the day shift between 0700 hours and 1500 hours when the sally port is active with frequent traffic. However, the sally port is also staffed and an officer monitors traffic in and out of the sally port. There were other time periods where this occurred, including on the same day of the escape. Zones 300 and 207 were tested at 0849 hours, were acknowledged immediately, but were not secured until 1445 hours. Again, this practice is identified as a major factor in the incident.

Staff: Staff activities were reviewed for the areas which Elliot was known to have been in and traveled thorough during his escape process. Evidence indicated the housing unit officers were present in both A and B wings during the afternoon hours the day of the escape. Elliot indicated Officer Chelilim was very active, shaking down cubes and prisoners. Elliot further indicated the yard officer was very active and attentive. Elliot stated that while he was in the yard awaiting his opportunity to escape behind the housing unit, the yard officer was very attentive and active in observing prisoner movement and shaking down prisoners as they traversed the area. It appears there was only one officer in the yard for this large area. Staffing sheets indicate a roving officer was on duty and assigned to the Level II housing unit.

Sally Port Operations: The sally port was not staffed during the time of the escape, and is only staffed from 0700 to 1500 hours, Monday through Friday. During the hours it is not staffed, an officer is only sent to the sally port if there is traffic. This has been the practice since the facility opened in 1987.

Towers: The gun towers were not staffed. Enhanced video surveillance, shock fences, e-flex zones and microwave zones were put in place in lieu of staffing the gun towers.

Tool Inventory: A critical tool inventory was conducted of all tools at ICF due to the fact that Elliot was alleged to be in possession of a box cutter and a hammer. All critical tools were accounted for. The prisoner got a box cutter and a hammer from a garage he entered after he escaped.

Television Locations: It was determined the only television available to staff was in the break room in the administration building where officers take their breaks and lunches. There are televisions in the day rooms in the housing units. Staff, by MDOC policy, is not allowed to bring personal mobile devices into the prison.

At this time, there is no evidence that staff's attention was diverted due to the Super Bowl. There are no other televisions available in the facility which staff could be watching and there are no televisions in or anywhere near the control center.

INTERVIEW OF MICHAEL ELLIOT:

On Saturday, February 8, 2014, ICF escapee Michael Elliot was interviewed at the LaPorte County Sheriff's Department, LaPorte, Indiana by MDOC Internal Affairs investigators. Elliot stated that about two years ago another prisoner pointed out the fact that the sally port was a weak spot in the facility security and that he believed an escape may be possible through this area. About four

months ago, Elliot began to formulate an escape plan and started watching staff activities around the sally port and fences. Elliot began to think seriously about an escape attempt recently due to the fact the snow started to pile up and he believed the snow could be used as cover. Elliot claims he had no assistance and investigators could find no evidence that he had any type of inside assistance from any prisoners or any assistance from any staff members. His escape plan was done all on his own. He wanted to escape because he was serving four natural life sentences.

Elliot decided to attempt the escape on Super Bowl Sunday because he thought the staff may be distracted by the game. On that day, he did not go to chow at 1609 hours when his unit was released, and instead, stayed in his unit, getting dressed in his heavy clothing. He put his civilian clothing on under some white thermal underwear he had. He then placed a larger set of state blues over the top of everything and waited for prisoners to start returning from chow. After prisoners started coming back, he went into the yard. He was watching the yard officer to see if he would get an opportunity to go behind the housing unit and to the fence area where he had previously noticed a gap under the fencing. Elliot stated that the yard officer was very active, but he did finally see an opportunity when the officer turned his back. He then went behind the housing unit and hid. He discarded his state blues which put the all-white clothing outward including a white mask and hat which he had fabricated out of thermal underwear material. He had white shoes on, so he was dressed entirely in white.

Elliot then made his way to the fence between the housing unit and the MSI factory and started clearing snow from under the fence. The snow was frozen, so he used a hook he had taken out of his locker to dig out the snow. He tried to crawl under the fence, but got caught on the fence. He continued to dig and eventually got under the fence. This took him some time. Prisoner Elliot thought it took 15 minutes or so. He then made his way across the yard, again watching the yard officer to make sure he was not observing the area where Elliot was. He advised at one point he had to lay motionless in the snow as the prisoner traffic slowed down and he was afraid the yard officer would see him. As prisoner traffic picked back up, he continued to move toward the MSI building. Once he got behind the building, he advised he knew that the cameras would not see him so he ran across the back of the building.

Elliot said his only fear of being detected was from the yard officer seeing him or his being observed on the cameras. Elliot had no knowledge of the microwave zones and whether they were operational or not. Elliot claimed his only fears were that the cameras would detect him or the perimeter vehicle officer would see him.

Elliot used the terrain (sloping ground) to shield himself from being detected by the yard officer, and crawled from the fence around the MSI building and then to the sally port gates. He stayed in the snow as much as possible and used the snow to hide himself. He arrived at the inside sally port gate and said he took a pair of hobby craft scissors that he had purchased and used those to bend the bottom hooks of the chain link fencing. Once he got those loose, he took his belt buckle and hooked the buckle onto the fencing and pulled it apart strand by strand. As he pulled more of the chain linking apart, he was able to make a hole in the fencing big enough to crawl through. He then went down into the pit in the sally port and rested. He next moved to the outside sally port gate and repeated his efforts to pull the fence apart. He made a hole in the outside gate, crawled through it, and was able to get out and went toward the wooded area behind the facility. Elliot stated the ARV came by him a few times and every time he heard it coming, he would stop and lay still so as not to

be detected. He crawled most of the time and thought he just got lucky with the cameras when he was not detected.

Elliot was asked what staff was doing during the time he prepared to leave and as he left. He stated that Officer Chelilim was active in the housing unit checking the unit and shaking down prisoners. He stated the officer in the yard was very observant that day, and he was not even sure he was going to get an opportunity to make his attempt. He did finally get his chance when the officer turned his back and Elliot ran behind the housing unit. The items he had in his possession from inside the facility were items he was allowed to have, such as the hobby craft scissors and his belt, which were used in the escape. The hook he used to dig out the snow was removed from his locker in his housing unit cubicle.

After he was out, he made his way to a road behind the facility. He then was looking for a car or something to help him get away. He came to a house where the garage door was open and a car was inside. He went into the garage and took a hammer, a box cutter, and a roll of duct tape. He was going to use the hammer to break a window if he needed to and the box cutter and the duct tape were to subdue someone if he had to. He stated he did not want to hurt anyone, but just wanted to get away. He made his way into town and observed a lady sitting in her car. He approached her and told her he had just escaped from prison and he needed a ride, showing her the box cutter, indicating he would use it if need be. He got in the car and had her drive south to Indiana, where they stopped to get gas. The lady asked to use the bathroom, and Elliot took the keys so she could not leave. Elliot put gas in the vehicle and paid for it, then went to the bathroom and told the lady it was time to go. Upon finding that she had locked herself in the bathroom, he left the gas station as he was afraid the police were coming. He drove to Shipshewana where he left the car. He then walked for a while stating whenever he would see a car he would hide in the ditch.

Elliot had not taken any tools from the prison and had a hook from his locker. He had scissors he had gotten from hobby craft. He got a box cutter and hammer from the garage on the first road he came to behind the prison. He found clothes in the back of the lady's car and put them on. Elliot stated he did not know the lady in the car and had never seen her before. He told her that wherever they ended up, he would leave her enough gas to get somewhere safe. Elliot did not hurt her, and stated he did not want to hurt her or anyone; he just wanted to get away. Elliot was asked why he escaped, and he stated because he is doing natural life with no parole.

Elliot had the box cutter and duct tape with him when he was arrested, but dumped the hammer somewhere along the way. Elliot left the first car in Shipshewana and walked toward Middlebury. He then stole a black car which he was driving near LaPorte when the police stopped him and arrested him. Investigators again asked Elliot if he had any assistance from anyone in escaping and he stated he did not. He stated no staff members were involved; in fact he was concerned about staff catching him as they were pretty active in shaking down the unit and the yard officer was paying close attention in the area of the yard shack. He also did not see any officers watching the Super Bowl that day and said the officers were all doing their job. He also was afraid the alert response vehicle officer was going to see him as the vehicle kept driving by while he was making his way toward the sally port. His main concern was being seen on the cameras and being caught. He did not know anything about the microwave zones or if they were working or not during his escape.

SECURITY ACTION PLAN FOLLOWING THE ESCAPE

The MDOC Director or Deputy Director of the Correctional Facilities Administration will personally visit each correctional facility to review the facts of the ICF escape and impress upon Department staff the paramount importance of facility security and public safety.

MDOC leadership will review with the Department of Technology, Management and Budget (DTMB) all scheduled security projects and the possible need for expedited execution.

A warden's peer review process has been created whereby individual wardens are visiting other institutions to review physical plant and security procedures.

Facility wardens have been asked to submit a list of their top five security needs. If this has been done already, MDOC leadership is asking them to review the list in light of recent findings.

All correctional facilities were instructed to conduct a focused security review of all perimeter gates including sally ports, staff and inmate entrance and exit points to include procedures and physical plant evaluations.

A maintenance staff work group has been formed to review all fencing material and in particular, chain link fencing as to vulnerability and hardening.

All correctional facilities were instructed to perform a complete review of all prisoner shakedown procedures. This review will also be done on the regional level and should focus on the timing, application, department-wide consistency, documentation and command review of prisoner shakedown procedures.

A review of all prisoner worker uniforms is currently underway to establish uniforms that are more recognizable and visible in color.

Snow removal strategies are being reevaluated by a custody security team to reduce visual obstructions and complications for security equipment.

A security classification review was completed on escapee to ensure accuracy and validity.

A third party independent review of the circumstances surrounding the escape is currently underway by the Attorney General's Office.