



## Texas Agencies Promise Reform After Alleged Abuse at Veterans Nursing Homes

*Written On May 19, 2010 By **Bob Kraft***

Three state agencies have pledged to improve responses to abuse allegations at nursing homes, after legislators raised pointed questions about safety and management at two state-owned facilities for veterans. That is the story published recently in the Dallas Morning News. Here are excerpts:

One of the main changes is for the state agency in charge of regulating nursing homes to offer annual training to law enforcement officers on how to investigate allegations of harm to the elderly.

The Dallas Morning News found that a criminal investigation into allegations of abuse by two former workers at a state veterans home in Big Spring lingered for more than two years, partly because of conflicts among police, state inspectors, and home administrators.

Although police first looked into the allegations in late 2007 at the Lamun-Lusk-Sanchez State Veterans Home, officers yielded to state inspectors. The Howard County district attorney told *The News* that the state aging agency and police should have been working together.

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Felony charges were filed in March against the former employees, accused of harming two residents in separate incidents in 2007. Bryson Vanderbilt, 25, pleaded not guilty in Howard County District Court last week. Connie Mae Johnson, 52, is expected to be arraigned soon.

Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson told the Senate Veterans Committee that steps can be taken to ensure that local officers work with nursing home operators on investigations. A division of the General Land Office hires private companies to run seven nursing homes for veterans and their spouses.

And Health and Human Services Commission officials said they have made changes in how they review appeals from nursing home operators that contest violations documented by state regulators.