

Federal Bureau of Prisons Lieutenant Pleads Guilty to Violating the Civil Rights of an Inmate Resulting in His Death

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A federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) lieutenant pleaded guilty today to violating the civil rights of an inmate by showing deliberate indifference to the inmate's serious medical needs, resulting in his death.

According to court documents, on Jan. 9 and 10, 2021, Michael Anderson, 52, was working in his official capacity as a BOP correctional officer, with a rank of lieutenant, at the Federal Correctional Institution at Petersburg, Virginia. In that capacity, Anderson was responsible for the care of federal inmates. On Jan. 9, 2021, a correctional officer notified Anderson that a 47-year-old inmate, W.W., was experiencing symptoms of an apparent medical emergency and asked the defendant to help W.W. obtain medical care. Anderson personally observed W.W.'s symptoms and stated that he would get medical help for W.W. Anderson nevertheless failed to notify medical staff, obtain a medical assessment, contact the facility's on-call physician or notify any other staff members of W.W.'s condition. The next day, a correctional officer notified Anderson that W.W. had fallen to the ground in his cell. Even with this information, Anderson failed to obtain any assistance for W.W. whatsoever. W.W. then laid on the ground, dead or dying, for over an hour and a half before any correctional or medical staff entered his cell. By the time correctional and medical staff entered the cell, life-saving efforts failed, and W.W. was later pronounced dead.

"Correctional supervisors are responsible for the care and custody of inmates entrusted to their care, particularly those with serious medical needs," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "The Justice Department will continue to hold accountable those correctional officers who deliberately disregard inmates' serious medical needs."

"Despite Anderson's knowledge of the victim's medical condition and his knowledge of BOP policies, he failed to provide potentially life-saving medical care to an inmate in need," said U.S. Attorney Jessica D. Aber for the Eastern District of Virginia. "People have a constitutional right to basic care while incarcerated."

"Anderson's appalling indifference and disregard for his responsibility to provide a humane environment for inmates resulted in the needless loss of life," said Special Agent in Charge Russell W. Cunningham of the Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General Washington Field Office. "Incarcerated individuals should never be denied medical care, and the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General will continue to aggressively investigate anyone who does so."

Sentencing is scheduled for Nov. 28. Anderson faces a maximum penalty of life in prison. Any sentence will be determined by a federal district judge based on the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Assistant Attorney General Clarke, U.S. Attorney Aber and Special Agent in Charge Cunningham made the announcement.

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

Special Litigation Counsel Kathryn E. Gilbert and Trial Attorney Matthew Tannenbaum of the Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Garnett for the Eastern District of Virginia are prosecuting the case.