

NYC federal jails are run by ‘morons,’ says judge after inmate describes horrors

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New York City’s federal jails are run by “morons,” a furious judge declared at a recent sentencing, saying the U.S. Attorney General himself should be aware of the “disgusting, inhuman” conditions at the lockups.

Manhattan Federal Judge Colleen McMahon said incompetence by the Justice Department and its Bureau of Prisons made it impossible to impose a fair sentence on Tiffany Days, 40, convicted in a drug-dealing conspiracy case in the Highbridge section of the Bronx.

The judge’s outrage came after listening to Days, accused of operating a drug stash house and gun possession, give [disturbing accounts](#) of life inside the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan and its sister institution, the Metropolitan Detention Center, in Brooklyn.

“The single thing in the five years that I was chief judge of this court that made me the craziest was my complete and utter inability to do anything meaningful about the conditions at the MCC, especially at the MCC and the MDC, two federal correctional facilities located in the City of New York that are run by morons, which wardens cycle (through) repeatedly, never staying for longer than a few months or even a year,” [McMahon said](#) at the April 29 sentencing.



Judge Colleen McMahon (Bachrach / Southern District of New York) Days described shocking conditions at the MCC, which has reeled from one crisis to the next since Jeffrey Epstein's suicide in August 2019.

Two correctional officers have pleaded not guilty to sleeping on the job and surfing the internet the night of Epstein's hanging — a case that has outraged the MCC rank and file. The Daily News previously reported that Epstein openly talked of suicide at the jail and was met with indifference. [IN HER OWN WORDS: Excerpts from Judge Colleen McMahon »](#)

In February 2020 inmates were put under extreme lockdown after a gun was smuggled into the jail — an episode that still has not led to any criminal charges. That emergency was followed by the coronavirus pandemic, which hit prison populations hard around the country. Finally, the MCC warden [retired in January](#). The jail is now on its third interim warden.



The Metropolitan Correctional Center in downtown Manhattan. (Luiz C. Ribeiro/for New York Daily News)

MDC's reputation is not much better. The jail grabbed headlines in January 2019 for a week-long [power failure](#) that left inmates freezing in cells during the coldest days of the year. It's most high-profile inmate, accused Epstein madam Ghislaine Maxwell, is currently waging an all-out legal battle with MDC administrators. She says she's being held in conditions akin to torture and that staff shine a light into her cell every 15 minutes, preventing her from getting a good night's sleep. The government insists the flashlight checkups are necessary for Maxwell's own safety — but that she cannot have an eye-mask because it is contraband.

The Bureau of Prisons even confounds the prosecutors who send a steady stream of inmates to its facilities. Just last week, the agency released former Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver on furlough to home confinement after he'd served less than a year of a 6 1/2-year sentence — over the adamant objections of prosecutors. Two days later the agency [reversed itself](#), ordering Silver, 77, return to Otisville prison in Orange County. Silver's supporters said his health had severely deteriorated behind bars — he arrived at his Lower East Side apartment in a wheelchair.



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Days' complaints about disgusting [conditions](#) are echoed by inmates and defense attorneys who have spoken to The News for nearly two years. The complaints took on new urgency during the pandemic, when access to lawyers and family have been severely restricted.



An American Flag is seen flying at half staff outside the Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York. (Luiz C. Ribeiro / for New York D/New York Daily News)

Judge McMahon sentenced Days to the mandatory minimum of five years, lamenting that her hands were tied, and said Attorney General Merrick Garland and other top officials should be made aware of what is going on.

“I wish that the Attorney General, whoever, head of the Bureau of Prisons and the leader of the Congress, would have heard that presentation,” McMahan said.

[IN HER OWN WORDS: Tiffany Days describes the conditions at the Metropolitan Correctional Center »](#)

The Bureau of Prisons noted that its facilities are accredited by associations that review compliance with sanitation, hygiene and health care standards.

“The Bureau of Prisons takes seriously our duty to protect the individuals entrusted in our custody, as well as maintain the safety of correctional staff and the community,” the agency said.



The Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, New York. (Mark Lennihan/AP)