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Former Federal Bureau of Prisons employees convicted of charges arising from their failure to obtain medical care for an inmate who later died from his injuries

Tuesday, December 24, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia

RICHMOND, Va. – A Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) lieutenant was found guilty on Dec. 21 of violating the civil rights of an inmate by showing deliberate indifference to the inmate’s serious medical needs. The lieutenant and an FBOP nurse were also found guilty of making false statements to a federal agent with the intent to obstruct the investigation into the inmate’s death.

According to court documents and evidence introduced at trial, Lieutenant Shrona Covington, 49, and Registered Nurse Tonya Farley, 53, both of Chesterfield, were on duty and working in their official capacities at the Federal Correctional Institution at Petersburg on Jan. 9, 2021. Covington willfully failed to ensure that the inmate, a 47-year-old man identified as W.W., was provided with necessary medical care, even though she knew that W.W. had a serious medical need, and Covington and Farley each made false statements to federal agents during the investigation into the inmate’s death.

Another FBOP official, Lieutenant Michael Anderson, previously pleaded guilty for his role in the inmate’s death and was sentenced to three years in custody.

“These defendants showed an appalling indifference and disregard for W.W.’s life,” said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “The Justice Department will continue to hold accountable those who fail in their duty to provide basic care and humane treatment to those in their custody.”

“Federal inmates are human beings in a uniquely vulnerable environment,” said U.S. Attorney Jessica D. Aber for the Eastern District of Virginia. “Their care is the responsibility of corrections staff entrusted to uphold the highest standards of professional conduct. The failure to honor that trust in this case cost a man his life.”

“Covington’s inexcusable apathy to the medical needs of W.W. over the course of two days caused his unnecessary death,” said Special Agent in Charge Tim Edmiston of the Justice Department’s Office of the Inspector General Mid-Atlantic Region. “Covington and Farley also decided to lie about their involvement in order to escape accountability. The Justice Department Office of the Inspector General will continue to investigate civil rights violations at the hands of Federal Bureau of Prisons employees.” Evidence presented at trial established that, in the early morning hours of Jan. 9, 2021, W.W.’s cellmate reported to facility staff that W.W. was exhibiting bizarre and unprecedented behavior, including that he was suddenly incontinent and unable to talk and walk normally. Over the course of two days, FBOP officials knew of but disregarded W.W.’s symptoms of a sudden neurological crisis, including his sudden incontinence, incomprehension, inability to talk, and struggles to stand or walk without falling.

Without medical attention to address his sudden and serious medical need, W.W. fell into walls and other objects numerous times, causing significant bruising and bleeding to his head and body. Although FBOP policy requires staff to provide necessary medical care to inmates, Covington and Anderson ignored the policy and their training and failed to respond to repeated calls for help from inmates and line staff.

W.W. finally fell head-first into a wall and then to the floor in an observation cell, where — despite inmate-observers' continued calls for help — he lay for an hour and 40 minutes before officers rendered aid. An autopsy concluded that W.W. died of blunt force trauma to his head and that the lack of medical assistance he received during his series of falls and after his last fall contributed to his death.

Covington is scheduled to be sentenced on May 7, 2025, and Farley is scheduled to be sentenced on May 8, 2025. Covington faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison, and Farley faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence based on the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

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

Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas A. Garnett for the Eastern District of Virginia and Special Litigation Counsel Kathryn E. Gilbert and Trial Attorney Katherine McCallister of the Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section are prosecuting the case and were previously assisted by then-Trial Attorney Matthew Tannenbaum of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information are located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for Case No. 3:23-cr-68.

Contact

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Updated December 24, 2024

7Former Federal Bureau of Prisons Official sentenced for federal civil rights violation for failing to obtain medical care for an inmate who died

Thursday, May 8, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia

She and a second official were also sentenced for making false statements in the federal investigation

RICHMOND, Va. – Former Bureau of Prisons (BOP) lieutenant Shronda Covington, 49, was sentenced yesterday to a year in prison to be followed by a year of home confinement and three years of supervised release for violating the civil rights of an inmate in her custody and control by showing deliberate indifference to the inmate's serious medical needs, resulting in the inmate suffering bodily injury, and for lying to federal investigators about the offense. The inmate later died of his injuries he sustained over the course of a 30-hour period spanning Jan. 9 and 10, 2021.

Former BOP nurse Tonya Farley, 54, was sentenced today to six months in prison, six months of home confinement, and three years of supervised release for lying to federal investigators about the circumstances of the death of the inmate, who was entrusted to her care.

According to court documents and evidence introduced at trial, Covington was on duty and working in her official capacity at the Federal Correctional Institution at Petersburg on Jan. 9, 2021. She willfully failed to ensure that the inmate, a 47-year-old man identified as W.W., was provided with necessary medical care during her shift, even though she knew that W.W. had serious medical needs, and W.W. suffered bodily injury as a result. Covington was also found guilty of making false statements to federal agents about the incident.

Another BOP official, former lieutenant Michael Anderson, previously pled guilty for his role in the inmate's death and was sentenced to three years in custody.

"Custody includes a responsibility for safety and wellbeing," said U.S. Attorney Erik S. Siebert for the Eastern District of Virginia. "Corrections staff must uphold that responsibility for persons in their care – or they will be held accountable for their failure to do so, like the defendants in this case."

"Federal correctional officials who fail to do their jobs at the cost of inmate safety should be held accountable," said Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "Further, officials who obstruct investigations of their misconduct violate the public's trust."

"This case is a powerful reminder that BOP officials who disregard their responsibility to provide a humane environment for inmates will be held accountable," said Special Agent in Charge Tim Edmiston of the Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General Mid-Atlantic Region.

Evidence presented at trial established that, in the early morning hours of Jan. 9, 2021, W.W.'s cellmate reported to facility staff that W.W. was exhibiting unprecedented behavior, including that he was suddenly disoriented, unable to talk, unable to stand or walk without falling, and unable to control his bladder. Over the course of two days, BOP officials knew of but disregarded W.W.'s symptoms.

Without medical attention to address his medical crisis, W.W. fell into walls and other objects numerous times, causing significant bruising and bleeding to his head and body. Although BOP policy requires staff to provide necessary medical care to inmates, defendant Covington failed to respond to repeated calls for help from the officers she supervised during her shift on the morning of Jan. 9, 2021.

On the morning of Jan. 10, 2021, W.W. finally fell head-first into a wall and then to the floor in an observation cell, where — despite inmate-observers' continued calls for help — he lay for an hour and 40 minutes before officers rendered aid. An autopsy concluded that W.W. died of blunt force trauma to his head and that the lack of medical assistance he received during his series of falls and after his last fall contributed to his death.

Farley was the last medical provider to see W.W. before his death. Despite BOP policies requiring her to confer with a physician about W.W.'s care, and despite Farley's admission that she should have conferred with a physician and sent W.W. to the hospital, Farley failed to take these steps. She then falsely told federal investigators that she had conferred with a physician, even though she had not done so. Farley also misled investigators about her conversations with another prison official.

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

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

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Contact

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Updated May 8, 2025

⁸Former Head Nurse at Rockbridge Regional Jail Convicted of Falsifying Documents

Friday, July 26, 2019

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Virginia

Gary Hassler Found Guilty Following Three-day Jury Trial

Lynchburg, VIRGINIA – A federal jury in U.S. District Court in Lynchburg today convicted Gary Hassler, the former head nurse at Rockbridge Regional Jail, of falsifying documents in order to impede a federal investigation into civil rights abuses at the facility, First Assistant United States Attorney Daniel P. Bubar announced.

“Today’s conviction shows that no person or institution can take steps to interfere in a federal investigation,” First Assistant Bubar stated. “I am grateful for the work of the FBI, Virginia State Police and Office of the Rockbridge County Commonwealth’s Attorney in bringing this case to justice.”

Hassler, 59, of Buena Vista, Va., was indicted in August 2018 and charged with two counts of falsifying documents in order to impede a federal investigation. Today, the jury convicted Hassler of one count of impeding a federal investigation into civil rights violations at the Rockbridge Regional Jail by falsifying a document. Evidence at trial showed that on March 5, 2017, Hassler falsified a document to claim an inmate at the jail refused medical care.

The investigation of the case was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Virginia State Police. The Commonwealth Attorney’s Office for Rockbridge County assisted with the investigation. Assistant United States Attorneys Zachary T. Lee and Matthew Miller prosecuted the case for the United States.

Updated July 26, 2019

⁹Va. corrections sergeant fired in connection with 2025 inmate death

The inmate was discovered with multiple injuries at Wallens Ridge State Prison as state police continue to investigate the death

March 30, 2026 04:51 PM
By Samuel B. Parker
Richmond Times-Dispatch, Va.

RICHMOND, Va. — A Virginia Department of Corrections officer has been dismissed in connection with the June death of an inmate at Wallens Ridge State Prison, according to a source with knowledge of the situation.

Jason Cope, a 13-year VADOC veteran who most recently held the rank of sergeant at the supermax facility in Wise County, was “placed on pre-disciplinary leave” in October, the source said — four months after Aubrey McKay was found in his cell with a fractured Adam’s apple, black eyes and bruises on his arms and ankles, his mother told WVTF.

On Jan. 12, Cope was “served to begin due process,” the source said, meaning officials began the process of terminating him in compliance with his rights under state code. Officials fired Cope roughly a month later.

In response to questions, VADOC spokesperson Kyle Gibson confirmed that Cope was no longer an employee of the department as of Feb. 10, but declined to provide details on the nature of his departure.

“The VADOC does not routinely comment on personnel matters,” Gibson wrote in an email.

Gibson also would not answer questions about whether Cope had been involved in any other reported incidents during his VADOC tenure, which began in April 2013, or why four months transpired between McKay's death and Cope's placement on leave.

He referred all further requests for comment to the Virginia State Police, which is investigating McKay's death.

VSP spokesperson Robin Lawson said that, because the "investigation is still ongoing, we cannot provide any additional information at this time." Cope could not be reached for comment.

McKay's exact cause of death remains unclear. A staffer for the Virginia chief medical examiner's office declined to comment on the case — or even to say whether the office had determined a cause of death nine months after McKay was recovered from his cell.

Like Gibson, the staffer referred all questions to VSP.

McKay's death came only a month after a group of alleged MS-13 gang members stabbed three corrections officers at Wallens Ridge. Criminal charges in that attack came swiftly.

In September, WVTF reported that multiple inmates inside the prison claimed they had been beaten in retaliation. VADOC denied the claim.

Prince William County Circuit Court records show McKay pleaded guilty in 2017 to one count of felony aggravated malicious wounding. He was 20 years old at the time.

He was sentenced to 20 years in prison with 10 years suspended, and was set to be released in July.

On March 10, The Times-Dispatch reported that the warden at Wallens Ridge had been replaced by VADOC's new director — part of a series of personnel changes that also included the warden of River North Correctional Center, where corrections officer Jeremy Hall was attacked and killed by an inmate in November.

**¹⁰Jury clears 5 former Va. corrections officers in inmate's 2022 death
The case hinged on whether inmate Charles Givens died from a beating or a seizure-induced fall;
the jury found no evidence of officer wrongdoing**

April 16, 2025 01:08 PM

[Sarah Roebuck](#)

ABINGDON, Va. — A federal jury found five former Virginia corrections officers not liable in the death of Charles Givens, an inmate with medical and mental health challenges who died in his cell at Marion Correctional Treatment Center in February 2022.

The verdict was delivered April 10 in Abingdon, Virginia, concluding an eight-day civil trial in which attorneys for Givens' sister, Kymberly Hobbs, sought \$15 million in damages, [NPR reports](#). Hobbs alleged the officers beat Givens, resulting in internal injuries that led to his death. The defense maintained that Givens suffered a seizure and fell, causing the fatal injuries.

The jury deliberated for just over three hours before reaching its decision.

The five defendants — Anthony Raymond Kelly, Gregory Scott Plummer, Joshua Jackson, William Zachary Montgomery and Samuel Dale Osborne — either resigned or retired before the Virginia Department of Corrections concluded its internal investigation, according to NPR.

The case stemmed from a civil lawsuit filed in 2023. According to NPR, testimony during the trial included allegations that several officers used force against Givens in a shower area, while one officer stood by and did not intervene. The defense denied the allegations and pointed to medical records and surveillance footage to support their account that Givens' injuries were caused by a seizure-related fall.

A key witness in the trial was a fellow inmate, Ron West, who claimed to have seen the alleged incident. Attorneys for the former officers challenged West's credibility, noting discrepancies between his testimony and earlier statements. Tim McAfee, who represented four of the defendants, told NPR the trial centered around whether the jury believed West's account. "The answer to that was resounding — no," he said.

Defense attorneys also questioned the timeline of updated autopsy findings, noting that the cause of death was initially listed as blunt force trauma, but not ruled a homicide until later. The plaintiffs' attorneys stood by the updated autopsy, which was issued by Assistant Chief Medical Examiner Eli Goodman.

A grand jury had previously declined to bring criminal charges against the officers.

Following media attention and scrutiny after Givens' death, the Virginia DOC made several changes at Marion, including the installation of a camera in the shower room. The agency told NPR it "has not hidden the truth from anyone in this case" and reaffirmed its commitment to transparency and public safety.

"[The] verdict confirms what the VADOC has long known: Our best-in-class agency is committed to its mission of ensuring public safety by providing effective incarceration, supervision, and evidence-based re-entry services," VADOC Director Chadwick Dotson said in a statement.

Montgomery, one of the former officers, expressed relief after the verdict.

"Glad this three-year nightmare is over," he told NPR. "Now I can go back to work and get on with my life."

The FBI confirmed to NPR that it launched an investigation into Givens' death but declined to comment further.

The plaintiff's attorneys indicated they do not plan to appeal the decision.