

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson (PA-15)
Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee
Judiciary Committee Member Day Hearing
November 3, 2023

Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Nadler, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to share my priorities for the Judiciary Committee in the 118th Congress. I recognize the challenges placed before the Committee and appreciate your ongoing commitment to improving our legal system and making our country a safer place.

Federal Prisons Accountability Act

The Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is the Justice Department's largest agency with more than 38,000 authorized positions, an annual budget of more than \$8 billion, and more than 158,000 inmates. Yet, it is the only agency within the Justice Department whose director is appointed by the Attorney General, is not subject to confirmation by the U.S. Senate, and does not have a term limit.

The BOP plays a critical role in public safety. It is the sole federal entity responsible for the protection and wellbeing of corrections officers, prison staff, inmates, and communities surrounding BOP facilities. My district is home to Federal Correctional Institution McKean, a medium security prison which holds over 1,000 inmates. It is a priority of mine to ensure everyone at FCI McKean, from staff and officers to the inmates, as well as those in the surrounding communities, are safe. Making sure those at the highest levels of BOP are qualified to serve and remain accountable to Congress is critical to the safety of those working in or living near federal correctional institutions. The Director and the Bureau must remain transparent and responsive to Members of Congress and the public at large. My bipartisan bill, H.R. 4138 the *Federal Prisons Accountability Act*, achieves these goals.

This legislation modifies the appointment procedure and term of service for the Director of the Bureau of Prisons by requiring the Director to be appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The *Federal Prisons Accountability Act* also limits the Director to a single term of 10 years. These overdue reforms will help provide stronger Congressional oversight over the Bureau by aligning the process for selecting a Director with other similar positions within the Department of Justice and across other federal agencies.

As someone who has served on the Bureau of Prisons Reform Caucus, it is important that we continue to improve and strengthen our prison system. I therefore respectfully request the Committee give full and fair consideration to H.R. 4138.

Eric's Law

Eric Williams was a federal correctional officer in my home state of Pennsylvania at United State Penitentiary Canaan. In 2013, Eric was brutally murdered while on duty by an inmate who was a convicted gang member serving a life sentence for murder. Eric's killer was tried for the death penalty, but the jury failed to reach a unanimous decision with one individual preventing the death penalty sentence. Because of one juror, Eric's killer was sentenced to a second life in prison, ultimately going unpunished and leaving Eric's family without justice. Eric's story is a stark reminder of the danger and extreme violence our officers face every day in our nation's federal prisons.

It is because of Officer Williams' story that I introduced H.R. 3449, *Eric's Law*, bipartisan legislation that addresses a glaring hole in our justice system while providing further protections for our correctional officers.

Along with my colleague from Pennsylvania, Congressman Matt Cartwright, our legislation permits prosecutors to impanel a second jury for sentencing if the first jury in a federal death penalty case fails to reach a unanimous decision on a sentence. This would only apply to cases in which the defendant is an inmate already serving a life sentence for murder, therefore having little to lose, and is convicted of another murder while serving their sentence. This allows for a final, finite decision in death penalty cases that victims and families deserve.

I'd like to thank Don Williams, Eric's father, as well as the Council of Prison Locals for their support of this bill and taking an important step towards ensuring what happened to Eric will never happen again. We must do everything in our power to prevent this kind of tragedy from happening again, and I respectfully urge this Committee to take up H.R. 3449 and reinforce our support for federal law enforcement officers.

Pro-Life Policies:

Finally, I want to reaffirm my commitment to protect and defend the sanctity of life and urge my colleagues on this Committee to advance legislation that achieves these goals. From the moment I was sworn into Congress in 2009, I cemented my promise to protect our most vulnerable – the unborn. Our founders enshrined in the Declaration of Independence three unalienable rights, with the first being the right to life.

My position on life has always been clear. You can't be a champion for the future of this great country if you are going to limit its potential. It is my strong belief that every child, every human life, is sacred and has a purpose in this world, and now more than ever we must continue protect the unborn.

Thank you again, Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Nadler, and the members of this Committee for your continued dedication to the matters within the jurisdiction of the House Judiciary Committee. I appreciate your consideration of these priorities and look forward to working with you on them moving forward.