

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, December 1, 2011

Justice Department Opens Investigations into Two Western Pennsylvania State Correctional Institutions

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department announced today that it is opening civil investigations into two state correctional institutions (SCI) in Western Pennsylvania. In accordance with the pattern or practice provision of the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA), the department will investigate allegations that SCI Pittsburgh failed to adequately protect prisoners from harm, including from prisoner-on-prisoner and officer-on-prisoner violence and sexual violence, in violation of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In addition, the department will look into whether SCI Pittsburgh officers systematically targeted prisoners for violence and other abuse based on the prisoners' race, sexual orientation, gender identity or other status, in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The department will also investigate allegations that SCI Cresson provided inadequate mental health care to prisoners who have mental illness, failed to adequately protect such prisoners from harm, and subjected them to excessively prolonged periods of isolation, in violation of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The Justice Department will seek to determine whether there is a pattern or practice of violations of the Constitution by officers or staff at SCI Cresson and SCI Pittsburgh. During the course of the investigation, the Justice Department will consider all relevant information. The investigation will include visits to the facilities, a review of records, interviews with corrections officials, prisoners and other witnesses, including family and community members, and advocates. The Justice Department has taken similar steps involving a variety of state and local correctional facilities, both large and small.

Starting on Dec. 2, 2011, the department will be able to receive additional information from community members via email at pennsylvaniaprisoners.community@usdoj.gov

Today's announcement is separate from any potential federal criminal investigation involving these facilities.

The Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, Special Litigation Section and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Pennsylvania are jointly investigating this matter.

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Civil Rights Division

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