



"A Message from the Inspector General: Audit of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Management and Oversight of its Chaplaincy Services Program," July 2021

Hello, I'm Michael Horowitz, Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Justice.

Today, my office released a report that identified significant deficiencies in the Bureau of Prison's Chaplaincy Services Program, which seeks to ensure that inmates are able to practice their religion of choice, a right protected by the Constitution.

The BOP hires Chaplains to facilitate worship and scriptural studies for inmates. Chaplains also provide pastoral care, spiritual guidance, and counseling.

Our audit found that BOP's Chaplaincy Services Program was seriously understaffed. At the time of our review, BOP had only 236 Chaplains to provide services for over 160,000 inmates. And more than two thirds of BOP institutions did not meet BOP's minimum staffing guidelines.

Additionally, we found a lack of diversity in the faiths represented by BOP's chaplains. For example, 84% of BOP chaplains represented a Protestant Christian faith, even though only 34% of inmates who claimed a faith preference identified with a Protestant Christian faith. We determined that at least 16 faith groups did not have any chaplains, and two groups that comprised the second and third largest inmate faith groups – Catholics and Muslims -- were substantially underrepresented among the BOP chaplaincy.

Finally, we found that these staffing shortages and lack of faith diversity prompted many BOP institutions to turn to alternatives that pose enhanced risks, such as inmate-led services and reliance on minimally vetted volunteers. Of particular concern is when high-risk inmates lead religious services because such inmates can potentially misuse services to encourage violent behavior, radicalize other inmates, or engage in otherwise prohibited activity. In fact, at four of the 12 institutions we visited, we found that inmates incarcerated for terrorism-related offenses or with known connections to terrorist organizations we permitted to lead services.

A robust program for religious services can help ensure that the Constitutional rights of inmates are protected, while maintaining the safety and security of BOP institutions. We make 5 recommendations to improve the BOP's delivery of religious services to inmates.

To read our report and all of our recommendations, please visit our website oig.justice.gov, or go to oversight.gov.

Thank you for joining me today.

(Stock media provided by composer William Pearson and publisher Prolific Two Publishing/Pond5.com, www.pond5.com.)