

INSIDE OUT

A biweekly briefing on the federal prison system for families, defendants, and advocates **Vol. 1 · No. 8 · Inmate Edition**

Five In-Custody Deaths in Ten Days; Fifth Circuit Narrows Hunter; Communications Access in Focus

This issue covers a two-week window in which the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) — the federal agency that operates the roughly 122 facilities holding people convicted of federal crimes — announced five in-custody deaths and one walkaway from a satellite camp. The deaths span low-, medium-, and high-security institutions across four federal circuits, and the pattern of near-simultaneous notifications is the practical starting point for families trying to understand how the BOP communicates when someone dies in custody.

On the legal side, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals has issued a ruling that substantially narrows the practical reach of the Supreme Court's 2024 decision in *Hunter* — a case that had opened certain sentence-reduction pathways under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). We walk through what the Fifth Circuit's approach means for defendants sentenced in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, and how it compares to other circuits. A separate Fifth Circuit signal on the constitutionality of the felon-in-possession statute (18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1)) is also on the docket.

Also in this issue: reporting on constraints affecting inmate email under BOP's TRULINCS system; the denial of a high-profile compassionate release petition and what its reasoning suggests about the current elderly/medical standard; an update on leadership dynamics at the Department of Justice affecting BOP oversight; and practical guidance on summer visitation and pre-fiscal-year-end compassionate release filings.

THIS WEEK'S LEAD

Five In-Custody Deaths Announced by BOP Between July 26 and August 3

Theme: deaths / custody / family notification

Between July 26 and August 3, 2026, the BOP issued five separate press releases announcing deaths at FCI Coleman Medium (a medium-security men's institution in central Florida), USP Victorville (a high-security men's penitentiary in California's high desert), FCI Forrest City Medium (medium-security, Arkansas), FCI Waseca (a low-security women's institution in Minnesota), and USP Pollock (high-security men's in Louisiana). A separate July 24 release reported a walkaway from the satellite camp at FCI Lompoc II in California — 'walkaway' meaning an unauthorized departure from a minimum-security camp, which typically has no perimeter fence.

BOP's standard practice is to issue a short press release for each in-custody death identifying the decedent, the date and approximate time of death, the facility, and the fact that the FBI and local law enforcement have been notified. The releases do not state a cause of death. Under BOP Program Statement 5553.06 (Escapes/Deaths Notification), the Warden's office is responsible for notifying the next-of-kin designated in the inmate's central file; that notification is supposed to precede any public announcement.

For readers, the practical significance is twofold. First, the volume — five deaths at five different institutions across five states in nine days — means families of currently incarcerated people may see BOP press-release traffic and worry. Confirming whether a loved one is safe is a two-step process: check the BOP inmate locator (bop.gov/inmateloc) for current designation, then call the facility's main switchboard and ask for the Chaplain's office, which handles well-being calls. Second, when a death does occur, families have specific rights under federal regulation and BOP policy to obtain the autopsy report, the inmate's medical records, and access to personal property.

UNDERSTANDING THIS STORY

During incarceration

For currently incarcerated readers: updating your emergency contact and personal-property designation

Two administrative items in your central file directly govern what happens to your family and property if the worst occurs, and both are easily updated through your Unit Team. First, your BP-A0148 Notification of Next of Kin form should reflect the person you actually want the Warden to call in an emergency, with a current phone number. Second, a written designation on file with the Property Officer identifies who receives your personal property. Ask your Correctional Counselor to print the current forms for review; if the information is stale, submit updated forms and keep a copy with your legal papers in your locker.

Separately, ensure that at least one person on your visiting list has a copy of your register number, your designated facility, and the name and number of your Case Manager. Families who have this information avoid days of confusion when reaching the institution.

POLICY & REGULATORY REFERENCES

BOP Program Statement 5553.06 (Escapes/Deaths Notification) governs the sequence and content of notifications following an in-custody death, placing next-of-kin notification ahead of public release. BOP Program Statement 5580.08 governs inmate personal property, including inventory and release upon death. The autopsy is performed under the law of the state in which the facility sits — coroner authority derives from state statute, not federal, which is why families obtain autopsy reports from a county office rather than the BOP.

Medical records are covered by the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552a, and can be released to a personal representative under 45 C.F.R. § 164.502(g) (HIPAA's personal-representative rule); BOP FOIA processing is governed by 28 C.F.R. Part 16. For litigation, the Federal Tort Claims Act (28 U.S.C. § 1346(b) and §§ 2671–2680) is the primary vehicle for damages claims against the United States arising from federal employee conduct; the administrative claim is a jurisdictional prerequisite. The DOJ Office of Inspector General operates under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. app.) and has independent authority to review BOP deaths.

Separately, the Death in Custody Reporting Act (34 U.S.C. § 60105) requires federal reporting of all deaths in law-enforcement custody; DOJ compiles the data, though release lags.

ACTION ITEMS THIS WEEK

- If you cannot reach your loved one and want to confirm safety: search bop.gov/inmateloc by register number, then call the facility switchboard and ask for the Chaplain's Office. Document the call.
- If currently incarcerated: ask your Correctional Counselor for a printed copy of your BP-A0148 (Next of Kin Notification) and your property-designation form, and update both if stale.
- If notified of a death: within the first week, request in writing (to the Warden) the inmate's personal property inventory, the name of the coroner or medical examiner handling the autopsy, and the point of contact in the FOIA office for medical records.
- For attorneys: send a litigation-hold letter to the Warden and BOP General Counsel identifying video, medical, use-of-force, and administrative-remedy records to be preserved.
- File a Standard Form 95 FTCA administrative claim with the BOP within two years of the death if you intend to pursue civil recovery; the agency has six months to respond before suit can be filed.
- Consider parallel referral to the DOJ Office of Inspector General at oig.justice.gov for independent review.

SOURCES

- [Death at FCI Coleman Medium](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons
- [Death at USP Victorville](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons
- [Death at FCI Forrest City Medium](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons
- [Death at FCI Waseca](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons
- [Death at USP Pollock](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons
- [Walkaway from FCI Lompoc's Satellite Camp](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons

DEEP DIVE 2

Fifth Circuit Narrows the Practical Reach of Hunter for Sentence-Reduction Motions

Theme: sentencing / § 3582(c)(2) / Fifth Circuit

In an August 4 decision analyzed by the LISA Newsletter, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals — which covers federal district courts in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi — issued a ruling that substantially limits how the Supreme Court's 2024 Hunter decision applies to motions to reduce sentence under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). Section 3582(c)(2) allows a district court to reduce a sentence when the U.S. Sentencing Commission (USSC) lowers the guideline range that applied at sentencing and makes the amendment retroactive.

Hunter had been understood by many practitioners as opening the door for district courts to consider a broader set of circumstances — including changes in the sentencing landscape and post-sentencing conduct — when deciding whether to grant a § 3582(c)(2) reduction. The Fifth Circuit's opinion reads Hunter more narrowly, restricting the factors a district court may consider and, in the panel's framing, cabining the reduction analysis closer to the mechanical guideline recalculation. LISA (Legal Information Services Associates), which tracks federal sentencing rulings, describes the ruling as materially reducing the practical scope of Hunter within the Fifth Circuit.

For defendants sentenced in Texas, Louisiana, or Mississippi with pending or contemplated § 3582(c)(2) motions — including motions tied to USSC Amendment 821 (the 'zero-point offender' and status-point amendments made retroactive in 2023) — the ruling changes what arguments are likely to succeed. Practitioners in other circuits should watch for a possible circuit split, which could tee the issue up for Supreme Court review.

UNDERSTANDING THIS STORY

During incarceration

If you have a pending § 3582(c)(2) motion in the Fifth Circuit

If your motion has been filed but not yet decided, ask your attorney (or, if pro se, review the docket) whether the government has cited the new decision in any recent filing. The ruling changes the analytical framework district courts must apply, and your motion may benefit from a supplemental filing that reframes arguments to fit the narrower reading.

If your motion has already been denied and the deadline to appeal has not passed (14 days from entry of the order under Fed. R. App. P. 4(b)), the new decision may affect whether appeal is viable. Discuss with counsel; do not let the appeal window close without a decision.

Before incarceration

For those considering a § 3582(c)(2) motion under Amendment 821

Amendment 821, made retroactive by the USSC in August 2023, reduced criminal-history impact for two categories: 'status points' (extra criminal-history points for committing the offense while under a criminal-justice sentence) and 'zero-point offenders' (a two-level reduction for defendants with no criminal-history points who meet additional criteria in USSG § 4C1.1). Eligibility is calculated by the BOP's Designation and Sentence Computation Center (DSCC) and by the sentencing court.

Before filing, obtain your Presentence Investigation Report (PSR) — through your former defense counsel or by motion to the sentencing court — and confirm the criminal-history calculation. The Federal Public Defender's office in the sentencing district often screens Amendment 821 cases; call and ask if they can review yours.

POLICY & REGULATORY REFERENCES

18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) authorizes a district court, on motion of the defendant or the Director of the BOP, or on the court's own motion, to reduce a term of imprisonment when the applicable guideline range has been lowered by the Sentencing Commission and the reduction is consistent with USSG § 1B1.10 (the Commission's policy statement on retroactive amendments). Section 1B1.10(a)(2) limits which amendments are eligible for retroactive application — currently listed in § 1B1.10(d).

USSC Amendment 821, Parts A and B, became retroactive effective February 1, 2024, per the Commission's August 2023 vote. Part A revised the status-point rule in USSG § 4A1.1(e); Part B added § 4C1.1 (the zero-point offender adjustment).

Hunter v. United States (2024) addressed the scope of factors a district court may consider in ruling on a § 3582(c)(2) motion. Circuits have divided on how broadly to read Hunter; the LISA Newsletter's August 4, 2026, update tracks the Fifth Circuit's narrower reading. The Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure govern the 14-day criminal appeal window (Rule 4(b)).

ACTION ITEMS THIS WEEK

- Obtain your PSR and confirm your criminal-history calculation and offense-level scoring before filing any § 3582(c)(2) motion. Request through prior counsel or by motion to the sentencing court.
- If you have a pending § 3582(c)(2) motion in the Fifth Circuit: contact counsel about whether a supplemental filing addressing the new decision is warranted.
- If your § 3582(c)(2) motion was recently denied in the Fifth Circuit: calendar the 14-day appeal deadline under Fed. R. App. P. 4(b) and consult counsel about viability.
- Call the Federal Public Defender in your sentencing district and ask whether their Amendment 821 screening project can review your case.
- Track LISA Newsletter (lisa-legalinfo.com) for developments in other circuits that may indicate a maturing split and Supreme Court review potential.

SOURCES

- 5th Circuit Emasculates SCOTUS Hunter Decision – Update for August 4, 2026 — LISA Newsletter (Legal Information Services Associates)

Systemic Issues Inside Out Is Watching

Patterns the publication is tracking this week from source material and court filings. Each entry includes factual description of the pattern and concrete guidance for readers affected by it.

Fifth Circuit constitutional scrutiny of 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1)

PATTERN

In addition to the Hunter narrowing described above, the Fifth Circuit has signaled continued willingness to entertain Second Amendment challenges to the federal felon-in-possession statute, 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1), following the framework set out by the Supreme Court in *Bruen* (2022) and *Rahimi* (2024). LISA Newsletter's July 27 update tracks a recent Fifth Circuit signal of a fresh attack on the statute's constitutionality as applied to certain defendants.

This is part of a multi-circuit landscape in which some appellate courts have upheld § 922(g)(1) categorically while others (notably the Third Circuit in *Range*) have found it unconstitutional as applied to specific defendants with non-violent underlying convictions. The doctrine is unsettled, and district courts are seeing motions to dismiss indictments and § 2255 motions premised on these arguments.

WHAT FAMILIES AND DEFENDANTS CAN DO

Defendants currently charged under § 922(g)(1) in the Fifth Circuit — or convicted and within the one-year window for a first § 2255 motion under 28 U.S.C. § 2255(f) — should raise the constitutional issue with counsel promptly. The specific facts of the prior felony (violent vs. non-violent, age of conviction, completion of sentence) matter to the as-applied analysis. For those outside the § 2255 window, a change in decisional law can, in narrow circumstances, restart the clock under § 2255(f)(3) if the Supreme Court recognizes a new right and makes it retroactive — track LISA and the Supreme Court's docket.

SOURCES

- 5th Circuit Signals Fresh Attack on Felon-In-Possession Constitutionality – Update for July 27, 2026 — LISA Newsletter (Legal Information Services Associates)

In-custody deaths across security levels and regions

PATTERN

The five death notifications issued between July 26 and August 3 span low- (Waseca), medium- (Coleman, Forrest City), and high-security (Victorville, Pollock) institutions across the Southeast, South Central, North Central, and Western regions. BOP's per-incident press-release format does not include cause of death, so

the notifications alone do not establish a common pattern. What they do establish is a testable question for oversight: whether the deaths reflect discrete circumstances at each facility or a common systemic factor (medical staffing, contraband, heat, violence).

The DOJ Office of Inspector General has, in prior reports, examined clusters of in-custody deaths and identified recurring themes including delayed medical response, staffing shortages, and lapses in suicide-watch protocols.

WHAT FAMILIES AND DEFENDANTS CAN DO

Families of currently incarcerated people at any of the five named facilities who have specific concerns about medical care, safety, or conditions can (1) document those concerns in dated notes, (2) request the inmate initiate the administrative-remedy process (BP-8 informal, BP-9 institutional, BP-10 regional, BP-11 central office) under 28 C.F.R. §§ 542.10–.19 for any specific incident, and (3) submit concerns directly to the DOJ Office of Inspector General at oig.justice.gov, which accepts confidential complaints. For deaths already announced, the OIG hotline is the appropriate escalation path for independent review.

SOURCES

- [Death at FCI Coleman Medium](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons
- [Death at USP Victorville](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons
- [Death at FCI Forrest City Medium](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons
- [Death at FCI Waseca](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons
- [Death at USP Pollock](#) — Federal Bureau of Prisons

BOP Operations

The Hidden Cost Of Cutting Off Email For People In Federal Prison

Forbes · 2026-08-03

TRULINCS is the BOP's inmate email system, which allows monitored electronic messaging between inmates and pre-approved contacts (roughly 30 cents per message, no attachments). Forbes reports on constraints affecting TRULINCS access at certain institutions and the resulting reliance on more expensive phone minutes and paper mail. For families: if a loved one's TRULINCS is restricted or offline at their facility, the fallback is postal mail to the institution's designated address (available on each facility's bop.gov page) and, where authorized, scheduled phone calls.

Walkaway from FCI Lompoc's Satellite Camp

Federal Bureau of Prisons · 2026-07-24

A walkaway from a satellite camp (minimum-security, no perimeter fence) is charged as escape under 18 U.S.C. § 751(a), which carries up to five years consecutive to any existing sentence. It also results in an immediate redesignation to a higher-security facility upon apprehension and forfeiture of any accrued First Step Act Earned Time Credits (FSA ETCs) related to the escape conduct. Families with a loved one at a camp should discuss the practical consequences of walkaway with them explicitly — reentry gains from camp placement are substantial.

California corrections officer and wife plead guilty to smuggling contraband to inmate

KTLA · 2026-08-07

Contraband introduction by staff is prosecuted federally under 18 U.S.C. § 1791, with penalties escalating by contraband type (narcotics, weapons, phones, currency). For inmates and families, the practical significance is that any facility contraband investigation typically triggers increased shakedowns, mail scrutiny, and visitation restrictions in the following weeks — factors to keep in mind when scheduling summer visits.

BOP Supports International Corrections Advancement

Federal Bureau of Prisons · 2026-08-05

A BOP news item on international corrections engagement. No direct operational effect on U.S. facility populations.

Sentencing & Courts

Federal judge denies Madoff compassionate release from prison

JNS.org · 2026-08-04

Compassionate release under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A)(i) requires 'extraordinary and compelling reasons' as defined by USSG § 1B1.13, plus consideration of the § 3553(a) sentencing factors and public safety. In high-profile denials, courts frequently rest the ruling on the § 3553(a) analysis — offense seriousness and just punishment — rather than the medical or age threshold. The practical takeaway for other petitioners: even a medically qualifying record is not sufficient if the court finds the § 3553(a) balance weighs against release. Build the release-plan and post-conviction-conduct record accordingly.

Seize My Airplane? I'll Drink to That – Update for July 30, 2026

LISA Newsletter (Legal Information Services Associates) · 2026-07-30

LISA's July 30 update addresses federal civil forfeiture practice, an area governed principally by 18 U.S.C. § 981 (civil) and § 982 (criminal), 21 U.S.C. § 853, and the procedural rules of the Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform Act of 2000 (CAFRA). Defendants facing property seizure alongside a federal indictment should ensure counsel is tracking both the criminal and forfeiture dockets, since deadlines to file claims are separate and short. Consult LISA's post and primary CAFRA sources for the specific procedural framework.

Policy & Legislation

Todd Blanche's New Grip on the Federal Prison System

The Bulwark · 2026-07-30

Reporting on the Deputy Attorney General's expanded role in BOP oversight. The BOP sits within the Department of Justice; the Director of the BOP reports to the Deputy Attorney General. Shifts in DOJ-level oversight can affect policy-priority items such as First Step Act implementation, home-confinement placement, and halfway-house contracting. Practical effect on individual cases is generally indirect and lagged.

The Attorney General as Prison Executive

Cato Institute · 2026-08-03

A Cato Institute analysis of the Attorney General's statutory authority over the federal prison system. Under 18 U.S.C. § 4001, the AG has broad delegated authority over federal detention; the piece examines how that authority has been exercised in recent policy shifts. Useful background reading for advocates and attorneys tracking BOP policy direction.

Why Is Anyone Even Surprised? – Update for July 28, 2026

LISA Newsletter (Legal Information Services Associates) · 2026-07-28

LISA's July 28 post covers the status of previously reported executive-branch consideration of broad clemency action. As of the post's date, no such action has issued. Practitioners and families should not delay filing pending motions, § 2255 petitions, or compassionate release requests in reliance on hypothetical executive action; clemency and statutory relief are separate tracks with different timelines and standards.

BOP Officers Sue EEOC Over Apparent Freeze in Federal Class Actions

FEDagent · 2026-08-06

BOP correctional officers have filed suit against the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission over the reported pause in federal-sector class-action processing. Direct effect on incarcerated people is limited, but staffing-related litigation is worth tracking because staffing shortages at BOP facilities affect programming, medical response times, and lockdown frequency.

20 Years of the Adam Walsh Act

Federal Bureau of Prisons · 2026-07-27

BOP commentary marking the anniversary of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 (34 U.S.C. § 20901 et seq.), which established federal sex-offender registration and civil-commitment authority under 18 U.S.C. § 4248. For affected inmates and families, the operational touchpoints remain SORNA registration requirements upon release and, in narrow circumstances, civil commitment referral before release; both are worth confirming with counsel well in advance of a projected release date.

Reentry

'First in the nation' intensive reentry program introduced at Red Onion supermax prison

Cardinal News · 2026-08-06

A Virginia state facility (not BOP) has launched an intensive reentry program at a supermax institution. For federal readers, the direct applicability is limited, but the program's design elements — structured programming inside restrictive housing paired with graduated release — mirror concepts being discussed in federal First Step Act reentry planning. Advocacy organizations may find the program useful as a comparison model.

VADOC launches new re-entry program for inmates at Red Onion State Prison

Augusta Free Press · 2026-08-05

Additional coverage of the same Virginia state program. Included for readers tracking state-level reentry program design.

PRACTICAL TIP

Filing compassionate release before the September 30 fiscal-year close

The federal fiscal year ends September 30. While a district judge can rule on a compassionate release motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A) at any point, U.S. Attorney's Offices, the BOP, and probation offices experience predictable end-of-fiscal-year workload compression. Motions filed after mid-August frequently sit longer for response and ruling. If you are contemplating a compassionate release petition, the practical steps this month are: (1) exhaust administrative remedies by submitting a written request to the Warden for a BOP-initiated motion under 28 C.F.R. § 571.61, which starts the 30-day clock after which a defendant may file directly; (2) gather current medical records via the inmate's Health Services request-for-records process; and (3) build the release-plan documentation — housing, employment or family support, medical continuity — because courts weigh the release plan heavily in the § 3553(a) analysis, as recent high-profile denials illustrate.

Summer visitation logistics: with schools out and families traveling, weekend visiting rooms are at capacity at many facilities. Confirm the institution's current visiting schedule on its bop.gov page (visiting hours and days vary by facility and can shift with staffing), call ahead the week of the visit, and bring backup identification. Visitors denied at the gate cannot typically be rescheduled the same day.

Inside Out returns in two weeks with continued coverage of in-custody notifications, sentencing developments, and First Step Act implementation. Readers who need further assistance navigating a specific federal-prison matter can reach DrPrison.org at help@drprison.org.

NEED FURTHER ASSISTANCE?

Readers navigating a specific federal-prison matter — a designation question, a halfway house issue, an administrative remedy, a compassionate release motion — can reach DrPrison.org directly at help@drprison.org. Inside Out is a free service; no subscription required.

Inside Out is published biweekly by DrPrison.org. Founded by Dr. Patrick Fisher, PhD, LPC, NCC. Editorial contributions from lived-experience consultants including Ken Gaughan.

This briefing is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. For legal questions consult a qualified federal criminal defense attorney. For crisis support in the United States, call or text 988.

<https://drprison.org/newsletter>