

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 10, 2023

Colette S. Peters
Director
Federal 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 Peters and Director Ahuja,

I write regarding concerns about understaffing and unsustainable working conditions at the Federal Correctional Complex in Florence, Colorado (FCC Florence). This essential Bureau of Prisons (BOP) workforce and their representative union have raised concerns about low pay, forced overtime, and dangerous working conditions that have exacerbated low morale, high attrition, and an inability to recruit and hire sufficient staff. This has resulted in an unsafe environment for BOP staff, surrounding communities, and the inmate population.

FCC Florence comprises four facilities: the minimum-security Federal Prison Camp, the medium-security Federal Correctional Institution (FCI), the high-security United States Penitentiary, and the Supermax Administrative Maximum Facility where many of the nation's most high-profile criminals are detained. FCC Florence is our nation's only federal super maximum facility, yet it remains one of the most under-staffed prisons in the country.

FCC Florence is short at least 188 correctional staff, including 120 correctional officers and 66 non-custody staff below the authorized amount. This understaffing has placed employees and the inmate population in an unsustainable environment and created a reliance on mandatory overtime and reassignment of non-custody staff. Over the past 12 months, BOP reassigned non-custody staff 2,247 times to augment correctional officers, with little to no advance notification. As FCC Florence remained short-staffed over the past year, the facility saw two inmate homicides and six serious assaults. Fatigue, exhaustion, and low morale have reduced staff productivity and led to more sick leave, retirements, and resignations.

To address these urgent staffing issues, BOP provided a 10% retention bonus to current correctional officers at FCC Florence. In January, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) gave FCC Florence direct hiring authority to increase its correctional workforce. In July, OPM increased the retention bonus from 10% to 25% for correctional officers, which helped fill some vacancies. In March 2022, OPM granted non-custody staff a 10% retention bonus, including teachers, case managers, counselors, and maintenance workers. Still, many of these positions remain unfilled or hard to fill.

In addition, uncompetitive compensation has compounded staffing issues at FCC Florence. Many comparable employers in the area pay more than the BOP. For example, non-custody correctional staff with the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC) make, on average, \$15,000 more per year than BOP staff at FCC Florence. On top of this higher pay, CDOC correctional staff also receive retention bonuses.

Complicating the staffing shortage, in 2019, BOP decreased the number of positions authorized for each institution. These vacancies are often filled with costly overtime from already overworked staff. So far, in FY 2022, FCC Florence has paid more than \$6.1 million in overtime for correctional officers, nearly double the \$3.8 million in its budget.

On September 29, 2022, Director Peters testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on and committed to maintaining “fully staffed institutions” as a “key priority for the Bureau.” In her testimony, she described how, “maintaining proper staffing levels promotes greater support for dedicated correctional workers who risk their own safety in a potentially dangerous environment on a daily basis to protect those housed in our facilities, their coworkers, and our communities.”

This laudable and important goal is why I write regarding AFGE Local 1169’s request to allow all FCC Florence’s staff to receive a 25 percent retention bonus to avoid additional attrition and help promote the recruitment and hiring of new staff. I look forward to working with you to address the unsustainable staffing shortage at FCC Florence. Thank you for your full and fair consideration of this request in accordance with all applicable rules, regulations, laws, and guidelines.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brittany Pettersen". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Brittany Pettersen
Member of Congress (CO-07)