

# DOGE making cuts to federal workforce: FCI Thomson union expresses frustration

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Thomson Prison

## DOGE, Musk oversight of federal workforce causing frustration for FCI Thomson staff

On Tuesday, the prison union said retention bonuses for medical staff at Thomson were cut in half for the first time in five years.

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THOMSON, Ill. — Tensions are high among staff at FCI Thomson following an email sent to all federal employees on Saturday, Feb. 22, asking them to provide specific details of their work, or risk being fired.

The Office of Personnel Management informed agency leaders that workers were not required to respond by the Monday deadline, however, Elon Musk wrote the following on his social media platform, X: "Subject to the discretion of the President, they will be given another chance. Failure to respond a second time will result in termination."

The conflicting directives have led to varying advice for federal employees, depending on where they work. Some were told to answer the request for a list of five things that they did last week, others were informed it was optional, and others were directed not to answer at all.

On Monday, Feb. 25, the Department of Justice told employees at FCI Thomson not to reply to the email, given the sensitive nature of their work. All 400 prison employees received the initial email.

Jon Zumkehr, president of AFGE Local 4070 representing prison workers, said Musk's actions are causing widespread confusion for the staff.

"Our issue with the email is, again, we're facing attacks on law enforcement, we're having a retention and recruitment crisis, and you have someone on the outside that has nothing to do with the Department of Justice saying you're gonna get fired if you don't respond to an email," Zumkehr said.

Tuesday morning, Zumkehr said the staff was dealt another blow. Retention bonuses for Thomson's medical staff got cut in half, the first time in five years that this has ever happened.

"Now keep in mind, our nurses, if they go to the hospital in the community, they'll make so much more in the local community than they will in a prison," Zumkehr said. "So, it's hard for us to be competitive when we pay our employees so much less."

The rest of the staff's bonuses were cut last year.

Zumkehr said he fears how Musk's email will impact FCI Thomson's already low recruitment numbers.

"We had a staff member today say she wants to quit," he said. "She's working on her paperwork right now to quit."

Although he isn't sure if the DOGE oversight is the reason she's quitting, he said it's cause for concern.

Staff are confused and frustrated by the email prompted by Musk and DOGE, Zumkehr said, and they are nervous about what else the department has in store for them. Zumkehr said what FCI Thomson needs is a higher budget and increased security in the mailing department to prevent drugs and cell phones being smuggled in, which he said is a frequent issue they face.

The federal prison has been riddled with controversy over the years, including hundreds of alleged attacks on staff members and issues over retention pay for employees. You can find News 8's coverage on Thomson [here](#).

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