

Prepared Statement by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Prisons
Thursday, September 29, 2022

[VIDEO](#)

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from Director Peters as well as the witnesses from our second panel today.

I'd like to emphasize that this hearing gives us a chance to ask questions of Director Peters under oath, but I think it'd make a lot of sense if this committee had the chance to do so before she became Director on August 2nd.

I've cosponsored the *Federal Prisons Accountability Act of 2022*. This is a bipartisan bill sponsored by Leader McConnell and cosponsored by several others including Senators Lee and Ossoff, and it would make the position of director of the Bureau of Prisons a Senate confirmable position.

The Bureau of Prisons has been the subject of serious criticism. Inefficiency, mismanagement, staffing problems, abuse of prisoners, crimes by prisoners, failure to implement prison programming, the list goes on and on. A confirmation hearing is an opportunity for more accountability.

This committee last held an oversight hearing of the bureau in April of 2021 with former Director Carvajal. He told us at that time that the bureau was on track to meet its obligations under the *First Step Act* and to resolve staffing shortages. But we were misled because these remain areas of serious concern today.

Staffing at federal prisons is a crisis. Without enough staff, you can't have the security to stop criminal activity inside prisons. Without enough staff, you can't implement *First Step Act* programming to rehabilitate those who want to reform themselves. Without enough staff, you can't keep inmates and staff safe.

I also want to mention that this committee has become aware of what appears to be disturbing examples of mismanagement and corruption.

Director Peters, on August 1st of this year, I sent you a letter on those issues that you've yet to respond to. I know you only took the position on August 2nd, but I'd still like to see a response to that as soon as possible.

The letter is about whether commissaries create a conflict of interest for the BOP's efforts to ensure inmates are satisfying their financial obligations. Many inmates have outstanding obligations such as victim restitution and child support.

Inmates such as the Boston Bomber and Larry Nassar have thousands of dollars to spend on cigarettes and candy that's stashed with the BOP.

While the BOP sits on that money, these notorious criminals aren't paying victim restitution and other obligations. In other words, the BOP profits from these criminals hiding their money in prisoner accounts instead of paying their victims.

Action has been promised with respect to reforming how these accounts are monitored. However, we've seen little follow through.

This committee has also been concerned about instances of prison workers and corrections officers committing crimes.

Director Peters, I understand that you recently visited Federal Correction Institution Dublin, where several staff – including a chaplain and former warden – have been arrested for sexually abusing inmates.

In response to letters from this committee, the BOP has supplied information on policies for hiring and enforcing rules on employee misconduct. However, those policies and rules don't matter if they aren't enforced within a culture that discourages breaking the rules.

Leadership begins at the top. As I tell all government employees in leadership positions: either you run the agency or the agency runs you.

In conclusion, I want to mention something that I think you figured I'd say. I've always placed a high importance on whistleblowers. Whistleblowers are patriotic citizens that put their country above their own self-interest. Whistleblowers help keep the government honest.

It's been widely reported that inmates who complain face punishment, but reports also indicate that whistleblower employees at the bureau face retaliation for speaking up.

This is not how you build accountability or trust.

It's important that as director of the BOP, you understand that whistleblowers are protected by law and their efforts should be supported, not chilled.

Thank you.

