

The Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) announced today the release of a report examining the management of the Special Programs Unit (SPU) at the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, New York (MDC Brooklyn). The DOJ OIG's review sought to determine whether MDC Brooklyn's management controls, policies, and practices could have contributed to alleged disruptions to safety and security in 2011 and 2012 by inmate Ronell Wilson, who was convicted of capital murder and who had a months-long sexual relationship with a correctional officer that resulted in the birth of their child.

Our review identified concerns related to BOP's placement of Wilson in the SPU, which primarily houses vulnerable inmates with mental health issues, without implementing safeguards or providing guidance to correctional staff on how to manage him. We also identified areas where MDC Brooklyn's ability to communicate information across shifts and housing units should be improved, although we did not find that these deficiencies directly led to Wilson's alleged disruptions.

Background about Ronell Wilson's incarceration at MDC Brooklyn

Ronell Wilson was convicted in 2006 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York of capital murder for killing two undercover New York City police detectives, and in 2007, Judge Nicholas Garaufis sentenced him to the death penalty. On February 18, 2011, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit affirmed Wilson's conviction but vacated the death sentence and remanded the case for a new penalty phase trial. Wilson was housed at MDC Brooklyn while he awaited the new penalty phase trial and resentencing.

During his time at MDC Brooklyn, Wilson had a months-long sexual relationship with then Correctional Officer Nancy Gonzalez that resulted in the birth of their child and, following an investigation by the OIG, Gonzalez's conviction of Sexual Intercourse with a Ward. In addition, according to testimony during Wilson's resentencing hearing in 2013, Wilson allegedly held an inquisition in the housing unit to determine who had reported the relationship to MDC Brooklyn's head of security, and also bullied inmates and manipulated staff in other ways.

In September 2013, Judge Garaufis reimposed the death sentence. In his opinion regarding Wilson's resentencing, Judge Garaufis cited "apparent ineptitude of the Bureau of Prisons" and recommended that the OIG "examine the management, policies, and procedures of the MDC that allowed [Wilson's] behavior to occur, placing at risk of harm other inmates and the many hard working personnel at the facility."

The OIG's Findings

The OIG found that MDC Brooklyn's senior management assigned Wilson to the SPU without implementing safeguards to prevent and detect his disruption of the safety and security of the unit. MDC Brooklyn officials told us they recognized the need to closely monitor Wilson because of his violent history and gang member status, and that they would have preferred to assign Wilson to the Special Housing Unit (SHU) for the duration of his resentencing proceedings, but they believed this was not an option based on a prior court order from a previous incarceration requiring them to remove Wilson from the SHU. Management therefore assigned Wilson to the SPU because they assumed the unit would allow for closer monitoring by correctional officers than was typically possible in general population units. The OIG's review found, however, that SPU procedures do not provide any instructions for staff on how to manage inmates like Wilson who have not been classified as needing

BOP's mental health services and who could potentially intimidate other SPU inmates. In addition, MDC Brooklyn's management did not provide any special instructions to staff on how to manage Wilson differently while he was in the SPU. As a result, staff told us that they generally did not manage Wilson differently than other inmates in the SPU.

The OIG also found several examples in which policies at MDC Brooklyn were unclear and may not have been fully communicated to staff. For example, MDC Brooklyn issued a revised SPU procedures memorandum in January 2015 that made significant changes to the guidance on managing inmates in the unit, yet some staff did not recall seeing this or any previous version of the memorandum. In addition, the OIG found that certain policies in place at the time of the review did not ensure that Correctional Officers routinely conducted searches of all housing unit cells; the policy on how staff should handle sealed inmate complaints placed in unit mailboxes needed to be clarified; and additional steps were needed to ensure that relevant security information is consistently shared across shifts and housing units at MDC Brooklyn.

The report makes five recommendations to strengthen oversight of the SPU and communication at MDC Brooklyn. The BOP concurred with all five recommendations.

Report: Today's report can be found on the OIG's website at the following link: <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2015/e1508.pdf>.

Multimedia: The OIG has released both a video message and a podcast to accompany today's report. The 2-minute video features the Inspector General summarizing the report's findings, and the 9-minute podcast features the Inspector General and members of the OIG's review team discussing the report and the related OIG investigation in more detail. Both the video and podcast can be accessed at the following link: <https://oig.justice.gov/multimedia/>.