



June 8, 2022

Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-001

Dear Inspector General Michael Horowitz:

We write today as a network of civil rights, human rights, mental health and religious organizations, and formerly incarcerated advocates, known as the Federal Anti-Solitary Taskforce (FAST), to urge the Department of Justice Office of Inspector General to launch an investigation into conditions at Thomson Federal Penitentiary, specifically on the use of double-celled solitary confinement and four-point restraints, the lack of mental health care treatment, and the abuse of incarcerated individuals by or at the hands of corrections officers.

In 2016, there was a demand for a similar investigation into the conduct and practices of the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) at USP Lewisburg's Special Management Unit after an investigative report found the aforementioned abuses had led to the deaths of at least four incarcerated people.¹ The report, published by [NPR and The Marshall Project](#), only corroborated what our organizations already knew from individuals incarcerated at Lewisburg: They were being subject to conditions that were as abusive as they were inhumane.

Rather than investigate these egregious practices, the response has been to simply move the unit to another federal facility in Thomson, Illinois. If BOP expected a different outcome in a new facility while leaving remaining practices in place, they were sorely mistaken. In an investigation, conducted anew by NPR and the Marshall Project, reporters found that, far from being discontinued, the practices of double-celled solitary and four-point shackling had actually been institutionalized at Thomson.²

¹ "Inside Lewisburg Prison: A Choice Between A Violent Cellmate Or Shackles," Published October 26, 2016. Reported by Christie Thompson of The Marshall Project and Joseph Shapiro, NPR News Investigations correspondent. Source: <http://www.npr.org/2016/10/26/498582706/inside-lewisburg-prison-a-choice-between-aviolent-cellmate-or-shackles>

² "How the Newest Federal Prison Became One of the Deadliest," Published May 31, 2016. Reported by Christie Thompson of The Marshall Project and Joseph Shapiro, NPR News Investigations correspondent. Source: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2022/05/31/how-the-newest-federal-prison-became-one-of-the-deadliest>

Equally of concern are reports that corrections officers are at the center of instigating violence and abuse. Reporting reveals that corrections officers routinely spread rumors that endanger incarcerated individuals and facilitate attacks by forcing individuals to share cells with people they fear.³ Additionally, incarcerated individuals who have protested placement because they believe their cellmate to be dangerous, or have spoken out in protest about the conditions of the unit, have been placed in four-point restraints, the practice of shackling people by each limb on a bed for hours at a time.⁴

The response of the BOP has been to minimize the use of restraints and double down on the thoroughly debunked notion that “double celling” is not solitary and helps prevent suicide. Yet experts conclude, double-celled solitary - that is, locking two people in a cell the size of a parking space for 23 hours a day- can have the same disastrous impact on an individual’s psychological health as individual solitary confinement, and can also lead to violence, especially when encouraged by the actions of corrections officers.

The results *have* been violent, and in many cases, deadly. In less than a two-year period, there have been at least 167 recorded assaults⁵ and at least five homicides.⁶ We must underscore that the current conditions at USP Thomson amount to what we can only classify as torture. Amid current conditions, we are concerned for all of the people - incarcerated and staff- who are living and working in the Thomson facility.

On the campaign trail, President Biden committed to ending solitary confinement in all federal prisons, however, in the nearly eighteen months since he took office, the Administration has taken no significant steps to this end. And while he President issued a May 25th [Executive Order](#) that instructed the Department of Justice to produce a report on BOP’s current efforts to end the use of solitary confinement,⁷ this is simply not enough. Connecticut recently became the third state to ban prolonged isolation.⁸ In its policy and practice, BOP is lagging far behind such state level reforms (which include New York and New Jersey). President Biden must employ the recommendations presented in FAST’s [“Blueprint for Ending Solitary Confinement by the Federal Government”](#) to end solitary and to save lives.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Assaults in prison are widely underreported. See “The violent American epidemic you won't hear about: Why prison abuse goes unreported and unpunished,” Published April 15, 2016. Reported by Daniel Denvir for Salon. Source: https://www.salon.com/2016/04/15/the_violent_american_epidemic_you_wont_hear_about_why_prison_abuse_goes_unreported_and_unpunished/

⁶ “How the Newest Federal Prison Became One of the Deadliest,” Source:

<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2022/05/31/how-the-newest-federal-prison-became-one-of-the-deadliest>

⁷ “Executive Order on Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices to Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety” Published May 26, 2022. Source:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/05/25/executive-order-on-advancing-effective-accountable-policing-and-criminal-justice-practices-to-enhance-public-trust-and-public-safety/>

⁸ “Governor Lamont Signs Legislation Limiting the Use of Isolated Confinement,” Published May 10, 2022. Source: <https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/News/Press-Releases/2022/05-2022/Governor-Lamont-Signs-Legislation-Limiting-the-Use-of-Isolated-Confinement>

As we continue to push for these reforms, the current situation at Thomson USP demands urgent attention and remedy. We hope your agency will take action on these alarming reports and launch a formal investigation.

Sincerely,

Members of the Federal Anti-Solitary Taskforce (FAST):

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR)

National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT)

Unlock the Box Campaign

The Federal Anti-Solitary Taskforce (FAST) is working to fully end solitary confinement in federal prisons and detention facilities (and end solitary in states, as well). The Taskforce is comprised of civil rights, human rights, faith, and health organizations and leaders, including people who have survived solitary confinement, people who have had family members in solitary confinement, and their allies. Members of the Taskforce have been working to end solitary confinement across the country and have come together to push for an end to solitary confinement federally. For more information, contact: jsandoval@unlocktheboxcampaign.org