



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO
AND
AFGE BUREAU OF PRISON LOCALS COUNCIL, C-33



January 15, 2019

Dear Senator,

I write to you on behalf of the more than 33,000 federal correctional workers in the federal Bureau of Prisons who work inside our nation's 122 federal prisons. These men and women do a very dangerous job everyday inside our federal prison walls and fences in order to keep the communities outside the prison safe.

Federal correctional workers are some of the lowest paid federal law enforcement employees – many are GS5, GS6 or GS7, with an average take home pay of \$500-\$700 a week, and live paycheck-to-paycheck. You can not have law and order without the order we provide to communities across the country where federal inmates are incarcerated. Nearly all of our workforce has been deemed “essential” and is going to work without being paid.

This is creating a severe financial hardship for many of our members. They still have to pay for daycare for their children and gas to get to work. And most federal prisons are located in rural areas, so employees often commute great distances to and from work. We have been working for nearly four weeks while the federal government has been shut down, and on Friday, January 11, 2019, we missed our first paycheck, and there is no sign of when the next one will come. Recently, the President said the shutdown could last “months or even years.” This kind of uncertainty is making an untenable situation far worse.

We may not be the first federal workers that come to mind when you think about a federal government shutdown, but we are deemed among the most essential. Federal correctional officers are often called “the forgotten law enforcement” because we go to work every day locked behind walls and fences and supervise dangerous criminals most people would rather not think about – terrorists, rapists and murders. We work in an already dangerous and stressful environment, where going to work distracted or fatigued can lead to serious injury or death. As the shutdown enters its fourth week, many of our members are being required to work mandatory overtime, and do so without pay, while many are preoccupied by how they will pay their rent or mortgage, their car payment, or their electric bill. It is a recipe for disaster because a distraction could cost you your life.

There couldn't be a worse time to force our members to worry about when their next paycheck will arrive. It's a safety issue for correctional employees and the communities they serve. Understaffing is already putting our lives and communities at risk. Over the last two years, federal correctional workers have faced hiring freezes, budget cuts, and staffing reductions, creating a severe understaffing crisis throughout the country. Many federal prisons must rely on augmentation, which is when positions like food service, teachers and clerical workers fill in for frontline correctional officers.





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More than 30 percent of federal correctional workers are veterans. These men and women put on a uniform and swore an oath to defend our country, and in return our country promised to protect them. It is unconscionable not to pay any federal worker – either those who are forced to work without pay or those who want to work but can't because they are furloughed. But it is even more egregious to not pay those who served their country in the military and now work as public servants for our government.

As a condition of employment, all federal correctional workers are required to pay their just debts. If they do not, it can be cause for discipline or termination. But how can our federal law enforcement officers be expected to pay their obligations if the federal government isn't paying theirs? And to add insult to injury, federal prison inmates are still getting paid for the jobs they do inside our prisons, but the law enforcement professionals who supervise them are not.

Our correctional professionals deserve better than this. Make no mistake, federal correctional workers want the federal government to reopen immediately. Those who are being required to work without pay want to be paid, and those who are forced to stay home because they are furloughed want to go back to work.

Sincerely,

E.O. Young
National President
AFGE, CPL C-33