

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

November 15, 2023

Colette S. Peters
Director
Bureau of Prisons
320 1st St, NW
Washington, DC 20534

Kiran Ahuja
Director
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Director Peters and Director Ahuja:

We write with concerns about understaffing and unsustainable working conditions at the Federal Correctional Institution in Englewood, Colorado (FCI Englewood). This essential Bureau of Prisons (BOP) workforce continues to raise concerns about low pay, forced overtime, and dangerous working conditions, which are exacerbating low morale, high attrition among workers, and an inability to recruit and retain qualified staff. We request your support and assistance to address these issues and ensure a safe environment for BOP staff, the surrounding communities, and the inmate population by authorizing direct hiring authority and providing a 25 percent retention bonus for all corrections staff.

FCI Englewood is a low security federal correctional institution with an adjacent minimum-security satellite camp and detention center. Located in Littleton, Colorado, the facility's correctional workforce is currently below 75% staffing. Over a quarter of these critical positions are vacant. Understaffing has led to more than 600 instances of mandatory overtime use in the past three months, where officers were required to continue working past the end of their usual shifts, often for an additional eight hours without a break. We have heard from constituents who report that it is also common for officers to work mandatory overtime shifts three and four times per week with little to no advanced notification. Fatigue, frustration, exhaustion, and low morale have reduced worker productivity and are also leading to an increase in sick leave and reduced officer retention rates.

Due to the severe staffing issues for correctional workers at FCI Englewood, there has been a decrease in staffing in many other departments at the facility as well, meaning that across the board for all positions at FCI Englewood around one in five positions remain unfilled. Inadequate staffing levels can lead to dangerous working conditions for the staff and an unsafe environment for the inmate population. In the last year, there have been over 10 staff assaults, five inmate suicide attempts and two inmate deaths and an increase in confiscations of hard contraband such as drugs and weapons at the facility.

The low pay and dangerous working conditions make working at FCI Englewood an unattractive choice for prospective employees. Many employers in the area pay more than BOP, including those in similar fields of work. For example, correctional officers with the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC) make on average \$15,000 more each year than the federal workers at FCI Englewood.

According to American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), many steps have been taken to help resolve the understaffing issues. For example, AFGE reports regularly meeting with BOP officials to propose new ways to expedite the hiring process and ramp up recruitment. To address these urgent staffing issues, BOP provided a 25% retention bonus to current correctional officers at FCI Englewood. However, there are several outstanding factors that hamper FCI Englewood's ability to fill vacant positions. These include a hiring freeze in 2017 that resulted in the institution being far below the authorized number of staff. In 2016, the BOP reduced the number of positions authorized for each institution. There have also been subsequent staff reductions, like the reduction in 2019 which have prevented levels from returning to 2016 levels. In addition, as result of FCI Englewood's reliance on mandatory overtime, the institution paid out more than \$10 million in overtime for correctional officers from 2020 to 2022. Another, roughly \$3 million was paid in 2023 to cover unfilled positions.

We support AFGE Local 709's request to provide FCI Englewood with direct hiring authority to help reduce the time it takes to hire new employees. Additionally, we support the request that all FCI Englewood correctional staff receive a 25 percent retention bonus to mitigate additional staff attrition and help promote the retention, recruitment, and hiring of new staff, so that temporary duty-assigned staff can return to their normal duties. We look forward to working with you to address the unsustainable staffing shortage at FCI Englewood, and we respectfully request your response by December 8, 2023.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator