

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 16, 2021

Michael Carvajal
Director
Bureau of Prisons
320 1st St NW
Washington, DC 20534

Kathleen McGettigan
Acting Director
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW,
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Director Carvajal and Acting Director McGettigan:

We write to follow up on our letter sent on August 2, 2020 to again support the efforts of the correctional staff at the United States Penitentiary (USP) Thomson to recruit qualified staff to work at the facility. As outlined in our August 2020 letter, we support the request that USP Thomson be included in the Chicago-Naperville, IL-IN-WI GS Locality, which would increase compensation for Thomson employees and help with recruitment. Additionally, we support their request that Thomson correctional officers be provided a 25 percent retention bonus.

As you know, USP Thomson is a high-security federal penitentiary with an adjacent minimum-security satellite camp. To manage this population, USP Thomson is authorized to employ 602 staff, including 364 custody staff. However, as of April 16, 2021, the prison only has 459 hired employees, including 246 custody staff.

The high number of unstaffed positions has led to a number of troubling issues at USP Thomson, including significant overtime and reliance on augmentation. For instance, AFGC Local 4070 has informed our offices that USP Thomson leadership uses 20 augmentations daily and more than 2,000 overtime shifts per month to keep the facility functioning. In addition, since the start of 2020, there have been five inmate deaths from fights or suicides that may have been prevented with additional staff.

As you know, there are several factors that hamper the ability of USP Thomson to fill vacant positions. These include limited housing options, long commutes to the facility, and lack of childcare services. In fact, on May 24, 2019, former USP Thomson Warden Donald Hudson wrote a letter to local communities highlighting the need for additional amenities to bolster recruitment efforts. The letter notes:

Affordable and desirable housing along with good quality schools and day care centers determine where Bureau of Prisons' staff reside. They need apartments, rental houses, starter homes, and larger homes for their expanding families. Unfortunately, for some,

commuting a long distance is necessary, with some staff traveling as far north as Dubuque and south beyond the Quad Cities.

In addition, we believe that including USP Thomson Prison in the Chicago-Naperville, IL-IN-WI GS Locality will greatly help with recruitment. As you know, the 2020 Locality Pay Adjustment for the Chicago locality is 28.59 percent, which means that GS employees in this area are paid 28.59 percent more than the GS Base Pay Table.

Given the significant differences in pay between USP Thomson and similar opportunities in Chicago, it is difficult for the facility in Thomson to maintain their already limited staffing levels, as employees can make significantly more at, for example, RRM Chicago and MCC Chicago. These issues are only compounded by the lack of amenities in the Thomson area discussed above. Indeed, USP Thomson staff have told our offices that they cannot compete with the pay being offered by BOP facilities in Chicago, which are a little over two hours away.

Given the low staffing levels, the challenges that have resulted from unstaffed positions, and ongoing issues with recruitment, we strongly support AFGE Local 4070's request that Thomson staff be provided a 25 percent retention bonus and Chicago-based compensation. These steps are necessary to improve recruitment and retention of staff at USP Thomson and would provide immediate encouragement for qualified individuals to apply to work at USP Thomson, as well as for current staff to remain at the facility. We urge you to use these and any other tools necessary to quickly address the ongoing staffing shortages at USP Thomson.

Sincerely,



Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress

/s/ Dick Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator