

November 2, 2023

Colette S. Peters  
Director  
Federal Bureau of Prisons  
320 First Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20534

Dear Director Peters,

I write to express support for efforts to recruit and retain qualified correctional officers (COs) and staff at Federal Correctional Complex (FCC) Hazelton, including a 25 percent retention incentive bonus. The request for a group retention incentive of 25 percent for all FCC Hazelton staff was approved by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and is pending consideration at BOP Headquarters. FCC Hazelton faces a dangerous staffing shortage that, while challenging, could be improved by providing current employees with a much-deserved pay increase. As you work to improve the safety of BOP staff and inmates, I respectfully request that you approve a 25 percent retention incentive for all FCC Hazelton staff in good standing.

Located in Bruceton Mills, West Virginia, FCC Hazelton comprises the high-security United States Penitentiary Hazelton, which houses over 1,500 inmates, as well as the smaller Federal Correctional Institute Hazelton. FCC Hazelton suffers from serious staffing shortages. According to data from BOP and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 420, FCC Hazelton has averaged between 70-85 CO vacancies and 30-45 staff vacancies since the beginning of the year. There has been substantial public reporting about FCC Hazelton's staffing shortage.

The dire staffing shortage has created a volatile situation threatening staff and inmates alike. I am particularly concerned about the high amount of CO vacancies. An absence of qualified COs has resulted in a reliance on augmentation, a practice in which non-CO staff, such as counselors, plumbers, cooks, and teachers, are required to work as COs. This is an extremely dangerous practice putting untrained staff in threatening situations. The practice also diverts resources from other critical prison programs. Finally, I am concerned about reports of significant mandatory overtime, with some staff working sixteen hour shifts multiple times per week.

A retention incentive for all FCC Hazelton staff in good standing would reduce attrition and augmentation, allowing BOP to continue the difficult process of raising staffing levels back to normal. The Senate Appropriations Committee, of which I am a member, discusses the dangerous practice of augmentation in the Fiscal Year 2024 Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations bill and calls on BOP to take all necessary measures to end the practice:

BOP routinely uses a process called ‘augmentation,’ whereby a non-custodial employee is assigned custodial responsibilities. The continued use of augmentation stretches correctional facility staff too thin, leading to unsafe conditions for both staff and inmates. The Committee has expressed its concerns about the practice of augmentation since Fiscal Year 2017 and once again directs BOP to curtail its overreliance on augmentation.

Tackling FCC Hazelton’s staffing shortage should be a top BOP policy priority. Recruitment near FCC Hazelton, a rural area, is challenging. In addition to supporting AFGE Local 420’s recruitment efforts, BOP should use every available tool, including retention incentives, to reduce attrition. Retention incentives are a readily available tool that has been authorized in the past by BOP for other federal correctional facilities facing staffing shortages. As you work to advance BOP’s mission of protecting staff and inmates, I respectfully request that you approve a 25 percent retention incentive for all FCC Hazelton staff in good standing as soon as possible.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this issue. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III", written over a horizontal line.

JOE MANCHIN III  
United States Senator