



# Department of Justice

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**STATEMENT OF  
COLETTE S. PETERS**

**DIRECTOR  
FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS**

**BEFORE  
THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT  
SURVEILLANCE  
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
AT A HEARING ENTITLED  
“OVERSIGHT OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS”**

**PRESENTED  
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**Statement of Colette S. Peters**  
**Director, Federal Bureau of Prisons**  
**Before the Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance**  
**Committee on the Judiciary**  
**United States House of Representatives**  
**November 7, 2023**

Good morning, Chairman Biggs, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the significant mission and the impactful work happening at the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP or Bureau). I am honored to represent, before you today, the nearly 35,000 employees of the FBOP. I believe in good government, accountability, transparency, and the importance of oversight. In coming to this work openly and in the spirit of cooperation, I believe we can achieve greater success and excellence together.

With a dedicated career spanning over 30 years in public safety and corrections, I have been shaped by various roles: research associate, counselor in a juvenile correctional facility, victims' advocate and crisis mediator for the Denver Police Department, Inspector General of Oregon, and Director of Juvenile and Adult Corrections for more than 14 years.

As the 12th Director of the FBOP, I find it motivating to lead exceptional corrections professionals of the largest corrections agency in the nation. Every day, I am inspired by the dedication of our employees. These diligent corrections professionals share a collective vision of correctional excellence that extends beyond the mere confines of institutional walls. We remain dedicated to creating and maintaining humane, safe, and secure environments for the individuals under our care while equipping them for successful reentry into our communities. Our employees drive this effort every day, changing lives and safeguarding the public. We must continue our work to ensure our dedicated corrections professionals return home safely, our communities are safeguarded, and we prepare those in our care for successful return to their communities as responsible neighbors.

Since assuming my role as the Director a little over a year ago, I am proud to be a part of a team that is working on impactful initiatives revitalizing our operations, working hard to improve our employees' wellness, and enriching the lives of those in our care. We are building on our achievements thus far and finding new ways for continuous improvement. Part of this process has involved increased engagement with our stakeholders, including proactive outreach to our federal agency and state partners, members of Congress, including, of course, Members of this Committee, members of the media, advocacy organizations, and justice-involved individuals. We have held several listening sessions with the public, and continue to maintain a close, collaborative relationship with our National Union through open communication. We certainly appreciate, and I would like to acknowledge publicly, the work we have accomplished in partnership with outgoing National President Shane Fausey and the Union's Executive Board under him. We are looking forward to continuing that relationship and dialogue with incoming President Brandy Moore White.

I am proud that as a result of careful discussion and thought over the past year, we have modernized our mission, vision, core values, and strategic framework to formalize our commitment to transformative change. Our focus is clear: We must strike the right balance of ensuring security, fostering compassion, safeguarding the public, and providing proven opportunities to aid in successful community reintegration. As we navigate this path, our diverse and adept workforce champions a modern approach to corrections, where safety, humane environments, and effective reintegration are paramount.

As a law enforcement agency, our core values guide our daily endeavors. Part of our strategic planning this past year included updating our core values to better align with the work we do to achieve our challenging law enforcement mission. These values emphasize accountability, integrity, respect, compassion, and correctional excellence throughout the agency. As dedicated corrections professionals, we are driven by a commitment to ethical practices, continuous improvement, and respect for all while shaping a culture of individual accountability and collective responsibility.

We have also worked diligently to root out employee misconduct. The vast majority of our employees are hard-working, ethical, diligent corrections professionals, and we want those who are engaging in misconduct held accountable. In that vein, we have delivered clear expectations. We are working to create and foster a culture where every employee and person in our custody knows that they can come forward without fear of retaliation. If retaliation does occur, we hold those individuals accountable as well. We have worked diligently to ensure collaboration with the Office of Inspector General (OIG); the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; local law enforcement, U.S. Attorneys' Offices, and others to ensure access to our institutions and information to improve timely investigations as we work to hold people accountable.

Developing meaningful change throughout the agency is not something that happens in a moment. Change requires focus, effort, and persistence over time. We want change that works and change which enhances our ability to fulfill our mission. I believe our efforts over the last year have already generated visible change, and our work on this kind of change continues. Among key areas for our continued focus on change are recruitment, retention, training, and employee wellness; eliminating employee misconduct; facilities maintenance and repair; First Step Act (FSA) implementation; compassionate release and home confinement; health care and suicide prevention; and reducing our use of restrictive housing.

### **Recruitment, Retention, Training, and Employee Wellness**

Ensuring the well-being and safety of our employees and those in their care is an essential part of our mission and my work as Director. Many of our dedicated employees feel overworked and exhausted. Yet, these corrections professionals continue to carry out the Bureau's mission day after day in the face of challenges such as recruitment and retention concerns, which result in overtime and augmentation and the need for additional training.

**Recruitment and Retention.** Appropriately filling positions throughout our organization is a top priority for the well-being of our dedicated employees and the safety of those in our care. Even before the pandemic, our workforce faced increasing demands and challenges, underscoring the need for support. The pandemic, along with a changing economy and the public's changing perception of law enforcement, have made these challenges even more pronounced.

As of September 2023, around 88% of our funded positions are filled. However, recruitment and retention of our employees remain a challenge. Between the coronavirus pandemic, a change in our labor market, and our nation's changing views of law enforcement, we are faced with many difficulties. Even so, we remain committed to our long-term goal of having a strong workforce. From calendar year August 2022 to August 2023, we've seen an approximate 60% increase in new hires, a 20% decrease in separations, and an approximate 25% decrease in the number of staff who have retired. These improvements were accomplished, in part, through recruitment and retention incentives, by modernizing our recruitment strategies, and by increasing employee training.

We clearly have more work to do, and we are actively working to increase this percentage even further. Our hiring strategy includes collaboration with external recruitment experts, resulting in a comprehensive, data-driven recruitment campaign. This campaign focuses on enhancing the Bureau's image, hosting online recruitment events, launching targeted ad campaigns, and utilizing data analytics to gauge effectiveness. Additionally, we have leveraged recruitment strategies aimed at increasing recruitment and retention, particularly for Correctional Officers and Health Services employees. Notable examples include recruitment incentives and other flexible pay options, a referral incentive program for employees who refer new hires, and an increase to the full performance level of the Correctional Officer position from GL-07 to GL-08. To help retain employees already on board, we use retention incentives and have obtained approval from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to authorize retention incentives above the normal payment limits for Correctional Officers and employees in certain other occupations at a number of Bureau facilities.

Maintaining and increasing staffing levels has been a challenge at the Bureau for years, and unfortunately this year was no exception. While the number of new hires has increased this calendar year, our efforts were not enough to allow us to meet our funded level in FY 2023. We will diligently continue our hiring efforts this year, with continued focus on filling our Correctional Officer vacancies and meeting the funded staffing level Congress will provide in FY 2024.

One of several pronounced areas of challenge is the hiring and retention of healthcare professionals. Our teams are collaborating to expand incentives to help meet this need. Systemwide, clinical healthcare professionals are staffed at approximately 80%. At individual institutions, healthcare staffing rates range from fully staffed to less than 50%. To that end, our Human Resources Division and Health Services Division are working together to increase the training, recruitment, and retention of clinical professionals. We are employing human resource flexibilities such as setting pay for new employees above the step-one rate of their grade based

on their superior qualifications or a special need for their services, authorizing student loan repayments, providing service credit to new employees for annual leave accrual for non-Federal work experience or otherwise noncreditable experience in the uniformed service, and providing other financial recruitment and retention incentives.

In May 2023, OPM reinstated the approval of the Accelerated Training and Promotion Program for Nurses and Advanced Practice Nurses, which we will be allowed to maintain for five-years. We have also implemented Title 38 market pay, which is a hybrid pay system enabling the FBOP to pay physicians, including psychiatrists, and dentists at a higher rate so that we are more competitive with the private sector and can attract talent to government services. We utilize special rate tables to pay salaries above applicable locality rates for other hard-to-fill professional positions across our agency locations, including Nurses, Physician's Assistants, Nurse Practitioners, Pharmacists, Psychologists, and Medical Technologists.

Our National Recruitment Office prioritizes medical recruitment through targeted outreach to potential applicants and community partnerships. We engage with organizations such as the National Commission of Correctional Healthcare, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Board of Physician Specialties, Pri-Med, the National Health Service Corps (NHSC), the United States Public Health Services Commissioned Corps (one of the eight uniformed services), and the Harris County Medical Society. During this calendar year, our national recruitment office team sought out numerous personal contacts with healthcare professionals for positions, including Dentists, Pharmacists, Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses, Physician's Assistants, Medical Officers, Psychiatrists, and Clinical Directors.

**Augmentation and Overtime.** We place high importance on effectively managing crises while upholding the safety and security of our institutions. Due to our law enforcement mission and the 24-hour nature of operations in a correctional environment, there will always be a need for tools like augmentation and overtime to maintain safety and security in our facilities. Augmentation involves temporarily reassigning law enforcement employees within our institutions to maintain safety and security by covering Correctional Officer assignments. This strategy addresses filling posts that, if left empty, could compromise facility operations, safety, and security. Augmentation is made possible because the majority of our employees undergo the same federal law enforcement training as Correctional Officers, ensuring consistent knowledge of best practices with annual updates. Yet, while a valuable tool, it is a tool that should be reserved for emergencies, not the long-term management of a recruitment and retention problem.

**Training.** We are dedicated to implementing training enhancements and increasing the quantity and quality of employee training across their careers. We are working to change the status quo, as current new employee training duration is substantially less than the national average for law enforcement academies.<sup>1</sup> Elevating training programs and standards for our employees is an essential step in fostering excellence and positive change within the Bureau. We aim to provide high-quality training while optimizing cost-effectiveness by utilizing training

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<sup>1</sup> Reaves, B. (2016) Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, NCJ 249784, State and Local Law Enforcement Training Academies, 2013. Retrieved from <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/slleta13.pdf>.

facilities tailored to the correctional environment and innovations such as distance learning and computer-based training. Currently, law enforcement training for our new employees consists of an initial three-week training at their work location followed by mandatory three-week introduction course at the Staff Training Academy (STA) at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia, which we refer to as “Introduction to Correctional Techniques (ICT) phase II.”

**Employee Wellness.** A resilient and thriving workforce forms the foundation of a secure and rehabilitative correctional environment. To meet our mission, the Bureau must cultivate a safe and supportive work environment for every employee. We aim to nurture and encourage a caring culture prioritizing physical and mental well-being. This April, in support of employee wellness and consistent with Executive Order 14074, “Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices to Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety,” we were proud to announce three policy changes that directly relate to and impact our employees’ health and well-being. Now, counselors with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that provide services to Bureau employees must be licensed. Employees can now use administrative leave to attend EAP sessions and they can utilize these services in retirement. Our new Correctional Support Team (CST) policy expanded the mission of CSTs to include engaging all employees in wellness and resilience activities.

Bureau leaders are now responsible for modeling and encouraging a supportive, caring, and help-seeking culture. Our culture requires employees involved in the disciplinary process to be referred to EAP for support during a challenging time in their careers. Additionally, it allows for activities to facilitate an employee’s healing following a major traumatic incident. For example, wardens are encouraged to approve administrative leave days for employees following such an incident.

### **Employee Misconduct**

We are actively working to prevent employee misconduct, identify it quickly when it occurs, and hold accountable those who engage in misconduct. The vast majority of our employees are hard-working, ethical, and diligent corrections professionals. We have provided clear expectations to all Bureau employees and are working to create and maintain an agency culture that is reflected at all our facilities. It is critical that every employee and person in our custody knows that they can come forward without fear of retaliation, and if retaliation does occur, we hold those individuals accountable as well. We have worked diligently with our fellow law enforcement entities, and others to ensure a meaningful investigatory and disciplinary process.

As Director, I have addressed the FBOP employees on our shared responsibilities to both report and prevent employee misconduct as correctional professionals. The FBOP strongly condemns all forms of sexual misconduct by those in our custody and our employees. We take seriously our duty to protect the individuals entrusted to our care as well as maintain the safety of correctional employees and the community. We have a zero-tolerance policy for sexually

abusive behavior of any kind; every person has the right to be safe from sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

We remain steadfast, however, in our mission to eradicate sexual abuse and harassment at the Bureau. The Bureau is working closely with the Department to implement the recommendations of the Department's Sexual Misconduct Working Group and to continue enforcing the requirements of the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003.<sup>2</sup> As of the end of September, there were 8,126 open employee discipline cases. Of these, 2,211 had been open for less than six months. The remaining 5,915 had been open for longer than six months. Referrals that present serious administrative or criminal misconduct are sent first to DOJ OIG for review and deferral. That process can take days to months, and this review is required before BOP is authorized to move forward with any administrative investigation.

To address this shortfall, our Office of Internal Affairs (OIA) has recently reorganized and has moved oversight of our Special Investigative Agents (SIAs) from reporting locally to the Wardens, to reporting centrally to FBOP Headquarters. Additionally, there are 53 additional positions that have been added to OIA, including 32 new SIA positions, 12 new Special Agent (SA) positions, eight new Supervisory Special Agents (SSA), and one Senior Investigative Support Specialist (ISS). The Employment Law Branch of our Office of General Counsel has also added 14 new positions. Of these, nine are attorney positions. We are monitoring cases, caseloads, and the time it takes to close cases all the way up to myself to increase efficiency in investigations and accountability. The Inspector General and I meet regularly, and we review the status of our cases that are under review and our open cases.

Further, consistent with a recommendation from the Sexual Misconduct Working Group, the Department supported a recommendation that the U.S. Sentencing Commission expand the applicability of compassionate release, in appropriate cases, for individuals who are the victim of sexual misconduct perpetrated by BOP employees. On April 28, 2023, the U.S. Sentencing Commission voted to promulgate amendments to the policy statement applicable to compassionate release motions. And in August, the Deputy Attorney General issued guidance on responding to requests for compassionate release, including to account for this recent amendment. Since then, consistent with the Working Group's recommendation, the Department and the BOP have supported reductions in sentences in appropriate cases, and will continue to afford meaningful review to such requests on a case-by-case basis. Most recently, BOP has moved for compassionate release on behalf of several victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by a BOP official.

### **Facilities Maintenance and Repair**

The Bureau has over 46,000 acres with almost 300 structures dispersed across over 120 institutions. The Bureau's estimated backlog for significant maintenance and repair (M&R) is

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<sup>2</sup> Report and Recommendations Concerning the Department of Justice's Response to Sexual Misconduct by Employees of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (Nov. 2, 2022), *available at* [https://www.justice.gov/d9/pages/attachments/2022/11/03/2022.11.02\\_bop\\_sexual\\_misconduct\\_working\\_group\\_report.pdf](https://www.justice.gov/d9/pages/attachments/2022/11/03/2022.11.02_bop_sexual_misconduct_working_group_report.pdf).

over \$2 billion. By comparison, over the last ten years the Bureau has received an average of approximately \$100 million per year in appropriations for necessary repairs and alterations. As a result, our current infrastructure needs are significant.

The Bureau recently awarded a contract to develop a strategic framework to address these challenges. The Contractor will assist the Bureau in developing an infrastructure strategy to increase the overall effectiveness of facilities management in the Bureau. The strategy will align infrastructure decisions with the Bureau's mission, including one or more methodologies for allocating resources, including short, medium, and long-range planning goals. Through working with this small business partner, the Bureau expects to develop a portfolio-based repair model for its M&R backlog, a retention or disposal decision model, and a business case analysis for new construction.

The Bureau and the Contractor conducted an in-depth and in-person kickoff meeting on the 21st of August, with completion of their work set to end in the second quarter of FY 2025.

### **First Step Act Implementation**

We remain committed to supporting full implementation of the First Step Act by ensuring those in our care can access programming opportunities and that eligible individuals receive appropriate FSA incentives. Since January 2020, more than 104,000 incarcerated individuals have participated in approximately 110 evidence-based recidivism-reduction (EBRR) programs and productive activities (PAs) within the Bureau. Having pivoted out of the COVID-19 pandemic, our programming capacity has returned to pre-COVID levels, but we have a backlog of program waitlists. To meet the programming needs of our population, institutions are adding programs and additional programming employees, enhancing the data management of programming implementation, and expanding program space where necessary and if feasible.

In 2019, we adopted the new good conduct time calculation required by the FSA and began implementing the FSA time credit provisions. Initially, implementing the FSA time credit provisions meant interim procedures with manual calculation of credits from the time the language of the final rule was approved until an automated system could be developed and tested. Then, in 2022, we transitioned from manual to automated FSA time credit calculations, streamlining and accelerating the process. Implementation of this system revealed that some individuals had not completed a needs assessment, a statutory prerequisite to earning time credits. As a result, some individuals' balances of earned time credits decreased when the automatic calculation system launched. The Bureau took immediate action to ensure that the issue did not adversely affect those who had failed to complete their needs assessment or those who had initially refused assigned programming. On November 18, 2022, the Bureau informed all adults in custody that it would extend a grace period through December 31, 2022, which allowed individuals to complete their needs assessments and address any declined programs in order to remain in what we call "earning status" under the automated system.

Also in November 2022, we published the policy on FSA time credits to formalize implementation of the FSA time credits final rule. In February and March 2023, we made clarifying edits to the policy.



This new policy was designed to streamline the calculation of credits and maximize an individual's ability to earn and apply these credits when engaging in programming. We modified a prohibition on earning credit in restrictive housing, so that individuals will be able to earn credit even while in administrative detention, if they continue to participate in programming. We clarified that time credit could continue to be earned while an individual is in a community placement such as a Residential Reentry Center or on home confinement, so long as the individual continues to comply with all the rules and procedures of prerelease custody.

### **Compassionate Release and Home Confinement**

**Compassionate Release.** The Bureau continues in its efforts to support compassionate release, wherein the sentencing court is able to reduce a sentence due to extraordinary and compelling reasons. The FSA went into effect on December 21, 2018, and as of October 10, 2023, we had released a total of around 4,627 individuals who were under our care through compassionate release. Of that group of individuals, 131 were released through compassionate release on a motion initiated by the Bureau, and 4,496 received compassionate release after a defense motion. Requests for compassionate release receive close and individualized review based on extraordinary and compelling circumstances.

As part of the compassionate release review process, we collaborate closely with U.S. Attorneys' Offices to determine if petitioning the sentencing court for compassionate release on behalf of an individual is warranted. While we work to review and handle compassionate release requests efficiently, ultimately, compassionate release decisions rest with the sentencing courts. As described above, we also have considered and will be prepared to comply with the U.S. Sentencing Commission's proposed amendments to compassionate release as they relate to individuals who are victims of sexual abuse while in our custody, which will take effect next month. To date, three individuals who were the victim of sexual abuse by a BOP employee have been released due to our petitioning.

**Home Confinement.** To ensure public safety and effective reentry with the home confinement provision authorized under the FSA, we rely on our Residential Reentry Centers. Those contractors work diligently to create a personalized reentry process, including individual-specific employment guidance, financial management advice, and more. This approach equips individuals with tools for a responsible and successful transition back into their communities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act enabled many individuals in Bureau facilities to be placed in home confinement for their health and safety. We tracked the individuals under our care whom we moved into home confinement. From March 2020 through June 24, 2023, we transferred approximately 13,666 individuals into home confinement under our CARES Act authority, with the vast majority of those individuals completing their sentence in home confinement without returning to an institution. Although the specific authority for new CARES Act home confinement placements has ended, those already placed remain in their placements. As of August 31, 2023, approximately 3,374 individuals remained in home confinement in accordance with applicable

rules. The vast majority of those placed on home confinement have complied with program rules, and less than 0.05% have been returned to custody for committing new crimes.

### **Health Care and Suicide Prevention**

As corrections professionals, we have known for decades that we are a health care organization. If individuals are going to be able to successfully program inside our institutions and re-enter our communities successfully, we must ensure healthy bodies and healthy minds by providing effective, timely, and evidence-based care. We have approximately 157,000 patients who are the equivalent of ten years older biologically than their chronological age because of their lack of preventive care and other health disparities. While demographic differences and data limitations can complicate accurate comparisons, generally, the individuals under our care usually have more chronic diseases than the U.S. general population and a higher percentage of mental health and substance use conditions. For instance, of those under our care, roughly 27.6% experience mental health conditions compared to 22.8% of the U.S. general population. Additionally, we have found that the rate of individuals in our care meeting the clinical criteria for one or more substance use disorders is significantly higher in the FBOP population, at 31.8%, when compared to 16.5% in the general U.S. population.

The pandemic allowed, for the first time, the community at-large an opportunity to understand the importance of high-quality health care within our facilities. As we pivot out of the pandemic, we want to leverage that knowledge going forward. To that end, we are in the process of procuring a contract that will allow us to review the quality of health care services within the FBOP system, review our policies and procedures to ensure we are operating through the lens of physical and mental health in all that we do, and then help us expand our work on reinforcing a culture of humanity and normalcy in our environments for both our employees and those who are in our custody. We look forward to seeing the results of that review and sharing those recommendations with you.

As we manage these complex issues and care for patients with complex care needs, our healthcare professionals utilize a team-based treatment approach and individualized care plans to ensure timely access to care coupled with comprehensive management of medical, mental health, and substance use needs.

Opioid Use Disorder (OUD), in particular, affects approximately 2.7 million Americans and thus presents a significant challenge within our facilities. From a security perspective, dangerous substances like illicitly made fentanyl can pose a health risk to FBOP employees and those in our custody that may come into contact with the substance. From a substance use and mental health perspective, we have incorporated evidence-based treatments like Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) and substance use disorder treatment services. These programs address various facets of the issue, preparing individuals to reenter their communities successfully. MOUD is available across all Bureau facilities and collaborations with agencies such as the DEA and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration ensure consistent accessibility and success.

To reduce the risk of death by overdose, either through use or accidental exposure, we continuously work to combat this and all contraband entering our institutions. We have heightened screening of mail and incoming publications. We are exploring innovative methods and have introduced electronic tablets in select facilities where individuals in our custody can maintain communication with friends and family, intending to reduce physical correspondence entering our facilities. Concurrently, we are examining advanced screening tools, like field test kits and hyper-spectral scanners, to safeguard our institutions further and maintain essential communication methods.

To save lives, we have also made opioid reversal agents like naloxone available in all of our institutions. Trained first responders within the facility can administer life-saving doses of naloxone, 24 hours a day, to anyone suspected of experiencing an opioid overdose. By incorporating our approach to OUD within primary healthcare, mental health treatment, and first responders, we emphasize careful planning, consistent care, training for our clinicians and responders, and risk reduction.

Our approach to OUD treatment does not end at our walls. We recognize the importance of post-release care. The Bureau coordinates with transitional care teams and community treatment professionals, ensuring treatment benefits and access to services persist after release.

**Suicide Prevention.** We are also taking steps to enhance our suicide prevention efforts. One suicide on our watch is one too many. The well-being of those under our care is our mission; hence, we have long prioritized suicide prevention. Each institution has a Clinical Psychologist designated as a Suicide Prevention Program Coordinator. These coordinators monitor at-risk individuals and guarantee adherence to the Bureau's assessment and intervention protocols. All of our employees receive regular training, equipping them with the necessary skills to identify and effectively care for those who are at risk of suicide.

Any time a risk of suicide is suspected, psychologists swiftly conduct Suicide Risk Assessments. When we have identified an individual at possible risk for self-harm, they are immediately safeguarded, and the individual assessments then prompt short-term and long-term plans to promote the individual's mental health.

We work to continuously monitor and track research and best practices as it relates to suicide prevention. Towards that end, this summer, our Deputy Director launched a Warden's Advisory Group to review our current policies and practices related to suicide prevention. The work is underway, and we look forward to hearing and sharing their recommended changes with you.

**Supporting Incarcerated Women.** Recognizing that incarcerated women, including those in the LGBTQ community, require different resources and supports than men, we recognize that we must create environments that respond to the realities of women's lives and address the issues specific to their lived experiences. Women experience higher rates of trauma, are often primary caregivers for minor children, have lower rates of education, and typically earn less than their male counterparts. In supporting the incarcerated woman, we must also include screening appropriate candidates to work at our women's facilities and provide trauma-informed

care and therapeutic interventions that address abuse, violence, poor family relationships, substance abuse, and comorbid disorders. This approach to supporting incarcerated women focuses on self-efficacy, treatment, and skills-building.

### **Evolving Approaches to Restrictive Housing**

We are working to comply with the provisions of the President's Executive Order on restrictive housing and align with best practices as it relates to restrictive housing. Restrictive housing is an effective tool for maintaining safety and security and protecting lives; however, research has also shown that restrictive housing can harm a person's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Research supported by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) suggests that it is not an effective deterrent, does not reduce institutional-level misconduct or violence, and increases an individual's likelihood of reoffending after release. As of September 2023, approximately 11,000 individuals were housed in Special Housing Units (SHU) in Bureau facilities. This number represents roughly a 0.4% increase in the percentage of individuals in our custody who are housed in SHU since the same time last year. However, we strive to ensure that we only place individuals in single cells when necessary to ensure public safety. There are several scenarios that result in an individual being placed in SHU, including, but not limited to when there is an imminent risk of violence towards others or when the individual exhibits severe mental health symptoms that make them vulnerable to the influence of others.

We are working on short-term and long-term plans that will continue to advance our long-standing efforts to improve behavior modification and utilize the tool of restrictive housing in line with research and best practices. In the short term, we have activated an internal working group to review our current practices alongside current research and a review of state corrections best practices. That group is working on recommendations for the executive team to consider, and we look forward to sharing those outcomes. In the long term, we and NIJ have partnered to invest in research that will inform how federal correctional institutions can effectively reduce the use of restrictive housing. The research will explore policies and discern whether and how we can further reduce our reliance on restrictive housing. We will use those findings to explore alternatives, implement effective policies, and ensure compliance within our correctional institutions while maintaining safety and security.

To identify alternatives to restrictive housing, we also use routine transfers for individuals seeking protective custody to enter the general population at another facility where there is no foreseeable threat. We have also activated Reintegration Units (RUs) for medium- and high-security incarcerated individuals who have been in restrictive housing due to protective custody requests, allowing them to improve their ability to adjust to less restrictive environments and eventually reintegrate into the general population when doing so does not pose a risk to their safety or others. We hope to continue expanding our use of RUs as we are guided by the studies surrounding these issues.

### **Conclusion**

Chairman Biggs, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to speak on behalf of the Bureau and its dedicated employees throughout the country

regarding the good work we are doing and our efforts at continuous improvement. I believe in the importance of transparency, oversight, and coming to this work with arms wide open. The Bureau's mission is extremely challenging but critical to the safety and security of the public, our employees, and individuals housed within our facilities.

With your support, we will remain a forward-thinking leader in corrections, fostering wellness in our dedicated law enforcement professionals who risk their own safety daily to ensure the safety of others while helping those in our care to rejoin their communities as responsible neighbors. I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, for the support we have seen from Members of this Committee, and for your continued support as we move forward.