

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 25, 2025

## VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Pamela Bondi  
Attorney General  
United States Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20530

Kathleen Toomey  
Associate Deputy Director  
Federal Bureau of Prisons  
320 First St., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20534

Dear Attorney General Bondi and Associate Deputy Director Toomey,

I write with concern regarding the Federal Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) decision to significantly reduce—and in some cases completely eliminate—retention pay for over half of all BOP employees, effective March 23, 2025.<sup>1</sup> This decision will effectively cut pay for affected staff by up to 25% and threatens to drive out critical personnel.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of already serious staffing shortages at BOP facilities, this poses a threat to the wellbeing and safety of prison staff, inmates, and the public.

According to the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (OIG), BOP staff regularly report that staffing shortages “pose[] the greatest threat to ensuring the safety of inmates and staff.”<sup>3</sup> BOP’s longstanding struggle to hire and retain qualified correctional staff is well documented. The Council for Prison Locals 33 reports that, at the end of 2023, BOP had not filled 40% of its appropriated correctional officer positions nationwide.<sup>4</sup> In 2024, OIG similarly found that BOP facilities are consistently understaffed and overburdened.<sup>5</sup> OIG noted that the staffing shortage has “a cascading effect on institution operations, often requiring substantial use of overtime, including mandatory overtime, and the temporary reassignment of non-[corrections

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Wagner, *23,000 Federal Prison Workers are Set to Take Pay Cuts up to 25% Next Month*, Gov’t Exec., (Feb. 26, 2025), <https://www.govexec.com/pay-benefits/2025/02/23000-federal-prison-workers-are-set-take-pay-cuts-25-next-month/403312/>.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Roebuck, *BOP slashes retention bonuses, impacting thousands of correctional officers*, Corrections1 (Feb. 27, 2025), <https://www.corrections1.com/federal-prison/bop-slashes-retention-bonuses-cutting-pay-for-thousands-of-prison-staff>.

<sup>3</sup> *Evaluation of Issues Surrounding Inmate Deaths in Federal Bureau of Prisons Institutions 65*, (Feb. 2024), <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/24-041.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Brandy Moore White, *Written Statement for the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism* (Feb. 28, 2024), [https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2024-02-28\\_pm\\_-\\_testimony\\_-\\_white.pdf](https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2024-02-28_pm_-_testimony_-_white.pdf).

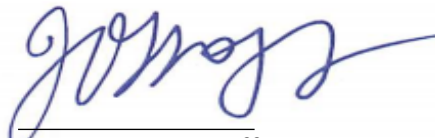
<sup>5</sup> *Top Management and Performance Challenges Facing the Department of Justice – 2024 3*, U.S. Dept. of J. Off. of the Insp. Gen. (Oct. 10, 2024), <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/2024-11/TMPC-2024.pdf>.

officer] staff to work in [corrections officer] posts[.]” Most concerning, a February 2024 OIG report found that staffing challenges hinder BOP’s work to address and prevent inmate deaths.<sup>6</sup>

Retention incentives play an important role in supporting staffing levels in BOP facilities facing the greatest shortages. Media reports suggest that cuts to this pay are already driving out personnel.<sup>7</sup> Correctional staff interviewed report that one understaffed facility could lose 10% of its staff due to the cuts and that, at another, every staff member in the medical department was looking for a new job.<sup>8</sup> Losing such critical personnel threatens to make the existing staffing shortage far worse. I therefore strongly urge BOP to reconsider its decision.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Ossoff", written in a cursive style.

Senator Jon Ossoff

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<sup>6</sup> *Evaluation of Issues Surrounding Inmate Deaths in Federal Bureau of Prisons Institutions*, *supra* n. 3 at 64.

<sup>7</sup> Wagner, *supra* n.1.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*