

**To:** Jackson, Ryan[jackson.ryan@epa.gov]  
**From:** The Washington Post  
**Sent:** Fri 7/14/2017 4:00:24 PM  
**Subject:** [SPAM] Federal Insider: Staff shortages, solitary confinement increase risks for federal prisoners and public



## **Staff shortages, solitary confinement increase risks for federal prisoners and public**

By Joe Davidson

Michael Horowitz, Justice Department inspector general, in 2014. (Bill O'Leary/The Washington Post)

Once again, Uncle Sam has demonstrated that skimping on his workforce is a good way to cheat his consumers.

In this case, the unwilling consumers are a group who generate little sympathy and exercise even less power — prisoners.

A new report from the Justice Department's internal watchdog shows how understaffed mental health services for particularly vulnerable inmates, coupled with discredited solitary confinement conditions, can ricochet on the law-abiding.

“First, although the BOP (Bureau of Prisons) has stated that it does not practice solitary confinement,” said Inspector General Michael Horowitz, “we found inmates, including those with mental illness, who were housed in single-cell confinement for long periods of time, isolated from other inmates, with limited human contact.”

About 9,750 inmates were in some form of restricted BOP housing in June 2016, according to the report. They were confined to their cells almost 24/7, sometimes for years. For the purposes of its analysis, the IG's office considered “solitary confinement to be an inmate alone in a cell for 22 hours or more per day with limited human contact.”

At the federal supermax prison in Florence, Colo., the investigators “learned of an inmate with serious mental illness who spent about 19 years” in restrictive housing.

That kind of punishment can backfire.

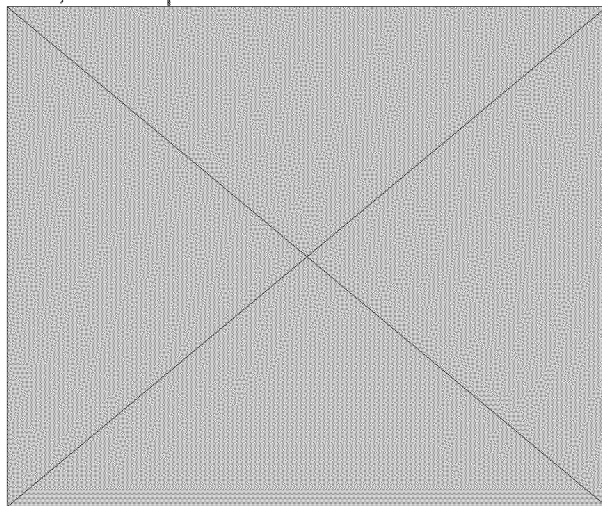
“Research shows that ‘time spent in solitary confinement contributes to elevated rates of recidivism’ and that many inmates released into the community from RHUs (restricted housing units) ‘come out of these units damaged and functionally disabled,’ which can be a public safety concern,” the report added.

The psychological damage can lead to “anger, aggression, and rage.” That fuels increased recidivism, which means more crime because the correctional system didn’t adequately do its job.

The job isn’t getting done in part because “mental health staffing does not support the treatment needs of inmates with mental illness,” the report said.

Many facilities fall far short of BOP’s standard of one psychologist for every 500 inmates. One 1,200-prisoner institution had one psychologist. A medical center “housing some of the BOP’s most seriously mentally ill inmates had filled only 12 of its 21 full-time mental health staff positions as of December 2015.”

We asked BOP a series of questions about its policies and requested updated data, but it provided no information.



**DOJ watchdog report criticizes solitary confinement**

The IG’s office said it was “also concerned about the BOP’s challenges in recruiting and retaining Psychiatrists. ... As of October 2015, the BOP had filled only 28 of 49 (57 percent) of its authorized fulltime Psychiatrist  
The report says the Bureau of Prisons’ policies “do not adequately

positions nationwide.”

Eric Young, president of the American Federation of Government Employees’ Council of Prison Locals, defended what other reasonable folks call solitary confinement. “Without restrictive housing, we would have anarchy inside our nation’s prisons,” he said. “Our staff deal with angry, aggressive and violent inmates every day; inmates act out for lots for various reasons and when they do so it is vital to remove them out general population to maintain security and good order in our facilities. So long as we are given the appropriate staff resources we can handle it. If legislators want us to do more they have to commit more funding to us for that purpose.”

Reports of BOP staffing shortages are not limited to psychologists and psychiatrists. A March 2016 IG study found that “recruitment and retention of medical professionals is a serious challenge for the BOP, in large part because the BOP competes with private employers that offer higher pay and benefits.” An April 2015 IG report said low staffing contributed to a 2009 riot at the Reeves County Detention Center, a Texas facility that operated under a BOP contract.

Your daily guide to the energy and  
While BOP officials have taken “a number of steps to address mental health concerns for inmates in restrictive housing,” Horowitz said “there are still  
si You received this email because you signed up for Federal Insider or because it is  
policy included in your subscription. For additional free newsletters or to manage  
We respect your privacy. If you believe that this email has been sent to you in error or  
you no longer wish to receive email from The Washington Post, click here. Contact us

- “BOP does not sufficiently track or monitor” inmates with mental illnesses.
- “Mental Health staff do not always document inmates’ mental disorders.”
- BOP is “unable to accurately determine the number of inmates with mental illness.”
- BOP is unable to “ensure that it is providing appropriate care” to inmates with mental illness.

The agency agreed with all 15 IG recommendations. They included determining the needed steps “to prioritize and incentivize the hiring of mental health staff,” tracking “all inmates in single-cell confinement” and monitoring “the cumulative amount of time inmates with mental illness spend in restrictive housing.”

More from Federal Insider concluded, “that significant additional steps are required to screen, treat, and monitor inmates with mental illness in these restrictive environments, especially those in single-cell confinement.”

Read more:

[Private federal prisons — less safe, less secure]

[Report: Halfway house issues mean high-risk offenders could be released too soon]

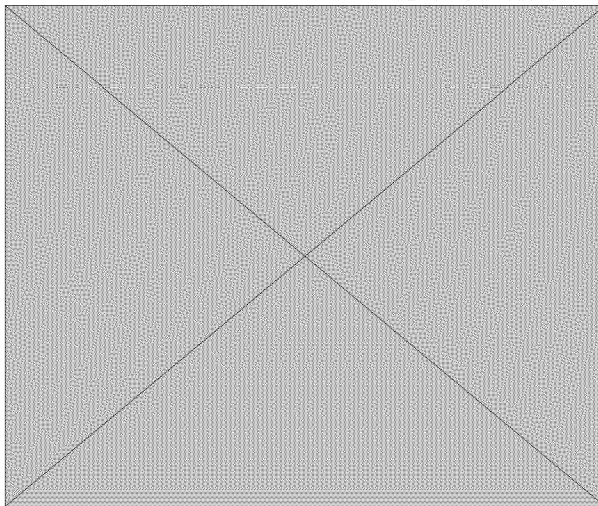
[Will states follow DOJ’s private prison move? Some are ahead of the feds.]

**for the mentally ill in federal prisons**

forms of restrictive housing.

By Joe Davidson | Columnist • [Read more »](#)

ADVERTISEMENT



Recommended for you

**The Energy 202**

environment debate.

[Sign Up »](#)

Share Federal Insider: [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#)

Trouble reading? [Click here](#) to view in your browser.

You received this email because you signed up for Federal Insider or because it is included in your subscription. For additional free newsletters or to manage your newsletters, [click here](#).

We respect your [privacy](#). If you believe that this email has been sent to you in error or

you no longer wish to receive email from The Washington Post, click [here](#). [Contact us](#)  
for help.

©2017 The Washington Post, 1301 K St NW, Washington DC 20071