

## PRESS RELEASE

# One Former Federal Bureau of Prisons Official Sentenced for Federal Civil Rights Violation for Failing to Obtain Medical Care for an Inmate Who Died

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### **She and a Second Official Also Sentenced for Making False Statements in the Federal Investigation**

Former Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) lieutenant Shrona Covington, 49, was sentenced yesterday to 12 months in prison followed by 12 months 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 injuries he sustained over the course of a 30-hour period spanning Jan. 9 and 10, 2021.

Former BOP nurse Tonya Farley, 54, was also 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, Virginia, 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 pleaded guilty for his role in the inmate's death and was sentenced to three years in prison.

"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."

"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."

"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.