

PRESS RELEASE

Former Federal Bureau of Prisons Lieutenant Sentenced for Civil Rights Violation Following Failure to Address Medical Needs of Deceased Inmate

Tuesday, November 28, 2023

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For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Former Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) Lieutenant Michael Anderson, 52, was sentenced today to 36 months in prison for violating the civil rights of an inmate by showing deliberate indifference to the inmate's serious medical needs, resulting in his death.

"People held in jails and prisons are at the mercy of correctional officials when it comes to fair treatment and basic necessities like healthcare, especially when they are experiencing a medical emergency," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "Correctional officials have a constitutional duty to ensure that those experiencing a health crisis or medical emergency are not ignored but instead are treated like human beings and provided basic life-sustaining care. The Justice Department will not stand by idly when officials inside jails and prisons deny people confined in their custody access to basic healthcare, leaving them to suffer grave injury or death. We will hold correctional officials accountable when their callous actions, or failure to act, violate our federal civil rights laws or the Constitution."

"This inmate's death was not the result of inadvertence or a lapse in judgment," said U.S. Attorney Jessica D. Aber for the Eastern District of Virginia. "His death was the completely preventable result of the deliberate choices made by the defendant, who knew he had the constitutional duty to provide medical care. Inmates are entitled to basic human dignity."

“Anderson’s appalling indifference resulted in the needless loss of life,” said Special Agent in Charge Russell W. Cunningham of the Justice Department’s Office of the Inspector General Mid-Atlantic Region. “Today’s sentencing sends a clear message that correctional officers who disregard their responsibility to provide a humane environment for inmates will be held accountable.”

According to court documents, Anderson admitted that on Jan. 9 and 10, 2021, he was working as an FBOP lieutenant at the Federal Correctional Institution at Petersburg, Virginia. In that capacity, Anderson was the second-highest ranking officer at the prison and was responsible for the care of federal inmates. On Jan. 9, 2021, a correctional officer notified Anderson that a 47-year-old inmate, W.W., was experiencing symptoms of an apparent medical emergency and asked the defendant to help W.W. obtain medical care. Anderson personally observed W.W.’s symptoms and stated that he would get medical help for W.W. The defendant nevertheless failed to notify medical staff, obtain a medical assessment, contact the facility’s on-call physician or notify any other staff members of W.W.’s condition.

The next day, a correctional officer notified Anderson that W.W. had fallen to the ground in his cell. Even with this information, Anderson failed to obtain any assistance for W.W. whatsoever. W.W. laid on the ground, dead or dying, for over an hour and a half before any correctional or medical staff entered his cell. When they finally did so, life-saving efforts failed, and W.W. was later pronounced dead.

The Justice Department’s Office of the Inspector General investigated the case.

Special Litigation Counsel Kathryn E. Gilbert and Trial Attorney Matthew Tannenbaum of the Civil Rights Division’s Criminal Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Garnett for the Eastern District of Virginia prosecuted the case.

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Topic

CIVIL RIGHTS

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950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
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