



NEWS RELEASE

From New York State Inspector General
Catherine Leahy Scott

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INVESTIGATION FINDS CHRONIC COMPLACENCY AND SYSTEMIC FAILURES OF SECURITY PROCEDURES AT CLINTON CORRECTIONAL FACILITY LED TO THE ESCAPE OF TWO MURDERERS

Any One Of More Than 400 Compulsory Checks In Months Leading To Escape Should Have Foiled The Convicts' Plans; Pre Escape Inspection Of Richard Matt's Cell Failed To Find The 18-By-14 Inch Hole Cut In His Cell's Wall

Recommendations Include Strict Compliance And Monitoring Of Security Procedures And Expanded Use Of Cameras And Other Electronic Detection And Monitoring Systems; Restructuring Of The Prison System's Internal Affairs Division; And Creation Of An Inspector General Audit Team To Monitor Security Procedures At All State Prisons

ALBANY – New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott today released an investigative report that found chronic complacency, complicit employees and myriad failures of even the most basic security procedures at the Clinton Correctional Facility that led to the June 6, 2015 escape of convicted murderers David Sweat and Richard Matt. The [report](#) details the actions, or lack thereof, of the inmates, prison staff, management and officials at the State Department of Corrections and Community Services (DOCCS) that contributed to the escape, and provides recommendations to prevent such an event from ever occurring again.

The report culminates an investigation that included sworn testimony from more than 170 witnesses and the review of tens of thousands of document pages. The investigation began shortly after the escape under the direction of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo “to conduct a thorough investigation to determine all factors potentially involved in the escape” and “recommend any potential reforms and best practices to prevent future incidents.”

Inspector General Leahy Scott’s investigation found the escape occurred in a prison where lapses in basic security functions were longstanding. These included the failure by officers assigned to the front gate to search employees’ bags entering the prison as required; night counts of inmates that were conducted negligently or not at all; inadequate cell searches; and poor supervision of inmates and employees by security staff and civilian managers in the prison tailor shop, among other factors. In sum, the investigation found that longstanding, systemic failures in management and oversight by DOCCS enabled two convicted murderers to meticulously orchestrate their escape from a maximum security facility almost in plain sight.

“The extent of complacency and failure to adhere to the most basic security standards uncovered by my investigation was egregious and inexcusable,” **said Inspector General Leahy Scott**. “These systemic

deficiencies led to the escape of two convicted murderers, striking fear in communities and placing brave law enforcement personnel at risk, at a high cost to the state. DOCCS has cooperated with my office to implement critical reforms. I will dedicate resources specifically to ensure the integrity of these reforms at Clinton, as well as ensuring adherence to best practices across all prison facilities in the State. I also look forward to continuing to work with DOCCS to ensure the implementation of policies and procedures in an effort to safeguard those who live or work in our prison system.”

The Inspector General’s investigation was conducted in consultation with Michael P. Jacobson, a widely recognized criminal justice scholar and former corrections executive. Jacobson served as Commissioner of the New York City Department of Probation from 1992 to 1996 and as Commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction from 1995 to 1998. From 2005 to 2013 he was president and director of the Vera Institute of Justice and since 2013 has been professor of sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) and executive director of the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance. The Inspector General also consulted current corrections officials from across the country on security issues directly relevant to deficiencies identified at Clinton.

“The Inspector General’s thorough investigation bore deeply into systemic issues of complacency and a lack of adherence to the most basic security procedures at Clinton, uncovering the failings that led to the escape. In working with the Inspector General and consulting with national experts, I am confident that the Inspector General’s recommendations will lay the groundwork for state of the art reforms to the New York State correctional system,” **said Jacobson.**

The escape led to a three-week manhunt throughout New York’s northernmost counties, paralyzing many communities throughout the region, and involved as many as 1,300 law enforcement personnel costing \$22.8 million in State law enforcement overtime alone. Matt was shot and killed 20 days after the escape and Sweat was shot and captured two days later. Prison civilian employee Joyce Mitchell, who ran the tailor shop both inmates worked in and had improper sexual relationships with each, was charged and convicted with providing Matt and Sweat with the hacksaw blades and other tools used in the escape. Clinton Corrections Officer Gene Palmer was charged and convicted with exchanging contraband that facilitated the escape. Based on the investigation, DOCCS has pursued and continues to pursue discipline of numerous employees implicated in the investigation. Many of these employees have already resigned or have been terminated.

Among the findings detailed in the report:

- Night counts were grossly inadequate or, in many instances, almost certainly not conducted at all. Over the course of approximately 85 nights that Sweat was working in the tunnels under the prison, more than 400 inmate bed checks should have occurred, any one of which, if conducted properly, would have detected Sweat’s absence and instantly foiled the escape plot.
- Clinton’s program of unannounced cell searches, essential to controlling inmate contraband, was deeply flawed. In fact, a documented search of Matt’s cell on March 21, 2015 failed to detect the 18½-inch-by-14½-inch hole in the rear wall of his 48-square-foot cell.
- Front gate officers failed to adequately screen employees entering and leaving the prison despite explicit policies requiring it.
- Monitoring and inspection programs by Clinton management and DOCCS central office failed to detect any of the security deficiencies that contributed to the escape.
- Officers failed to properly conduct at least 15 required weekly inspections of “cell integrity” to include examination of “bars, floors, vents, walls, and rear of cell from the catwalks.” These inspections, if performed as required, would have revealed the breaches in the walls of Sweat’s and Matt’s cells.
- Failure of the DOCCS internal affairs division, the Office of Special Investigations, to uncover an inappropriate relationship between Mitchell and Sweat despite documented allegations to that effect.

The Inspector General's investigation found that multiple breakdowns in Clinton security operations and DOCCS oversight contributed to the escape. To correct these failures, many changes were necessary. Of urgent importance, Clinton Correctional Facility management must ensure that fundamental security requirements are met. These requirements include effective front gate screening of all employees; diligent night counts to ensure the presence of inmates; thorough and more frequent searches of cells, catwalks, and tunnels to uncover contraband and evidence of escape planning; and strict enforcement of policy prohibiting improper interaction of staff and inmates in the tailor shops and elsewhere. DOCCS also must significantly expand the use of cameras and other electronic detection and monitoring systems. DOCCS has cooperated with the Inspector General and has implemented or is implementing the Inspector General's recommendations.

Inspector General Leahy Scott is also creating a specialized team within her office to independently audit and monitor adherence to statewide and facility specific operations policies and procedures across all correctional facilities in the State.

A copy of the report may be viewed by clicking [HERE](#)
An audio file of the Inspector General's remarks is available [HERE](#)

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