

Chairman Hal Rogers
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Oversight Hearing – Bureau of Prisons
February 26, 2025

Good afternoon.

The subcommittee will come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

This is the first hearing for the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee of the 119th Congress.

I am honored to serve as Chairman of this important Subcommittee.

We have a few new Members of the Subcommittee on our side of the aisle, including Mr. Alford (MO), Mr. Strong (AL) who will also serve as the Subcommittee's Vice Chair, and Mr. Moore (WV).

We welcome you and the returning Members including Mr. Carter (TX), Mr. Cline (VA), Mr. Gonzales (TX), and Mr. Clyde (GA).

We are also lucky to have Congresswoman Meng serving as the Ranking Member.

Ranking Member Meng has served on this Subcommittee for several years now and we will rely on her input and expertise as we move forward this year.

She is joined on her side by Mr. Ivey (MD), Mr. Morelle (NY), Ms. Dean (PA), and Mr. Mrvan (IN).

Welcome to all returning and new Members to the Subcommittee.

We will follow the 5 – minute rule for questions. Of course, I don't plan on cutting anyone off mid-sentence.

I will recognize Members in order of seniority based on who is present at the beginning of the hearing, going back and forth between parties.

For those arriving after I strike the gavel, I will recognize you in the order that you arrive continuing to go back and forth between the parties.

While I am sure that we will not always agree on the issues before the Subcommittee, all Members and witnesses will be heard and respected.

With that, I'd like to welcome our witness today, Associate Deputy Director Kathleen Toomey, to this oversight hearing on the Bureau of Prisons.

Thank you for taking the time to appear before the Subcommittee to discuss the Bureau's operations, challenges, and accountability to the American people.

The Bureau of Prisons plays a critical role in maintaining public safety, ensuring secure and humane incarceration, and preparing inmates for reintegration into society.

At a time when the federal prison system faces mounting challenges—ranging from staffing shortages to aging infrastructure to a growing inmate population—it is imperative that we examine how taxpayer dollars are being used to meet these needs.

Today's hearing will allow us to assess BOP's progress and identify areas where improvements are necessary.

Specifically, I want to discuss ongoing concerns related to the agency's ability to recruit and retain qualified correctional officers, the conditions of confinement within federal facilities, and the Bureau's continued reliance on high-cost, low-staffing models that leave employees overworked and facilities vulnerable.

A pressing issue we must address is the Bureau's growing inmate population and the increasing strain this places on its facilities.

The rise in inmate numbers demands a careful assessment of whether BOP has the capacity, infrastructure, and staffing to manage this growth while maintaining safety and rehabilitation efforts.

Additionally, we must discuss BOP's footprint across the country, ensuring that facilities are properly located and resourced to meet the current and future needs of our federal prison system.

I remain encouraged by the Bureau's continued work on the proposed Letcher facility and look forward to seeing further progress on this critical project.

The Bureau's approval of the Letcher County facility last October is an important step in addressing both capacity challenges and providing economic opportunities for the region.

As BOP continues to assess and prioritize its infrastructure needs, ensuring that projects like Letcher stay on track is essential.

I will be watching this project closely, as its approval and completion will be an important factor in evaluating the Bureau's broader facility planning efforts.

Finally, I fully recognize Congress has not yet completed fiscal year 2025 funding and that we are not yet in receipt of the fiscal year 2026 budget request, but I expect a candid discussion of the Bureau's budget needs based on historical trends.

While we understand that maintaining secure and functional institutions requires resources, we must ensure that every dollar spent is justified.

Additional funding cannot always be the answer; we must be creative in addressing the Bureau's needs while ensuring that strategic plans incorporate fiscally responsible solutions.

Any long-term strategy must consider cost-effective approaches, improved resource allocation, and innovative management practices to maximize efficiency without excessive financial burdens.

Associate Deputy Director Toomey, I look forward to your testimony and to an honest discussion on how the Bureau of Prisons can best fulfill its mission.

At this time, I would like to recognize Ranking Member Meng for any remarks she may wish to make.