



"A Message from the Inspector General: Report of Investigation and Review of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Handling of the Transfer of Inmate James "Whitey" Bulger," December 2022

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

Today, my office released a report on the Federal Bureau of Prisons', or BOP's, handling of the transfer of Inmate James "Whitey" Bulger, a notorious former organized crime leader, from BOP's prison near Coleman, Florida to a BOP prison in Hazelton, West Virginia. Bulger died within 12 hours of arriving at Hazelton, and three inmates have since been criminally charged in connection with his death.

Our investigation revealed serious BOP staff and management performance failures at multiple levels; bureaucratic incompetence; and flawed, confusing, and insufficient BOP policies and procedures.

We found it particularly troubling that Coleman personnel placed Bulger, an 89-year-old inmate who used a wheelchair and had serious heart conditions, in a single cell in Coleman's Special Housing Unit, or SHU, for 8 months while Coleman staff bureaucratically struggled with how to transfer him to a new facility.

During that time, BOP personnel:

- Didn't accurately represent Bulger's medical condition in BOP transfer paperwork,
- Didn't timely update Bulger's medical care level,
- Advised over 100 BOP officials of Bulger's upcoming transfer to Hazelton,
- Spoke openly at Hazelton about Bulger's upcoming arrival in the presence of Hazelton inmates, and
- Didn't take adequate steps to assess whether Bulger faced harm from other inmates at Hazelton.

We also found that BOP medical professionals didn't adequately review Bulger's medical records and failed to consider Bulger's ongoing cardiac and other medical incidents at a time they were recommending that his BOP medical care level be downgraded. The reduction in Bulger's care level allowed Coleman to transfer Bulger to Hazelton. We concluded that BOP Medical Care Level guidelines were flawed and lacked clarity.

The fact that these serious deficiencies occurred in connection with a high-profile inmate like Bulger was especially concerning given that the BOP would presumably take particular care in handling such an inmate's case. In our view, no BOP inmate's transfer, whether they are a notorious offender or a non-violent offender, should be handled like Bulger's transfer was in this instance.

To read our report and our 11 recommendations, visit our website oig.justice.gov, or go to oversight.gov.

Thank you for joining me today.

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