

## Why GAO Did This Study

BOP confines about 7 percent of its 217,000 inmates in segregated housing units for about 23 hours a day. Inmates are held in SHUs, SMUs, and ADX. GAO was asked to review BOP's segregated housing unit practices. This report addresses, among other things: (1) the trends in BOP's segregated housing population, (2) the extent to which BOP centrally monitors how prisons apply segregated housing policies, and (3) the extent to which BOP assessed the impact of segregated housing on institutional safety and inmates. GAO analyzed BOP's policies for compliance and analyzed population trends from fiscal year 2008 through February 2013. GAO visited six federal prisons selected for different segregated housing units and security levels, and reviewed 61 inmate case files and 45 monitoring reports. The results are not generalizable, but provide information on segregated housing units.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that BOP (1) develop ADX-specific monitoring requirements; (2) develop a plan that clarifies how BOP will address documentation concerns GAO identified, through the new software program; (3) ensure that any current study to assess segregated housing also includes reviews of its impact on institutional safety; and (4) assess the impact of long-term segregation. BOP agreed with these recommendations and reported it would take actions to address them.

## BUREAU OF PRISONS

### Improvements Needed in Bureau of Prisons' Monitoring and Evaluation of Impact of Segregated Housing

#### What GAO Found

The overall number of inmates in the Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) three main types of segregated housing units—Special Housing Units (SHU), Special Management Units (SMU), and Administrative Maximum (ADX)—increased at a faster rate than the general inmate population. Inmates may be placed in SHUs for administrative reasons, such as pending transfer to another prison, and for disciplinary reasons, such as violating prison rules; SMUs, a four-phased program in which inmates can progress from more to less restrictive conditions; or ADX, for inmates that require the highest level of security. From fiscal year 2008 through February 2013, the total inmate population in segregated housing units increased approximately 17 percent—from 10,659 to 12,460 inmates. By comparison, the total inmate population in BOP facilities increased by about 6 percent during this period.

BOP has a mechanism to centrally monitor segregated housing, but the degree of monitoring varies by unit type and GAO found incomplete documentation of monitoring at select prisons. BOP headquarters lacks the same degree of oversight of ADX-specific conditions of confinement compared with SHUs and SMUs partly because ADX policies are monitored locally by ADX officials. Developing specific requirements for ADX could provide BOP with additional assurance that inmates held at ADX are afforded their minimum conditions of confinement and procedural protections. According to a selection of monitoring reports and inmate case files, GAO also identified documentation concerns related to conditions of confinement and procedural protections, such as ensuring that inmates received all their meals and exercise as required. According to BOP officials, in December 2012, all SHUs and SMUs began using a new software program that could improve the ability to document conditions of confinement in SHUs and SMUs. However, BOP officials acknowledged the recently implemented software program may not address all the deficiencies GAO identified. Since BOP could not provide evidence that it addressed the documentation deficiencies, GAO cannot determine if it will mitigate the documentation concerns. BOP expects to complete a review of the new software program by approximately September 30, 2013, which should help determine the extent to which the software program addresses documentation deficiencies GAO identified.

BOP has not assessed the impact of segregated housing on institutional safety or the impacts of long-term segregation on inmates. In January 2013, BOP authorized a study of segregated housing; however, it is unclear to what extent the study will assess the extent to which segregated housing units contribute to institutional safety. As of January 2013, BOP is considering conducting mental health case reviews for inmates held in SHUs or ADX for more than 12 continuous months. However, without an assessment of the impact of segregation on institutional safety or study of the long-term impact of segregated housing on inmates, BOP cannot determine the extent to which segregated housing achieves its stated purpose to protect inmates, staff and the general public.