

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 8, 2021

Michael Carvajal
Director
Bureau of Prisons
320 1st St, NW
Washington, DC 20534

Kiran Ahuja
Director
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Director Carvajal and Director Ahuja:

We write regarding concerns we have heard about understaffing and unsustainable working conditions for Bureau of Prisons (BOP) workers at the Federal Correctional Complex in Florence, Colorado. We have heard that the low pay, forced overtime, and dangerous working conditions have led to low morale, attrition of current workers, and an inability to recruit an adequate number of qualified staff to run the facility safely. We request your help in order to address these issues and ensure a safe environment for Bureau of Prisons (BOP) staff and the prison inmates.

FCC Florence makes up four facilities, including the high-security United States Penitentiary and the Administrative Maximum Facility, where many of the nation's most high-profile criminals are detained. FCC Florence is home to the one and only federal super maximum facility and yet it is currently one of the most under-staffed prisons in the country.

Understaffing at FCC Florence can place employees and the inmate population at heightened risk. Similar to other high security federal correctional facilities, the large number of staff vacancies has led to a number of troubling issues including significant reliance on overtime and augmentation. The complex is at least 136 correctional officers short of the number authorized. To make matters worse, it is our understanding that fifteen officers are expected to retire by the end of 2021. In addition, seven officers have quit in the past month. Inadequate staff can lead to dangerous working conditions for the staff and an unsafe environment for the prisoners. There have been six serious staff assaults in the last six months, and there were two inmate homicides in the past nine months.

The low pay and dangerous working conditions make working for the BOP an unattractive choice for prospective employees. Many employers in the area pay more than the BOP, including those in similar fields of work. It is our understanding that correctional officers with the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC) make on average \$15,000 more per year than their BOP FCC Florence counterparts.

As you know, there are several factors that hamper the ability of FCC Florence to fill vacant positions. These include a hiring freeze in 2017 that resulted in the complex being far below the authorized number of staff. In 2019, the BOP changed the number of positions authorized for

each institution. After the decrease in the number of authorized staff, the complex was six officers short of this new number. In 2018 and 2019, FCC Florence paid out more than \$17.6 million in overtime for correctional officers.

Also, we have heard that FCC Florence is unable to attract or retain staff in part due to forced overtime. Correctional officers are forced to work an additional 8-hour shift multiple times each week, frequently three and four times per week with little to no advance notification. It is our understanding that fatigue, frustration, exhaustion and low morale has reduced productivity, and led to an increase in sick leave.

According to American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), they have taken many steps to help resolve the staffing issues including regularly meeting with BOP officials to propose ways to expedite the hiring process, and ramp up recruitment of new hires. The union spent \$50,000 of their own money to run advertisements on social media to help attract and hire new staff.

We support AFGE Local 1169 and the Council of Prison Locals – 33’s request to allow FCC Florence’s local Human Resources department to have direct hiring authority in order to reduce the time it takes to hire new employees. Additionally, we support their request that FCC Florence staff be provided a 25 percent retention bonus in order to avoid additional staff attrition and help promote the recruitment and hiring of new staff, and that temporary duty-assigned staff be returned to their normal duties. We believe these steps are necessary to improve the recruitment of new staff, and to retain the existing staff. We look forward to working with you and receiving your response by Monday, January 3, 2022.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator