

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 1, 2023

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

The Honorable Lisa Monaco
Deputy Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Director Ahuja and Deputy Attorney General Monaco,

We write with concerns about understaffing and low pay at the federal correctional institution in Sheridan, Oregon (FCI Sheridan). In our discussions with prison staff and union representatives, they repeatedly raised concerns about low morale, high rates of attrition, and difficulties recruiting and retaining staff. We each discussed these issues with Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Director Colette Peters, who was familiar with them and vowed to correct them. To address these urgent staffing issues, BOP authorized a 25% retention bonus for all correctional staff as well as additional retention and relocation bonuses in January of this year. We urge the United States Department of Justice and Office of Personnel Management to quickly approve these important incentives.

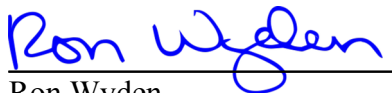
FCI Sheridan is comprised of a medium security federal correctional institution with an adjacent minimum security prison camp and detention center. While FCI Sheridan is currently authorized to employ 341 staff, including 115 custodial officers, it has remained regularly understaffed with a total of 104 separations from 2019 through 2022. We understand that since November 2022, BOP has stepped up recruitment drives for FCI Sheridan through on-site and off-site recruitment events, however, as of May 2023, FCI Sheridan remains short at least 56 correctional staff, including 27 custodial officers.

While numerous factors contribute to this problem, uncompetitive compensation is a leading cause of hiring and retention issues at FCI Sheridan. In particular, through discussions with staff and union representatives, we learned that staff at FCI Sheridan often leave BOP employment to join the Oregon Department of Corrections, which pays considerably higher salaries on average compared to FCI Sheridan. However, we understand that when 25% retention bonuses have been granted at other federal penitentiaries with similar problems, recruitment has improved and attrition rates have fallen at those facilities. For example, when United States Penitentiary, Thomson, a federal prison in Illinois, faced serious staffing issues and was granted a 25% retention bonus, correctional officer fill rates improved from 56% to 78%.

Full staffing is also critical to ensuring that the health, safety, and constitutional rights of incarcerated people are protected. In August of last year, we wrote to BOP Director Peters about our concerns regarding inmates' experiences with unaddressed medical needs and small cell confinement and allegations of staff retaliation and violence at FCI Sheridan. While we understand that these allegations remain under investigation by BOP, improving recruitment and retention of custodial staff as well as doctors, nurses, and other non-custodial staff is paramount to making sure that inmates' rights are protected. We also look forward to working with FCI Sheridan warden Israel Jacquez on improving both staffing levels and conditions for inmates at the prison.

Given the ongoing staffing problems at FCI Sheridan, we strongly support BOP's decision to grant these retention incentives. We urge you to approve and implement this decision as soon as possible and would appreciate your response by July 17, 2023.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator