



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
DIVISION

NOVEMBER 8, 1978

B-133223



The Honorable Carl D. Perkins  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Perkins:

In response to your request of June 29, 1978, we have examined allegations concerning the operation of the Federal Correctional Institution in Ashland, Kentucky. The results of our work at Ashland were discussed with your Administrative Assistant on October 5, 1978, and it was agreed that our report would specifically cover the following allegations:

- unwarranted adverse actions and poor performance evaluations of employees,
- low employee morale,
- high personnel turnover under the new warden, and
- unnecessary renovation of the warden's residence.

In investigating the allegations, we were confronted with mostly testimonial evidence--some of it conflicting--and only limited documentation. Since we could not reconstruct the events or find documentary support for much of what we were told, we could not fully substantiate or refute the allegations. However, we identified some inconsistencies in personnel actions and irregularities in the renovation work at the institution.

Since the allegations center on the actions of the new warden, it is important to note that he was assigned in July 1977 to straighten out what the regional director termed a floundering institution with poor sanitation,

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financial management, food service, security and morale. The new warden was chosen for his strong management style and high standards. In this regard, the regional director told us the warden has performed in an outstanding manner and exceeded expectations.

We visited Ashland during August and September 1978 and interviewed past and present employees, reviewed 123 personnel files and other available documentation and inspected the institution's facilities. We also interviewed the Bureau of Prison's Southeast Regional Director and performed work at the Bureau's headquarters in Washington, D.C. The results of our work follow.

ADVERSE ACTIONS AND POOR  
PERFORMANCE RATINGS OF EMPLOYEES

We identified 12 employees involved in adverse actions <sup>1/</sup>, including letters of reprimand, suspensions, terminations, or transfers. Nine of them actually received an adverse action and three resigned while an adverse action was proposed or pending. Examples of the charges included inattention to duties, disrespectful conduct, disorderly conduct, unauthorized absence, and careless workmanship resulting in delayed work production. Although charges against the employees were documented, we received conflicting testimony concerning the merits of some charges.

Adverse actions may be appealed internally or externally to the Federal Employee Appeals Authority (U.S. Civil Service Commission) or the courts. Two cases at Ashland have been appealed internally. In both cases the charges were upheld, but in one case the recommended penalty was reduced. Six other cases were appealed to the Federal Employee Appeals Authority. Of these, four appeals were denied and two are pending.

Concerning unjust performance evaluations, we noted some inconsistencies. For example, several employees with good past ratings either at Ashland or elsewhere within the Bureau, received markedly lower evaluations under the new management. Some of these employees had exemplary

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<sup>1/</sup>An adverse action charge such as a termination is initiated by a department head. The deciding official is normally the warden.

records, including several promotions, quality step increases for work performed, and letters of recommendation. We also noted that in several cases the rater and reviewer differed substantially in their appraisal of the same individual.

When questioned about these, management contended that personnel evaluations are a yard stick relative to time and are subjective in nature. The regional director noted that, although the warden's standards are high, no one was being asked to do anything beyond the scope of their job. The warden told us that some employees were overrated in the past because loose standards were applied.

#### EMPLOYEE MORALE

Overall, we were unable to quantify the employee morale at Ashland. Apparently, the new warden's strict management style (supposedly much different from that of the prior warden) has created some turmoil among the employees. The associate wardens, current department heads, and some of the staff we talked to characterized morale as being the highest ever. They, as well as the majority of the people interviewed, complimented the warden's achievements in the areas of sanitation, security, safety, and inmate accountability.

On the other hand, employees either directly or indirectly associated with the adverse actions or poor performance ratings under the warden classified morale as extremely low and cited examples of instances they perceived as management pressure and harassment. Examples of pressure and harassment included derogatory statements allegedly made by management officials relative to an employee's performance, the allegation that people were forced to write and rewrite memorandums supporting management's position on a controversial situation, and a feeling staff conveyed concerning job security--one mistake here and you're out.

The alleged harassment of staff by management was verbal in nature and occurred on a one-to-one basis. Proving or disproving these allegations is very difficult since they involve interpersonal relationships, and individual personalities and perceptions.

PERSONNEL TURNOVER

We attempted to examine an allegation that personnel turnover greatly increased under the new warden by comparing turnover for the last year of the prior warden's tenure to the first year of the new warden. While we found that turnover had increased, we could not draw conclusions about the causes of the increase.

|               | <u>9/1/76 - 8/30/77</u> | <u>9/1/77 - 8/30/78</u> |
|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Terminations  | 11                      | 11                      |
| Resignations  | 20                      | 34                      |
| Reassignments | 0                       | 5                       |
| Transfers     | 16                      | 28                      |
| Retired       | 11                      | 9                       |
| Other         | 3                       | 1                       |
|               | <u>61</u>               | <u>88</u>               |
|               | --                      | --                      |

Although we reviewed personnel files, available exit interviews and talked with former employees in the Ashland area who wanted to be interviewed, we could not attribute the turnover specifically to the new warden's conduct. Information in the personnel files was often incomplete because officially a person's file is retired to storage in St. Louis 30 days after departure. The institution, out of necessity, only maintained a skeleton personnel folder. The exit interview program is not mandatory and not all employees leaving Ashland FCI are interviewed. Moreover for those employees who are interviewed, management completes the record and the employee does not actually confirm the information recorded.

RENOVATION OF THE WARDEN'S RESIDENCE

It was alleged that expenditures to renovate the warden's residence were excessive--that over \$20,000 was spent for materials and household appliances which were mostly not needed. We identified \$12,460 in expenditures for work performed at the warden's residence but we could not determine the need for the renovation because required semi-annual inspection reports were not prepared.

The normal controls over such projects were not used. We found no indication the institution's Work Programming Subcommittee approved this project although it had that responsibility. This group should have approved a work

order for this project before it was submitted to the regional office for approval and allotment of funds. However, we found no work orders for this project. Further, project records such as the purchase request log and construction progress reports were incomplete.

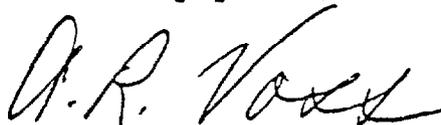
A renovation project for the warden's residence was approved in July 1977 by the Bureau's Southeast regional office in the amount of \$9,900. Of the \$12,460 we identified, about \$9,100 was charged directly to the project account. The remaining \$3,360 was charged to the institution's routine maintenance account. Institution officials told us that routine maintenance was performed on the warden's residence during renovation, but we found little difference in the items charged to the accounts. For example, a refrigerator was charged to one account and a gas range to the other. Paint was charged to both accounts.

We found minor violations of equipment procurement policies including the purchase of unauthorized colored appliances and their procurement from the Sears & Roebuck Company which was not on the approved General Services Administration supplies listing at that time. Also, surplus carpeting was installed upstairs in the living areas without proper regional office approval.

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We discussed the contents of this report with Bureau officials before leaving Ashland and have incorporated their comments in this report. As arranged with you, distribution will be made 4 days after initial release to your office and copies will be available to interested parties. We hope that this information will be of assistance to you.

Sincerely yours,



Allen R. Voss  
Director