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Title: Testimony of Kandia Milton

Position/Title: Government Affairs Director

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Hearing Title: Federal Corrections in Focus: Oversight of the Bureau of Prisons

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Good morning Chairmen Andy Biggs, Jefferson Van Drew, Ranking Members Lucy McBath and Jasmine Crockett, and to members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance and the Subcommittee on Oversight - thank you for convening this important joint hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the operations of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, particularly its management of individuals in its care and custody.

My name is Kandia Milton, and I serve as the Government Affairs Director for Dream.Org—a bipartisan organization committed to advancing meaningful and lasting criminal justice reforms. At the heart of our work is a commitment to centering the voices of those directly impacted by the justice system.

I come before you not only as a policy advocate but also as someone who has lived experience within the federal prison system. I previously served as Deputy Mayor and Chief of Staff for the City of Detroit. After accepting responsibility for a serious bad decision I made in office, I served time in a federal correctional facility. While I had always understood, on an intellectual level, the need for prison reform and the importance of supporting successful reentry, it was my time behind the walls - and the stories of those I met inside - that opened my heart and gave purpose to the work I do every day.

It is deeply troubling that many of the challenges we discussed and faced during my incarceration which ended in 2011 remain unresolved today. In fact, by many accounts, conditions have worsened. This is not only a disservice to correction officers, and those who are incarcerated, but also to the communities to which they will one day return.

There are a large number of pressing issues at the Bureau of Prisons (BOP):

First, there are catastrophic infrastructure issues. The BOP has 122 institutions that sit on 46,000 acres with 3,600 buildings and, according to the Inspector General, they all need serious attention:



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“As of February 2024, the BOP estimated that the major repairs needed across its facilities would cost \$3 billion. During an OIG audit, we determined that all 123 of the BOP’s institutions required maintenance (one has closed since this report)”¹

Despite the need for investment in critical infrastructure across the entire BOP, there continues to be talk of investing money in the building of new facilities.²

Second, the BOP is critically understaffed. Associate Deputy Director Kathleen Toomey, in her testimony before the subcommittee on commerce, justice, science, and related agencies in February concluded that the BOP was short over 4,000 officers³ while other press reports suggest that the bureau is over 6,000 officers understaffed.⁴ The problem of retaining officers has been complicated by a directive that ended retention bonuses.⁵ BOP spokesperson Donald Murphy suggested this impacts up to 25% of some employees' pay⁶ and The Federal News Network reports that this decision has already resulted in more correctional staff leaving their positions exacerbating the staffing crisis.⁷ Finally, being understaffed results in higher overtime costs and the use of regular staff to augment⁸ correctional officer shortages. As correctional officer Jon Zumkehr put it:

“This is not strategic cost-saving, This is blind slashing of essential funding that will cost taxpayers more in the long run. The overtime costs alone to cover vacant positions, combined with increased recruitment expenses, will far exceed any immediate savings”⁹

Third, is the problem of halfway housing. The bureau has available beds, but has not filled them which has left thousands of people having earned the credits under the First Step Act or Second Chance Act to qualify for release but who still remain in prison. This is legally problematic in the case of First Step Act earned credits, multiple courts have concluded that the plain meaning of the statute demands release¹⁰ and there is a pending ACLU class action on this topic as well.¹¹ As an organization that led the efforts to pass the First Step Act, we emphatically support its full implementation - which to date the BOP has failed to do - and we at Dream.Org agree with Attorney General Pam Bondi who said during her confirmation hearing:

“We must fix the Bureau of Prisons and follow through on the promise of the First Step Act by building new halfway houses.”¹²

¹ <https://oig.justice.gov/tmpc/challenge-1#:~:>

² <https://www.kentucky.com/news/politics-government/article294653689.html>

³ <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP19/20250226/117920/HHRG-119-AP19-Wstate-ToomeyK-20250226.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/walterpavlo/2025/04/04/bureau-of-prisons-is-a-powder-keg-with-problems/>

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/walterpavlo/2025/02/26/bureau-of-prisons-to-cancel-staff-retention-bonuses/>

⁶ <https://www.corrections1.com/federal-prison/bop-slashes-retention-bonuses-cutting-pay-for-thousands-of-prison-staff>

⁷ <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/pay/2025/03/days-ahead-of-coming-bop-pay-cuts-some-employees-already-resigning/>

⁸ <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/pay/2025/03/employees-at-the-bureau-of-prisons-try-to-deal-with-agency-side-pay-cuts/#>

⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/walterpavlo/2025/02/26/bureau-of-prisons-to-cancel-staff-retention-bonuses/>

¹⁰ <https://www.prisonology.com/blog/bop-ordered-to-transfer-prisoner-home-after-first-step-miscalculation>

¹¹ <https://www.aclu.org/cases/crowe-v-federal-bureau-of-prisons#>

¹² https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2025-01-15_-_opening_statement_-_bondi.pdf



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Finally, there are operational culture problems. Most recently, these problems resulted in the closure of FCI Dublin, a prison so notorious that nearly 100 cases, including a class action case, are in the process of litigation.¹³

These problems are incredibly important. The Federal Bureau of Prisons is responsible for the safety and health of approximately 156,254 incarcerated people, 35,764 total staff including 12,662 correctional officers. In addition, many thousands of incarcerated people are released from federal prisons every single year and how they return is critical to the public safety of our communities. The investment in good facilities, good correctional programming, and retaining and hiring excellent correctional staff are about investing in the growth and development of people and pays off both inside our facilities and in our communities. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹³<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/fci-dublin-prison-closed-abuse-worse-1235033085/>