

Transcript: "A Message from IG Horowitz:
The Impact of an Aging Inmate Population on the Federal Prison System" – May 2015

Hello. My name is Michael Horowitz, and I am the Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Justice.

Today the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, or O-I-G, released a report examining the impact of an aging inmate population on the Federal Bureau of Prisons, also called B-O-P. The BOP is part of the Department of Justice.

Many people may not be aware that the federal inmate population is aging so rapidly. There are now more than 35 thousand federal inmates who are 50 or older, and that number has grown fast. In a recent five year period, it grew by more than 25 percent while the rest of the federal prison population actually shrank.

The impact of this shift is significant. From a budget perspective, the average aging inmate costs about 8 percent more to incarcerate than the average younger inmate. That difference is largely driven by healthcare spending, which also rises with age. There are other impacts. For example, aging inmates require different programming while in prison. An inmate who has already received an education, or who does not plan to reenter the workforce after release, may not benefit from the educational and jobs skills programs typically offered at BOP institutions. Aging inmates can also require different physical infrastructure – lower bunks, for instance, or handicapped-accessible cells. All of these issues become more pronounced, and more costly, as the number of aging inmates increases.

Our report examines these issues and concludes that the aging inmate population has had an adverse impact on the BOP's ability to provide a safe, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure environment for inmates age 50 and older, and to assist them when they reenter the community.

Today's report is part of the OIG's ongoing effort to help the DOJ confront the crisis of escalating costs and overcrowding in the federal prison system. We have for years identified the prison system as among the top management challenges facing the DOJ, and in recent years we have issued reports assessing a wide variety of prison-related issues. Time and again these reports have concluded that the challenges facing the DOJ are both complex and pressing.

In some cases, we have found that the DOJ is taking appropriate steps to address the problems we have identified. But in some cases, we have found that the DOJ's responses to these problems have fallen short. Today's report provides one example of that. As part of our review, we assessed the effects of the BOP's compassionate release policies for aging inmates, which the BOP revised over a year ago to provide expanded consideration for inmates 65 years and older. We found that only two aging inmates have been released under the revised policy.

These findings and many others are described in today's report, which is now available on our website at justice-dot-gov-slash-OIG. There you can also find our other reports on the federal prison system, as well as descriptions of our ongoing reviews.

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Thank you for your interest in the OIG's work. You have my commitment as Inspector General that the OIG will continue its efforts to help the BOP and the DOJ address the significant challenges in this area.