

**Statement for the Record
Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on Bureau of Prisons Oversight
November 19, 2019**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Today's hearing provides an opportunity to conduct oversight of the Bureau of Prisons – the federal entity responsible for the care and custody of over 180,000 federal inmates and one of the Justice Department's largest employers, with approximately 35,500 employees as of May 2019.

There are two issues that I hope we can focus on – implementation of the *First Step Act*, and problems with staffing and conditions in Bureau of Prisons facilities.

First Step Act

Last December, Congress passed the *First Step Act*, and the President signed that bill into law. It was an important moment of bipartisanship.

That bill reduced a number of harsh mandatory minimum sentences. As I have said in the past: I am not a fan of mandatory minimum sentences – particularly those that give no discretion to sentencing judges.

Early in my career, I sat on several thousand felony cases as a member of the California Women's Board of Terms and Parole. This Board set the sentence and granted parole to women sentenced to state prison.

I recall one woman sentenced to more than a decade in prison for having three marijuana cigarettes. The judge ran the counts consecutively, and the sentences added up to fifteen years. Fifteen years for three cigarettes.

Aside from mandatory minimums, the legislation also addressed problems in the federal correctional system.

Specifically, the Bureau of Prisons is supposed to assess each inmate and assign them to participate in evidence-based recidivism reduction programs.

The goal is that once each inmate leaves, he or she will never return to prison. The Bureau of Prisons has the responsibility to make sure this happens by putting in place rehabilitative and job training programs. I hope to hear about those efforts today.

It is a crucial part of our job as members of Congress to remove unfairness from the criminal justice system, and I believe the *First Step Act* was just that – a first step in our journey.

Full implementation of this critically important legislation will continue to be a priority for me.

Bureau of Prisons Facility Issues

Separately, I continue to hear about staffing shortages and working conditions at the Bureau of Prisons that are cause for concern.

There are currently 3,300 vacant positions in the Bureau of Prisons. These shortages are imposing unrealistic overtime on correctional officers.

In some instances, administrative staff, medical staff, or even teachers are called upon to fill in shifts for correctional officers. This means that staff with minimal correctional officer training are placed in potentially dangerous situations, increasing the risk to employees and inmates.

At the same time, deterioration of BOP facilities have exposed inmates and staff to mold and extreme weather conditions.

Safety should be paramount at the Bureau of Prisons, and I am concerned that more needs to be done.

I therefore look forward to hearing from our witness on these important issues.

Thank you.