

April 9, 2024

The Honorable James Comer
Chair, House Oversight Committee
2410 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

We, the undersigned organizations, write today to urge you to support and advance the Federal Prison Oversight Act (H.R. 3019). We strongly support this effort to improve the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) because it is aligned with our core values of ensuring government accountability and improving public safety. This common sense legislation accomplishes these goals by increasing accountability in our prison system, preventing harm to both those living and working in these facilities, and providing transparency for those individuals serving to keep prisons safe as well as the public at large.

America's prison system is in crisis. Our support of independent prison oversight stems from irrefutable evidence of failure that puts corrections officers and those they oversee at risk of serious injury, exemplified by facilities that are overcrowded, understaffed, underfunded, unsafe, and in a state of dangerous disrepair. The absence of oversight has given rise to a prison system that is rampant with abuse, neglect, and mismanagement, making rehabilitation difficult and endangering everyone who lives and works in a federal prison. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) employs over 34,000 people and is responsible for the care of over 150,000 people with a budget north of \$8 billion. Still, the BOP has historically operated with little transparency and accountability. The BOP should be safer and more productive for the people who reside and work in their facilities, and more accountable and transparent to taxpayers. We know that when correctional officers are given the proper resources and prisoners are provide to pathways to rehabilitation there is a direct increase in public safety through reduced recidivism rates.

An independent oversight agency is key to improving outcomes in the federal prison system. H.R.3019 contains two main provisions to improve the safety and accountability of our federal prison system. Under the Federal Prison Oversight Act the BOP would be subject to independent oversight by the Department of Justice's Office of Inspector General (IG) and individual complaints would be investigated by an independent Ombudsman. Incidences of violence against staff and incarcerated people, inhumane living and working conditions, overuse of augmentation, abuse and neglect, crumbling infrastructure and lack of accountability from leadership have become too common. This legislation is a powerful tool that benefits correctional staff, incarcerated individuals, and communities across the country.

In a national poll, [82% of Americans said they believe there should be a system of independent oversight of our federal prisons](#). Support for H.R.3019 benefits not only individuals who are incarcerated, correctional staff, and communities, but also members of Congress. Equipped with the insights of an oversight body that conducts routine inspections, investigates systemic issues, collects and analyzes data, and reports its findings, you and your colleagues can make more informed policy and appropriations decisions. These decisions can save lives and ensure

correctional staff can focus on fostering a safe environment behind bars which leads to success when incarcerated individuals return to society.

We thank you for your consideration and markup of the Federal Prison Oversight Act and urge the committee to advance this urgently needed legislation.

Sincerely,

FAMM
Niskanen Center
National District Attorneys Association
Prison Fellowship
Justice Action Network
Due Process Institute
Arnold Ventures