

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 5, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

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

The Honorable William W. Lothrop
Acting Director
Bureau of Prisons
320 First St NW
Washington, D.C. 20534

Dear Attorney General Bondi and Acting Director Lothrop:

I write to urge accelerated implementation of the Prison Camera Reform Act to protect civil rights and to improve safety, accountability, and transparency within our federal prison system. The Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) first annual report under the Prison Camera Reform Act revealed too-slow progress towards the Act's goals to address blind spots and deficiencies in prison camera systems. Faster progress is necessary to meet the Act's goals and ensure the safety of staff and incarcerated persons alike.

The Prison Camera Reform Act was signed into law on December 27, 2022. I wrote and passed this bill to require BOP to address gaps in camera coverage in federal prisons that undermine staff and inmate safety, hinder internal investigations, and diminish public trust in BOP.¹ In accordance with the law's requirements, BOP submitted an initial implementation plan in March 2023 that evaluated the number, placement, and effectiveness of surveillance cameras and communication devices in federal prison facilities.² That initial report set forth a twofold approach to upgrade prison security camera systems and eliminate blind spots. First, install an improved single-mode fiber (SMF) optic backbone at institutions in need to accommodate upgraded digital cameras.³ And second, install digital cameras to enhance quality and consistency.⁴ Beyond cameras, the report assessed necessary upgrades to radio and public announcement systems throughout BOP.⁵ To track progress, BOP submits an annual report to Congress detailing its action under the Act.

BOP's first annual report, submitted to Congress last year, raises serious questions about the Bureau's slow progress and prospective ability to achieve its implementation goals. To better understand BOP's relative lack of progress, I request prompt answers to the following questions:

¹ Prison Camera Reform Act, Public Law 117-321.

² Federal Bureau of Prisons, *Prison Camera Reform Act of 2021: Plan for Reform of BOP Security Camera and Radio Coverage Capabilities*, [hereinafter "BOP 2021 Plan"].

³ BOP 2021 Plan at 2.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.* at 4-6.

1. As of February 2024, nearly a year since issuing the compliance plan, only 12 out of 121 BOP institutions have completed installation of digital camera systems.⁶ What explains that lackluster progress? Is BOP confident that all 121 institutions will have updated camera systems by March 2026?
2. As noted above, the first phase to upgrading the prison camera system is to install improved single-mode fiber optics. Early in the 2024 implementation report, BOP reports that “[a]s of February 2024, fiber optics installation had been completed in 87 institutions.”⁷ However, a later table titled SMF shows only 58 institutions have completed fiber optics installation.⁸ Please clarify the discrepancy between these two numbers. If the latter number is correct and only 58 institutions have been updated, why did BOP only complete installations at six institutions between February 2023 and February 2024? Is BOP still on track to complete all fiber optic installation by the end of fiscal year 2025, as asserted in the 2024 update?
3. In February 2023, BOP reported that 14 institutions are handling fiber optics installation in-house.⁹ That number remains unchanged as of February 2024, indicating no progress.¹⁰ Why? Do BOP employees have sufficient training and resources to handle installation internally?
4. BOP’s initial assessment identified 68 BOP institutions in need of upgrades to Land Mobile Radio (LMR) Systems to ensure efficient and clear communication throughout the prisons.¹¹ BOP’s annual report shows no progress against this number a year later.¹² Has progress been made since? If no, why not?
5. Per BOP’s initial report, 50 institutions need upgraded hand-held radios.¹³ As of the most recent report, 46 institutions need upgrades.¹⁴ Why has BOP only upgraded four institutions in the past year?
6. According to the 2024 report, it will take BOP “approximately four years to upgrade all hand-held radios (assuming supply chain availability).”¹⁵ That suggests BOP will not

⁶ Federal Bureau of Prisons, *Prison Camera Reform Act of 2021 Annual Progress Report*, [hereinafter “BOP 2024 Progress Report”].

⁷ BOP 2024 Progress Report at 2.

⁸ *Id.* at 4.

⁹ BOP 2021 Plan at 4.

¹⁰ BOP 2024 Progress Report at 4.

¹¹ BOP 2021 Plan at 5.

¹² BOP 2024 Progress Report at 4-5.

¹³ *Id.* at 6.

¹⁴ BOP 2024 Progress Report at 6.

¹⁵ *Id.*

meet the 2026 deadline to implement its initial plan, as required by law. What is necessary to ensure BOP upgrades handheld radios by the March 2026 deadline?

7. BOP's initial report committed to assessing existing blind spots and addressing those blind spots as quickly as time and resources allow.¹⁶ This past year, BOP concluded that 11,400 additional cameras are required to address all existing blind spots in federal prisons.¹⁷ Will BOP fully address blind spots by the March 2026 deadline? Are there any interim goals BOP has identified to ensure the deadline is met?

The deadline for implementation according to the Prison Camera Reform Act is rapidly approaching. For that reason, I respectfully request answers to the above questions by April 16, 2025. To promote transparency, I encourage BOP to respond in a manner that can be made public. Should you have concerns about this, my staff is willing to discuss accepting confidential responses, as well.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued work to ensure the safety and wellbeing of individuals and staff in our federal prison facilities.

Sincerely,

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

Senator Jon Ossoff

¹⁶ BOP 2021 Plan at 1.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 2.