



Council of Prison Locals 33

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
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FOR THE

**SENATE JUDICIARY: SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND
COUNTERTERRORISM**

***“Sexual Assault in U.S. Prisons Two Decades After the Prison Rape
Elimination Act”***

**PRESENTED:
September 25, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chairman Booker, Ranking Member Cotton, Members of the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism, and distinguished guests.

I want to sincerely thank the Sub-committee for this opportunity to present the perspective of our federal prison system from the professional, hard-working, men and women, of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. I must once again make mention, for far too long this conversation has been missing a key element; the professional law enforcement officers who have dedicated their lives to protecting their coworkers and communities, and safely housing inmates.

The Council of Prison Locals represents nearly 30,000 correctional professionals, across the country, in 121 federal prisons. These professional law enforcement officers, who work tirelessly in some of the most violent self-contained 'cities' in the country, keep us all safe from some of the world's most dangerous human beings.

Let me start my remarks for today's hearing off with, The Council absolutely condemns sexual abuse of inmates. Our job is to ensure the safety and security of the institutions where we work, and sexual abuse of an individual should never be tolerated. While we applaud the goal behind PREA, there are truly some shortfalls:

The primary concern is the current staffing level within the Bureau of Prisons. The staffing level is so catastrophic it has and will again lead to loss of life. The most efficient way to provide security and oversight is not cameras and technology, it is staffing. This must be addressed

urgently not only for the protection of our staff, but also for the inmates housed in our care.

Secondly, is the level of funding the bureau receives to achieve its mission. The current funding level is inadequate at best and has caused the bureau to reduce a lot of things to include training. This hinders our ability to effectively carry out the Bureau's mission of rehabilitation and reintegration, among many other things.

While I know there will be a lot of discussion today about sexual abuse of inmates there is a whole other side to this discussion that Congress needs to be made aware of and needs to address in some substantial way. The fact of the matter is inmates are frequently sexual harassing and assaulting bureau of prisons staff inside of our facilities.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons could not operate without the almost 10,000 or 30% of female staff it currently has. As noted by a recent UN report addressing the effect of females working in prisons, "the role of female prison officials goes far beyond working in women's prisons. In all facilities the presence of women staff can often defuse potentially volatile incidents when confrontations arise..."The strength of women officers in prisons lies not just in their ability to enforce rules, and in their courage and resilience, but also in their innate capacity to empathize, making a profound difference by fostering a more rehabilitative atmosphere."

DOJ's Inspector General Michael Horowitz noted in the February 23, 2023 Report on the Federal Bureau of Prison's Efforts to Address Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Committed by Inmates Towards Staff that inmate-on-staff sexual harassment is "widespread" within the BOP. In addition to rape and sexual assault, inmates' subject employees to egregious sexual harassment including exposing their genitals, exhibitionary masturbation, throwing semen, threats of sexual violence, and a constant barrage of vile, crude and degrading sexual comments.

I can wholeheartedly tell you female staff are quitting because of the sexual abuse to which they are subjected; thereby, further worsening the understaffing crisis and further reducing our ability to keep everyone safe inside of the walls in which we work.

The prisons where inmate sexual misconduct is rampant have the attitude that nothing can be done to stop it and that is what the employees signed up for when they agreed to work for the BOP. Despite that attitude, there are prisons where inmate sexual misconduct is not tolerated and there are steps that can be taken to protect our staff.

It is unclear to me, why we are refusing to prioritize staffing our prisons, thereby protecting our staff and the inmates in our care. Not only has this caused the bureau to lose staff, but it has cost the agency well over \$ 30 million dollars in the last 15 years alone (2016 \$20 million to female staff at FCC Coleman, 2018 \$11 million at FCC Victorville). In the settlements just mentioned the bureau agreed to undertake programmatic relief as a result of the class action lawsuit brought by female staff against the agency for failure to prevent inmate sexual

harassment, but this was just implemented bureau-wide this year. This in itself is a step in the right direction, but is far from the end of the solution.

Chairman Booker, Ranking Member Cotton, and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my formal statement. I look forward to answering your questions and providing additional insight.