

DAILY NEWS



Rikers brawl downplayed - union

UNION officials slammed the city's Correction Department yesterday for downplaying the severity of a bloody brawl on Rikers Island.

Fourteen correction officers and two captains were hospitalized after a fight between inmates sparked a near riot inside the Otis Bantum Correction Center about 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, the officials said.

The Correction Officers Benevolent Association said the melee was a direct result of staffing cuts, specifically security posts at Rikers.

The union has said the correction officer force has decreased from 10,500 to 8,000 a few years ago, and the city proposed eliminating 51 officer positions for fiscal year 2012.

"Someone is going to get killed

because of this," said the union's spokesman, Michael Skelly. "Hopefully, this could be a wake-up call for this commissioner."

The injured officers were treated at New York Hospital Queens for injuries that included a broken nose and various lacerations.

"The reality is that this department has a very serious problem on its hands," Skelly said.

John Lainger and Joe Kemp