

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 19, 2019

The Honorable William Barr  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Barr:

We write to draw your attention to persistent understaffing problems at Bureau of Prisons (BOP) facilities, an issue that we urge you to address as you lay out priorities for your tenure at the Department of Justice. We have previously contacted former Attorney General Jeff Sessions to raise our concerns about BOP's risky staffing practices, including the hiring of an insufficient number of correctional officers and the use of staff augmentation. We hope that you will take steps to address these issues and ensure the safety of the men and women who serve in our nation's federal prisons.

It is our understanding that BOP intended to cut or leave unfilled 6,000 positions last year. The failure to fully and properly staff BOP facilities has led to higher inmate-to-staff ratios, which present serious risks to safety and security and can have tragic consequences. In 2013, our constituent Eric Williams, a 34-year-old correctional officer, was brutally stabbed to death by a convicted murderer at a high-security federal prison, USP Canaan. Eric was standing guard alone in a housing unit with over 100 criminals.

To compensate for staffing deficits, some BOP facilities have relied on augmentation, using employees such as healthcare providers, teachers and other support staff to assist in guarding inmates. This creates an unsafe environment for staff, inmates and the public. Correctional officers, who act as the law enforcement officers within a prison, have the training and experience necessary to guard inmates and address any dangerous situations that arise. BOP policy should ensure that correctional officer duties are performed by trained correctional officers, without relying too heavily on augmentation. Federal prisons—particularly high-security facilities—are a stressful, and often dangerous, work environment for prison staff. A fundamental step BOP can take to improve their working conditions is to cease its overreliance on augmentation.

Proper staffing is absolutely necessary to keep officers, support staff, inmates and the general public as safe and secure as possible. The hiring freezes and staff reductions of the last few years are counterproductive to BOP's stated mission of housing inmates in facilities that are "safe, humane, cost-efficient and appropriately secure." As Attorney General, you will play a key role in directing and crafting BOP policy. We strongly encourage you to use your position to ensure

that our federal prisons are fully and properly staffed. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Robert P. Casey, Jr. in blue ink.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Pat Toomey in blue ink.

Pat Toomey  
United States Senator