



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

B-197221

DECEMBER 2, 1983

The Honorable Vic Fazio
House of Representatives



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Dear Mr. Fazio:

Subject: Security And Supervision Of Inmates In
The Bureau Of Prisons Community Treatment
Centers (GAO/GGD-84-30)

As you know, the General Accounting Office is conducting a review of the effectiveness of the Bureau of Prisons Community Treatment Center Program. The following is a summary of our findings relating to the security and supervision of inmates in community treatment centers, as requested by your office on June 10, 1983.

Background

The Bureau of Prisons Community Treatment Center Program is a community-based residential corrections program. The purpose of the centers is to ease the transition from confinement back to society by providing offenders with certain services in or near their home communities, including employment placement assistance, group and individual counseling, vocational and educational training, and drug and alcohol treatment. State and local governments and private organizations operate the community treatment centers under contract with the Bureau of Prisons and provide pre-release services for qualifying offenders during the last several months of their sentences. The centers also take offenders committed directly from the courts to serve short sentences and parolees and probationers who need some degree of supervision. Approximately 240 centers were in operation and about 7,000 inmates were referred for services in fiscal year 1982. Eighty-three percent of the centers' residents were transferred from institutions, 10 percent were parolees/probationers, and 7 percent were direct court commitments.

The Bureau's policy for transferring inmates to community treatment centers sets forth the criteria used to recommend individual placement in a community treatment center and to determine when transfer to a center should be made. In summary, each Bureau of Prisons corrections institution periodically reviews its inmates' records with regard to

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percentage of time served, history of controlled substance abuse, mental stability, history of disciplinary infractions, and family or community support. Using a custody classification scoring system, the institution makes a decision on the appropriate level of custody for each inmate. Of the four levels of custody, "community" is the least secure and is reserved for the least dangerous inmates. Inmates in this category are eligible for community-based program activities. The authority to transfer inmates to a community treatment center rests with the warden of the institution having custody.

Security and supervision of inmates
in community treatment centers

The Bureau's policies for the control and supervision of inmates residing in community treatment centers are described in its standard contract with organizations operating such centers. The contract describes the Bureau's required procedures for supervising and maintaining control over the inmates. The responsibility for assuring that the provisions of the contract are carried out is delegated to the Bureau's community program managers, who are located in major cities throughout the country.

During our visits to community treatment centers we observed the procedures followed in implementing the Bureau's policies and discussed the centers' operations with program staff. On the basis of our observations we believe that the facilities generally comply with such prescribed control procedures as

- a sign-in/sign-out log sheet for each inmate; the log provides data concerning inmates' whereabouts;
- verifying the whereabouts of inmates by making contacts with employers and other locations where the inmate is granted permission to visit;
- testing periodically for alcohol and drug abuse;
- using a system for granting passes and furloughs when the inmate requests permission to leave the community for any reason; and
- disciplining inmates for forbidden acts varying from restricting them to quarters to returning them to jail or prison.

We verified the existence of the above procedures. For example, we reviewed sign-in/sign-out logs for inmates to determine if procedures were followed and required data was recorded. We also reviewed inmate files and found records showing that the centers contacted employers periodically by telephone to verify that inmates were at locations shown on the log sheets.

Generally, we found that the centers complied with the required procedures and monitored the whereabouts of inmates. However, our review was limited to verifying that the required procedures existed and that supporting records were kept. We did not attempt to determine the effectiveness of the procedures or to verify the accuracy of the supporting records. We noted differences in the degree of control exercised over inmates and in the views of center directors concerning the amount of control needed. For example, one center director stated that he generally did not trust the inmates unless he had personal knowledge to the contrary. Conversely, another center director told us that he generally trusted the inmates unless there was evidence that an inmate should not be trusted.

To obtain additional information about the security and supervision of inmates in the centers, we interviewed police and probation officers in selected communities where centers were located. The majority of the officials interviewed expressed little or no concern about the presence of the centers and did not feel that the inmates were creating problems in the community. They stated further that information concerning inmates was available when requested. However, officials in two of the nine locations we visited expressed concerns. At one location the probation officer felt that the center was lax in its efforts to properly account for inmates looking for employment and was too trusting of the residents during the first part of their stay at the center. At another location, police and probations officials expressed concern about the presence in their community of inmates residing at the centers.

Conclusion

On the basis of our limited review, we believe that the Bureau of Prisons' policies for releasing inmates to community treatment centers and the procedures required of the centers to properly supervise the inmates are adequate. We believe that reasonable procedures exist for maintaining appropriate controls over inmates during their stay at the centers. Generally, the centers complied with the required procedures and monitored the whereabouts of inmates; however, differences existed in the degree of control exercised over inmates.

Strict adherence by the centers to the Bureau's policies and procedures will not guarantee that inmates will not be involved in crime, but strict compliance with the Bureau's policies and procedures should reduce potential problems.

Objective, scope, and methodology

Our objective was to review the supervision, security, and control the Bureau of Prisons exercises over inmates in community treatment centers. We performed work at the U.S. Bureau of Prisons Headquarters in Washington, D.C.; each of the five Bureau regional offices; and at community programs managers' offices in Atlanta, Georgia; Cincinnati, Ohio; Dallas, Texas; Louisville, Kentucky; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Richmond, Virginia. We also visited U.S. Probations Service Offices and local police officials in various cities with community treatment centers.

At the Bureau of Prisons' Headquarters and field offices, we interviewed officials and obtained documentation on the policies and procedures for releasing prisoners to community treatment centers and the provisions made for supervision and security of inmates residing at the centers. At the probations offices and police departments we discussed the centers with officials and obtained their opinions on the centers and any problems encountered by the community.

We visited a total of nine community treatment centers throughout the United States and observed the operation of the centers and procedures related to security and supervision of inmates. The nine centers were not randomly selected. However, the centers were from each of the Bureau's five Regional Offices, and we believe this provided representative data because each region directs the operations of the centers in its geographic area.

Our work was performed in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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As requested by your office, we did not obtain agency comments on the matters discussed in this report. We would be pleased to meet with you or your staff should you have any questions.

Sincerely yours,

W. J. Anderson

William J. Anderson
Director