

# INMATE ALLEGEDLY SEVERED GUARD'S THUMB

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By Matthew Chayes

An inmate bit the tip off a jail guard's thumb at Rikers Island, the city Correction Department said Friday. Hospital surgeons couldn't reattach the tip, said the correction department spokesman, Stephen Morello. Morello said jail officials were in contact with prosecutors about criminally charging the inmate, 45-year-old Joseph Vilsaint, in connection with the attack. The attack happened Thursday at the island jail's Anna M. Kross Center while Vilsaint was in a holding cell after being involved in a fight. When the correction officer went to bring Vilsaint for a medical checkup, Vilsaint appeared to be sleeping, but then "sprang up, grabbed his hand and bit the thumb off," Morello said. Fellow officers had to

use a chemical spray and restraining holds to bring Vilsaint under control. Vilsaint had been jailed on a felony assault charge from Brooklyn, Morello said. The thumb was retrieved, put on ice, and sent with the officer to Bellevue Hospital Center in Manhattan. The name of the officer, who's been on the job five years, wasn't made public. In a statement, the New York City Correction Officers' Benevolent Association union president, Norman Seabrook, blamed the attack on budget cuts. "Budget cuts and savage inmates are literally eating away at our membership," he said. A department spokesman countered: "Budget and staffing issues did not contribute in any way to this incident." Rikers, located in the East River between Queens and the Bronx, is among the world's largest penal colonies.