

Testimony reveals flaws in governor's DOC report

Last week, Gov. Jay Inslee released a report about the management problems at the Department of Corrections that led it to release thousands of prisoners before their sentences were finished. Tragic results include the deaths of at least two innocent people, authorities say.

The governor's narrowly-focused report pins much of the blame on middle managers — even those who recognized the problem years ago and repeatedly tried to flag it to upper managers' attention. Senior agency officials somehow escape blame, except in the most general sense.

- **The report downplays the role played by Bernie Warner**, corrections secretary during most of Inslee's term — *the top manager under the governor's direct supervision.*
- **It downplays the effect of an upper-management decision** to prioritize a troubled computer "risk-assessment" project at the expense of maintenance and fixes to faulty software.
- **The report's conclusions are disputed** by those who have testified before the Senate Law and Justice Committee. Some say their remarks were mischaracterized or presented inaccurately.

The report claims: **No one suggests Warner's management style and decisions was a contributing factor.**

"No one who had involvement with this particular problem with whom we have spoken suggested that this was a cause for either the original error or its perpetuation over the years." (Governor's report, p. 48)

Three witnesses contradicted the statement in Monday's hearing before the Senate Law and Justice Committee:

- **Kit Bail, former Chief information officer**, said Warner's management style and overemphasis on the "Strong-R/Advance Corrections" project caused top IT officials to quit — something she told the governor's investigators.
- **Denise Doty, former assistant secretary**, said Warner's decisions reordered the priorities of the IT department and created the climate where the mistake could occur. She said she spoke about the matter at length with the governor's investigators.
- **Corrections Secretary Dan Pacholke** drew a direct connection: "I think Mr. Warner did several things to set the context for which this error could occur and go undetected for some time."

The report claims: **Middle managers are responsible for delaying a software fix 16 times.**

"[IT Business Manager] David Dunnington was primarily responsible for repeatedly delaying this project. He was unable to explain the delays, at least in part because he failed to make any record of the reasons for the delays." (Governor's report, p.3)

- Testimony suggests the orders came from a higher level. Pacholke testified: "There has been a lot of discussion or relevance placed in the report on the fact that he downgraded the priority of this IT fix. Well, he can show you in writing where he was directed to downgrade all enhancements to a Level 3 by a Deputy CIO. So he was complying with a directive given to him in writing. He didn't make that decision independently. That's one example. And he certainly has other material to suggest there were other areas like that -- where he was, for the most part, following directives that were given him by more senior staff."

As the governor's office defends the actions of agency upper managers, two conclusions can be drawn:

- **There's more to the story.**
- **The Senate's independent investigation offers a critical check and balance.**