



U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General

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Audit of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Efforts to Place Inmates Close to Home

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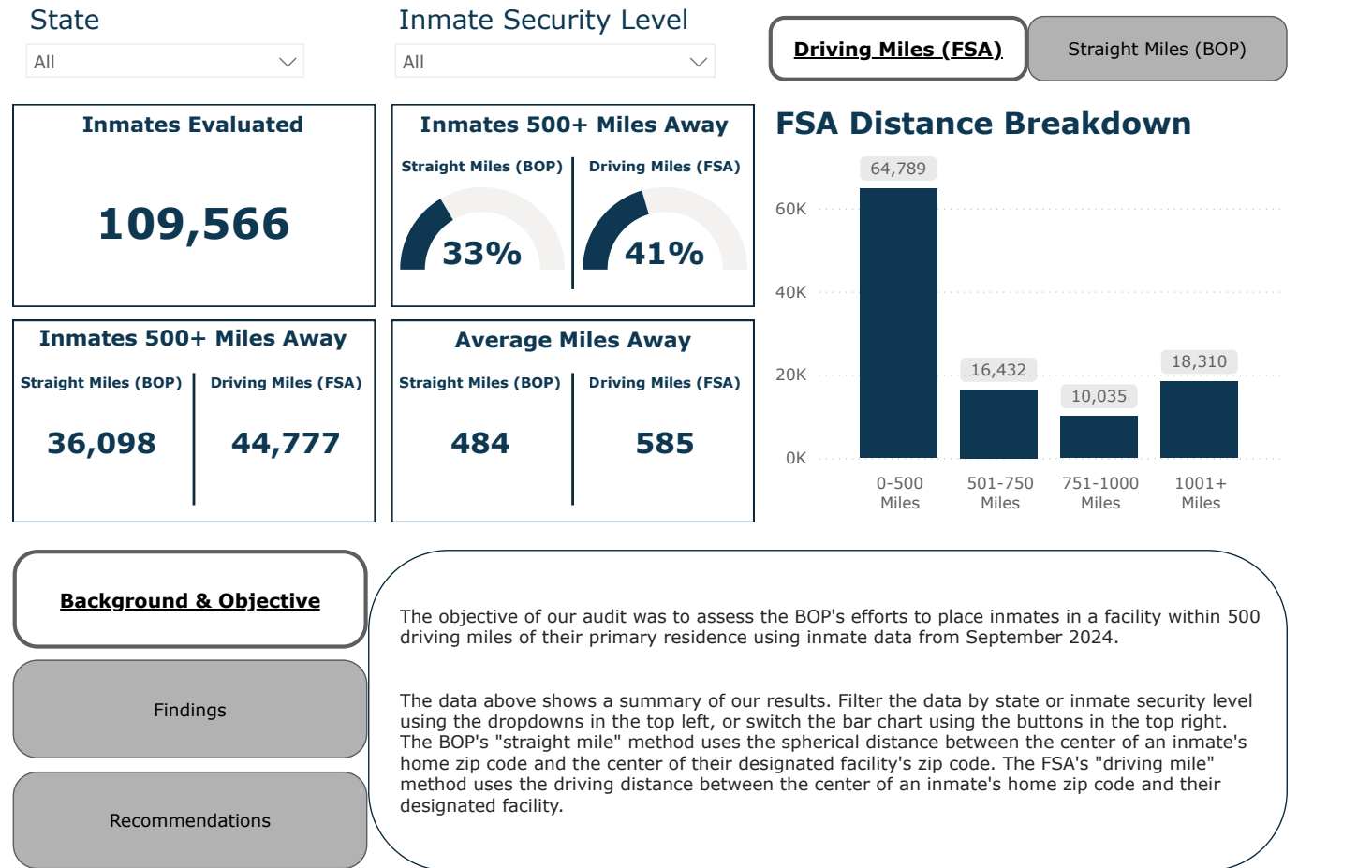
On December 21, 2018, President Trump signed into law the First Step Act (FSA) to improve criminal justice outcomes and reduce the size of the federal prison population while maintaining public safety. One provision in the FSA amends 18 U.S.C. § 3621(b), requiring the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to place inmates in facilities as close to their primary residence as possible, and to the extent practicable, within “500 driving miles.” Placing inmates close to home during incarceration reduces recidivism, eases the harm to family members separated from their loved ones, and helps strengthen family ties. The objective of this audit was to assess the BOP’s compliance with the FSA confinement location requirement. Our audit scope covered inmates in BOP custody on September 28, 2024.

BOP’s inmate placement data showed that 36,098, or 33 percent, of the inmates we evaluated were over 500 miles from their release residence on September 28, 2024. However, we found that the BOP used a straight-line, or “as the crow flies” calculation instead of driving miles, as required by the FSA. This resulted in an undercalculation for the inmates evaluated of approximately 8 percent, affecting over 8,600 inmates, as shown in the interactive dashboard below. Read more about the data and our methodology [here](#).

Inmates in BOP Custody in the Contiguous United States on September 28, 2024

When Placing Inmates, BOP Considers Many Factors, Such As:

- Bed Availability
- Inmate Security Level
- Inmate Program Needs
- Inmate Faith-Based Needs
- Inmate Medical and Mental Health Needs
- Recommendations of the Sentencing Court
- Other Security Concerns
- Inmate Discipline History
- Separation From Other Inmates
- Inmates Requiring Immigration Hearings
- Location of Family / Support Network Outside of Inmate's Legal Address



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The FSA also required that the U.S. Attorney General report to Congress from 2020 to 2025 on the progress made under the FSA, and the reports include the number of inmates housed more than 500 miles from their release residence. However, the information provided to Congress did not reflect driving miles as required by the FSA, because the BOP's mileage calculations were based on a straight-line distance method.

Additionally, we reviewed a sample of 100 BOP inmates, which included inmates placed both more and less than 500 miles from their residence, to determine if their placements were sufficiently supported. For 26 percent of our sample, we were

unable to determine the reason the inmates were placed at their designated facility, particularly when there were comparable facilities closer to the inmate’s residence. Lastly, our review of the BOP’s data identified inaccurate and inconsistent inmate address information, compromising BOP’s ability to calculate distances accurately. Our report contains three recommendations to improve BOP’s inmate placement efforts.

OIG Audit Approach

BOP’s Placement Process

Finding 1: BOP's Mileage Methodology	Finding 2: BOP's Inmate Placement Decision Support	Finding 3: BOP's Process for Address Standardization and Verification	Conclusion and Recommendations
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We found that, on September 28, 2024, approximately 41 percent of the BOP inmate population we evaluated were housed more than 500 driving miles from their primary residence.¹

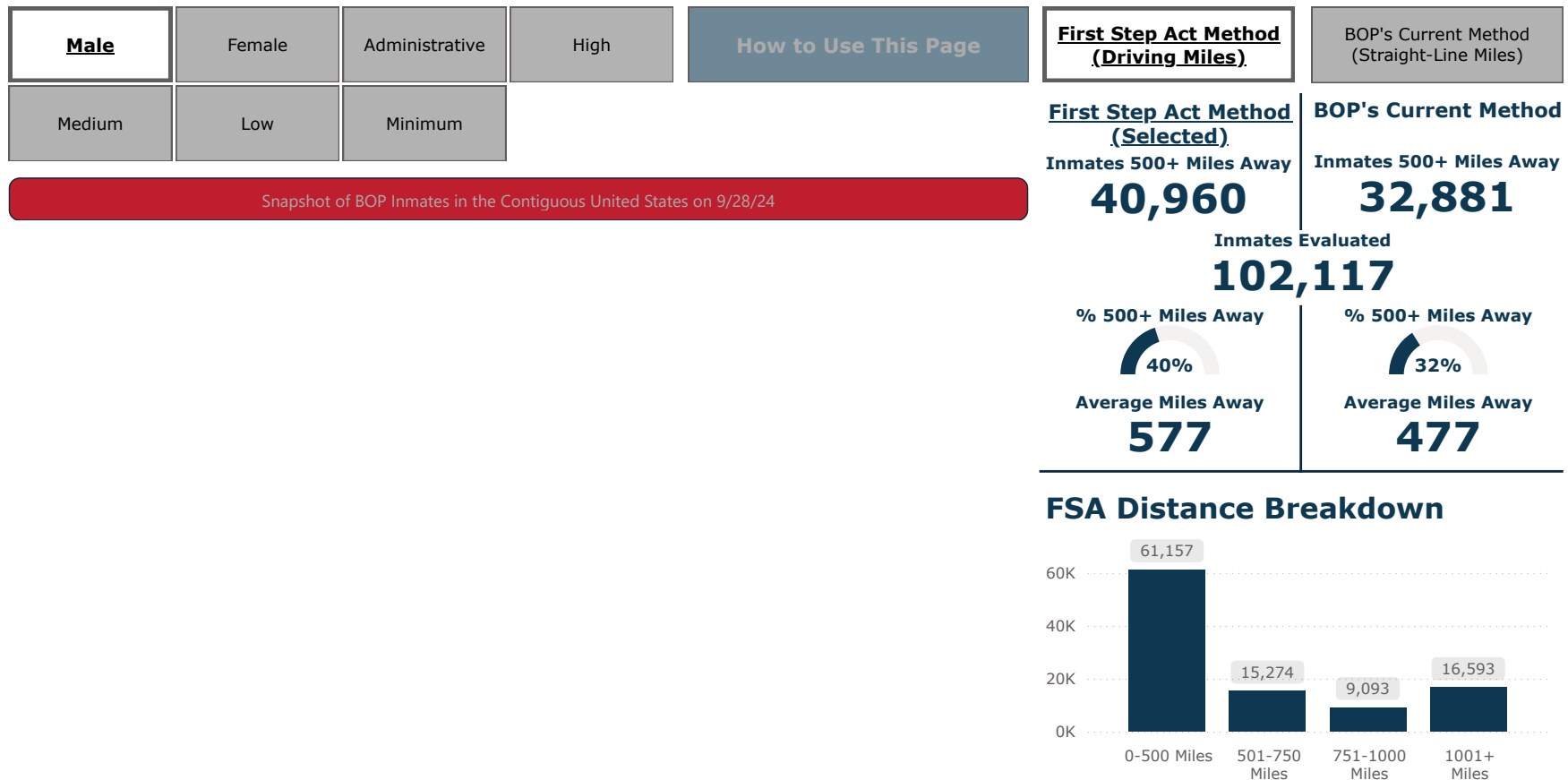
Inmates enter, exit, and transfer within BOP continuously, and the BOP must consider multiple factors when placing, or “designating” an inmate to a facility. These factors include bed availability, security level, program needs, faith-based requests, sentencing court recommendations, and other BOP security concerns. The availability of medical and mental health care services at facilities also affects placement. The BOP classifies inmates into four care levels and places them in facilities that meet their medical and mental health needs. Inmates classified at lower care levels have lesser medical and mental health needs than inmates classified at higher care levels.² As the need for higher levels of care increases, the number of facilities that can meet that need decreases, limiting options closer to inmates’ residences, as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1
Inmate Care Level Data on September 28, 2024

		FSA Method (Driving Miles)	
Description	Inmates Evaluated³	# 500+ Miles Away	% 500+ Miles Away
Medical Health			
Care Level 1	72,725	29,208	40%
Care Level 2	33,268	13,590	41%
Care Level 3	2,427	1,228	51%
Care Level 4	1,143	751	66%
Mental Health			
Care Level 1	104,771	42,230	40%
Care Level 2	4,110	2,094	51%
Care Level 3	601	389	65%
Care Level 4	81	64	79%

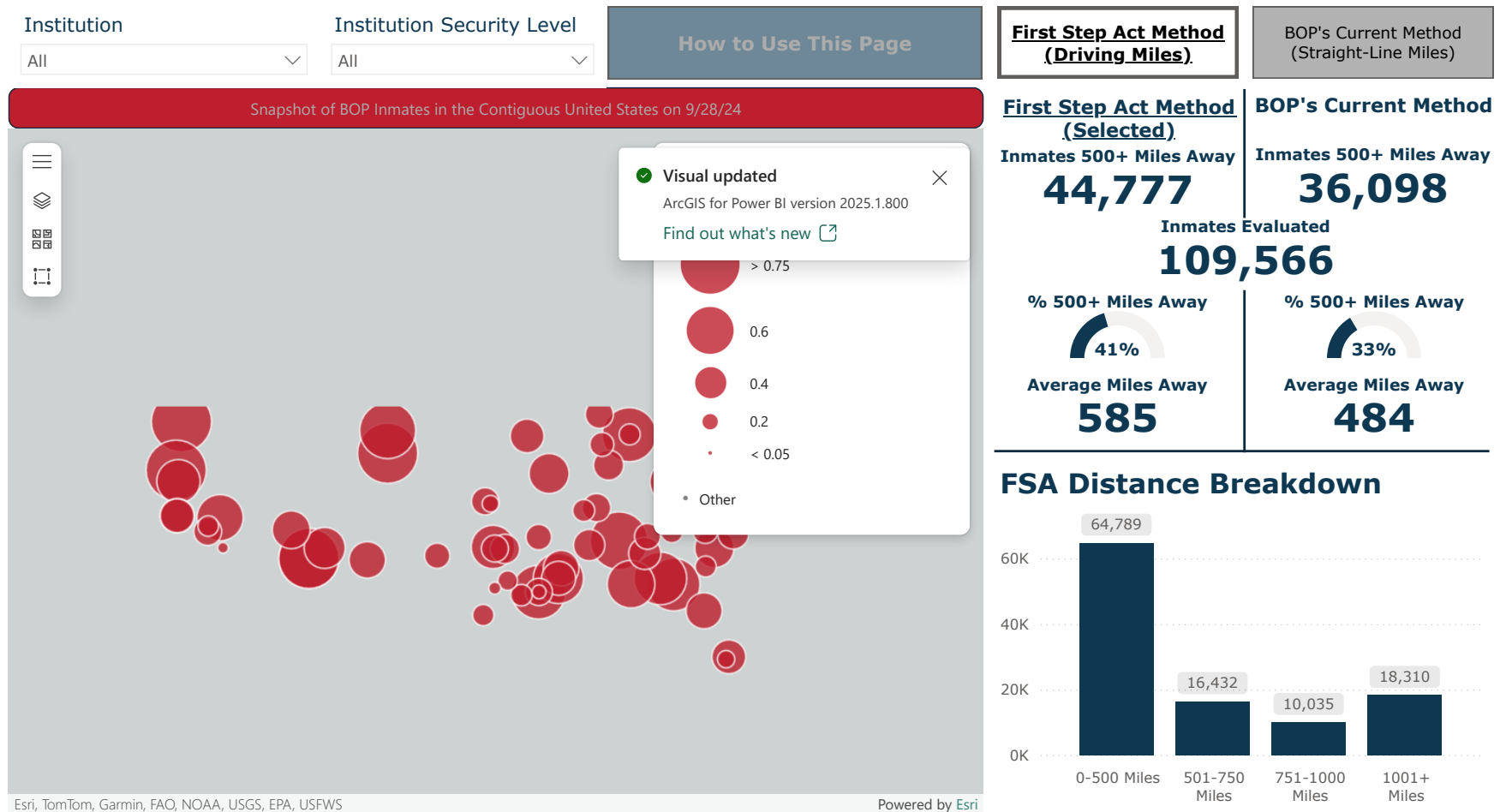
Source: OIG Analysis of BOP Data

Additionally, the BOP faces fundamental challenges in placing inmates close to their primary residence. As shown in the map below, certain areas of the country lack BOP institutions within 500 miles. Click on the buttons in the top left to see the impact on male or female inmates, and by BOP security level.

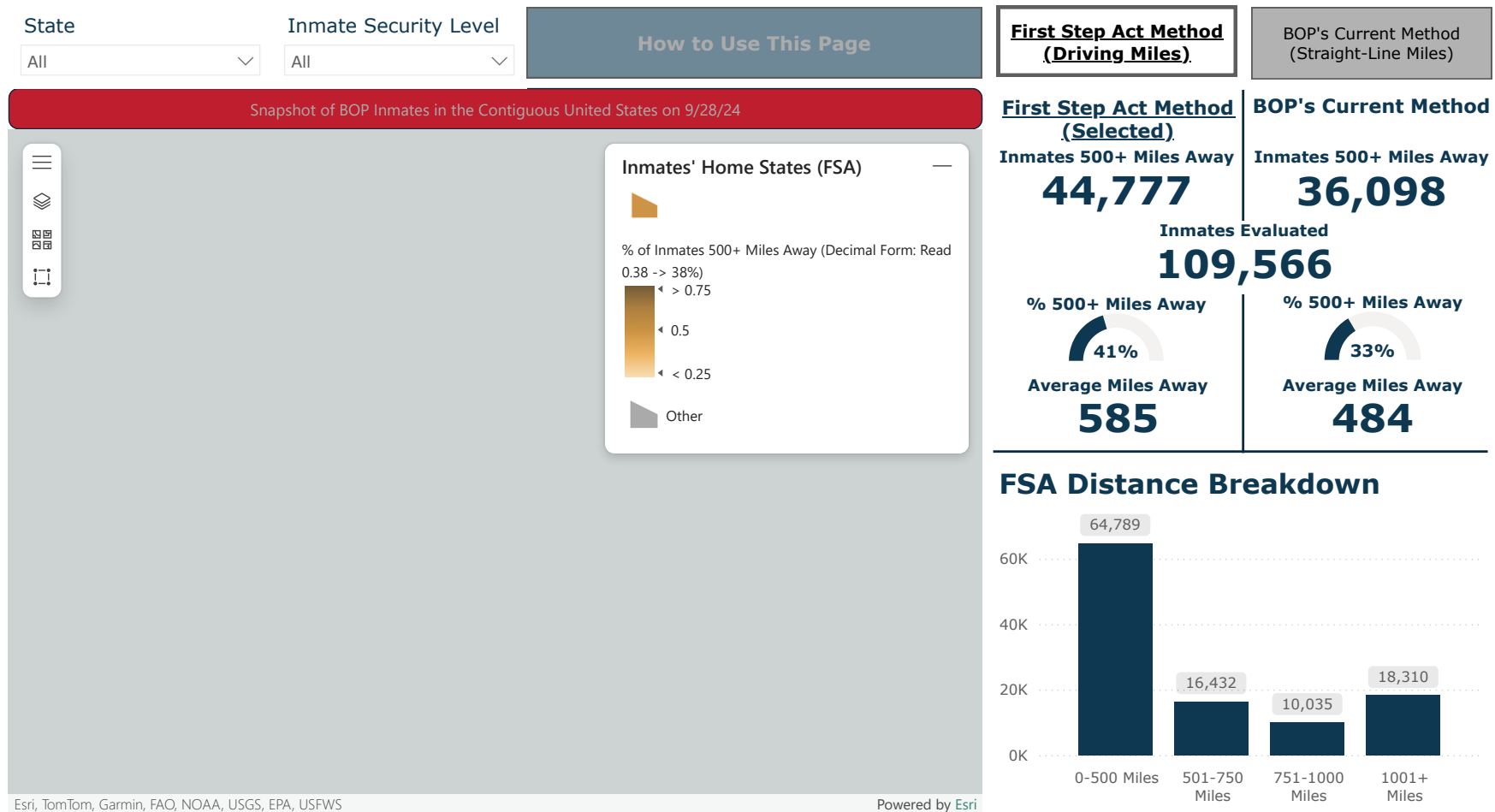


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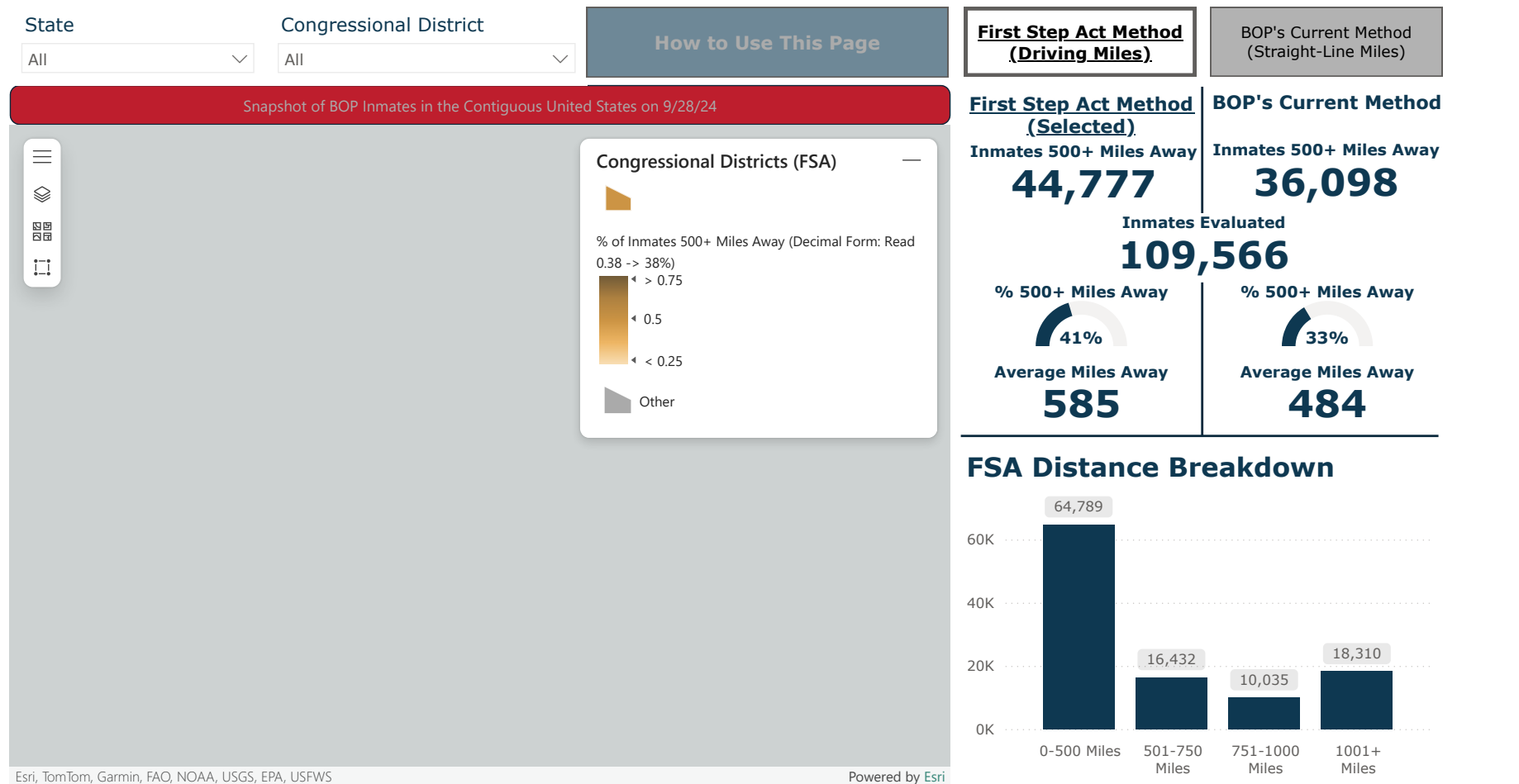
Below, the impact is demonstrated by BOP location. The red circles, each of which represents a BOP facility, increase in size with the percentage of inmates more than 500 miles from their release residence. Click on or hover over the map for more details on an institution.


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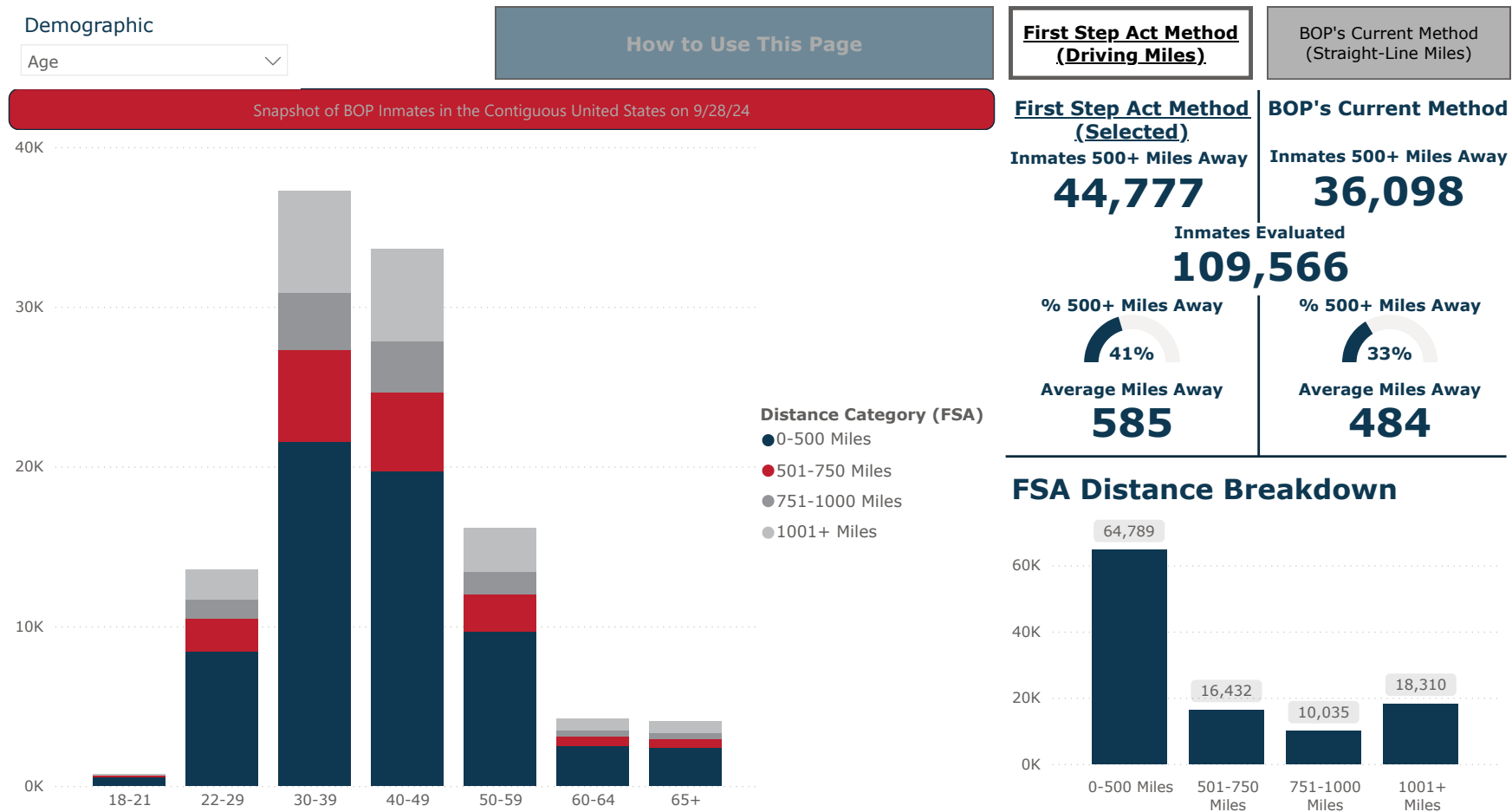
The map below illustrates the effect of the lack of institutions in the northwest and north central parts of the United States. In the map, darker-shaded states indicate a higher risk of inmates from that state being placed more than 500 miles from their release residence. Click on or hover over the map for more details on a state.


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The map below provides data at an even more granular level – by congressional district. Both the state map and congressional district map provide valuable information to Congress, primary stakeholders, and decision makers in BOP's planning and budgetary processes. Click on or hover over the map for more details on a district.


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Finally, the dashboard below provides information on inmates by age, ethnicity, security level, race, and sex, which are demographics that the BOP publicly releases on its webpage.⁴ The data shows, for example, 69 percent of Native American inmates and 51 percent of the BOP's female population were housed more than 500 miles from their release residence. Contributing factors likely include the lack of facilities in the northwest and north central parts of the United States where many tribes are located, and the fact that the BOP has fewer female facilities than male facilities. While the OIG does not make recommendations regarding the construction of new facilities, we believe this information is important for the BOP, the Attorney General, and Congress to consider in their planning.



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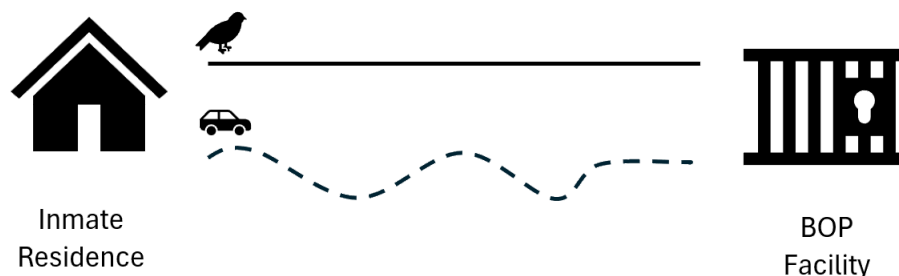
Overall, the interactive dashboards provide different perspectives of the inmate placement data comparing the mileage between the FSA method and the BOP's straight-line method, providing a comprehensive view of the unique attributes of the inmates in BOP custody on September 28, 2024.

BOP's Ongoing Efforts to Enhance Placement Decisions

Since the FSA's enactment, the BOP has worked to house inmates closer to home. For example, the BOP updated its primary designation policy to align with the FSA and identified four facilities for mission changes to create more space near inmates' release locations.⁵ Additionally, in May and June 2025, the BOP issued two directives to maximize home confinement availability for those qualifying under the FSA and Second Chance Act.⁶ Because these actions are ongoing, the impact is not fully reflected in our data, which represents inmates in BOP custody on September 28, 2024. However, in our judgment, these directives could increase the bedspace across BOP facilities, aiding efforts to place inmates closer to home.

Finding 1: The BOP Should Ensure Accurate Calculation of Driving Miles

First Step Act Distance vs. BOP Straight-line Distance



Both the FSA and BOP policy require the BOP to place an inmate in a facility within 500 driving miles of their primary residence to the extent practicable. The FSA also required that the Attorney General report to Congress from 2020 to 2025 on the progress under the FSA, and the reports included the number of inmates housed more than 500 miles from their release residence. However, the information provided to Congress did not reflect driving miles as required by the FSA because the BOP's mileage calculations were based on a straightline distance method.⁷ In January 2025, we informed the BOP of our concern with the BOP's mileage calculation methodology. BOP officials stated that its current inmate management system, SENTRY, uses an older programming language that cannot integrate driving miles. In September 2021, the BOP awarded a contract to develop and implement a new inmate management system, CICLOPS, to replace SENTRY. BOP officials stated the new system, expected to be functional by December 2026, will use newer technology that would allow the BOP to measure driving miles between BOP institutions and inmate homes. We believe this enhancement is necessary to ensure compliance with the FSA and accurate reporting to Congress. Therefore, we recommend that the BOP ensure its mileage calculation process captures driving miles as required by the FSA.

Finding 2: The BOP Should Properly Document Placement Decisions

To understand the BOP’s inmate placement process and to determine if the BOP placed inmates in accordance with the FSA, we evaluated a judgmental sample of DSCC placements for 100 inmates of the 156,576 inmates in BOP custody on September 28, 2024. The judgmental sample included inmates placed both more and less than 500 miles from their primary residence. For each of the 100 inmates, we observed and verified inmate data in SENTRY and documents in other BOP systems.⁸ We summarized the results of our testing below.

Table 2
Summary of Inmate DSCC Placement Testing

Primary FSA Exception	Sufficiently Supported	Insufficiently Supported
Bed Availability	9	10
Inmate Security Designation	14	2
Program Needs	5	2
Medical and Mental Health Needs	10	1
Recommendations of the Sentencing Court	13	0
Other BOP Security Concerns	23	11
Total	74	26

DSCC staff exercise professional judgment and consider various factors when placing inmates. In 74 cases, we found that the inmate’s placement was sufficiently supported, meeting security, medical, and other needs. However, in 26 cases we could not verify that the inmate was placed as close to home as possible. In some cases, we identified multiple options significantly closer to the inmate’s residence that appeared to meet all inmate needs. We asked the BOP designators why, in these cases, the inmates were not placed closer to home. BOP designators suspected placements were likely based on bed availability at the time, or other security or medical concerns, but no documentation supported these decisions in any of the BOP systems or files.

BOP policy requires DSCC staff to note the reason for designation or transfer in the “designator remarks” field in SENTRY. However, DSCC staff explained that SENTRY limits the amount of text that can be entered into that field, and the field can be overwritten, hindering the preservation of placement decisions. A DSCC staff member stated that once BOP’s new system, CICLOPS, is built, BOP will explore enhancements to better capture the placement decisions. In our judgment, the BOP should ensure

Source: BOP DSCC and OIG analysis

placement decisions are properly documented to demonstrate compliance with the FSA. Therefore, we recommend that the BOP ensure each inmate placement decision is sufficiently supported with proper documentation.

Finding 3: The BOP Should Ensure Address Information Is Accurate and Standardized

To determine the distance between an inmate's legal residence and their designated facility, the BOP must have the zip codes for both locations.⁹ BOP's policy states it is important to have an accurate zip code because it is used to determine the mileage between an inmate's legal residence and the designated facility. Our review of the SENTRY data found inaccuracies in inmate legal residence addresses, potentially affecting mileage calculations.

First, we identified approximately 8,800 inmate resident zip codes that were either not recognized by the U.S. Postal Service or did not match the inmate's resident street or city. We discussed this issue with BOP officials, who acknowledged that a process to verify zip codes, which are copied from U.S. Probation Office reports, for accuracy would be beneficial but would require additional time and resources.

We also found over 1,500 instances where the inmate's legal residence was listed as a government address (e.g., contract detention facilities, BOP institutions, U.S. Marshals Service offices / U.S. Probation Offices, or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement locations). Again, we discussed our concerns with BOP officials, who stated that DSCC previously used addresses reported by the U.S. Probation Office, even if they were government addresses. The BOP believes this practice was not appropriate because the address appears to be a residential address. The BOP stated it now requires DSCC staff to enter either (1) an actual residence address from the Presentence Investigation Report or a U.S. Marshals Service Individual Custody/Detention report, or (2) populate the field as "No Residence" if an actual address cannot be located. During regularly scheduled program review, a Case Manager may change an inmate's legal address in the Bureau's Inmate Information System if the inmate provides supporting documentation of a change or correction in legal residence from what was documented in the Presentence Investigation Report.

The BOP's reliance on information from other agencies, along with SENTRY's inability to verify or flag nonresidential addresses, increases the risk of inaccurate inmate legal residence addresses. This affects the accuracy of mileage calculations, which rely on the resident address zip code. Therefore, we recommend that the BOP incorporate controls such

as address standardization and verification to ensure that each inmate's legal address is accurate throughout their time in custody and that legal address entries are populated with "No Residence" when appropriate.

Conclusion and Recommendations

While BOP is making efforts to comply with the FSA, we identified areas for improvement. We found that the BOP did not calculate the distance from an inmate's primary residence to their designated facility using driving miles, which significantly understates the distance inmates are away from their home. Instead, the BOP used a straight-line method to calculate the distance, which also led to inaccuracy in the reports the Attorney General is required to submit to Congress, overstating the reported number of inmates placed within 500 miles of their release residence. Additionally, we could not always verify inmate placements were sufficiently supported. Finally, we identified a need to improve the process for recording the inmate's address information in SENTRY to promote the accuracy of mileage calculations and the integrity and quality of the data. We provide three recommendations for the BOP to take corrective action and make the necessary improvements.

We recommend that the BOP:

1. Ensure its mileage calculation process captures driving miles as required by the FSA.
2. Ensure each inmate placement decision is sufficiently supported with proper documentation.
3. Incorporate controls such as address standardization and verification to ensure that each inmate's legal address is accurate throughout their time in custody and that legal address entries are populated with "No Residence" when appropriate.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Objective, Scope, Methodology

Appendix 2: The Federal Bureau of Prisons Response to the Draft Audit Report

Appendix 3: Office of the Inspector General Analysis and Summary of Actions Necessary to Close the Audit Report

Appendix 4: Footnotes

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