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February 21, 2018

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Sessions,

Recently, the Department of Justice instructed the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to eliminate approximately 6,000 unfilled positions at federal prisons nation-wide. These positions have remained vacant because the Department of Justice (DOJ) never lifted the temporary federal hiring freeze from January 2017, and now this massive job elimination threatens the safety of our correctional officers and the security of our prisons. We urge you to reconsider the decision to eliminate these positions.

BOP has a long history of chronic understaffing at correctional facilities across the United States. At several facilities, BOP has already implemented augmentation to make up for already unfilled positions. Through augmentation, BOP employees who would normally serve as teachers, counselors, or trade workers are asked to step into the role of a correctional officer. As a direct result, staff have fallen behind on duties they were originally hired to perform, creating even more pressure in an already dangerous setting.

While it is appropriate for everyone employed at a federal prison to be capable of filling in as a correctional officer, continued reliance on these staff on top of their normal duties accelerates burnout and lowers morale. Augmentation was designed as a temporary solution to short-term staffing conflicts, not a long-term solution to respond to budget pressure. The recent action to further reduce staffing levels is a step in the wrong direction.

We are familiar with the dangers that understaffing presents to the safety of correctional officers and staff. These concerns continue to be communicated to us by constituents and correctional officers. Elimination of jobs held unfilled and now faced with elimination will see emergency response capabilities dramatically reduced and unfairly exposes BOP personnel to higher levels

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of risk to their safety as well as the safety of inmates. This is especially problematic when considering the potential unrest that may occur due to the subsequent loss of inmate programming and services. History has shown that when access to programming and education is limited for inmates, they engage in violence at a much higher rate.

The safety of the men and women who put their lives on the line every day to guard, supervise, and protect federal inmates must be a top priority. Implementing these cuts across the board without considering the unique characteristics of each facility would undermine safety priorities and make an already difficult career even more difficult by stretching limited resources further. We implore you to reconsider eliminating these positions.


Sincerely,



David B. McKinley, P.E.
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Member of Congress


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Member of Congress


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Member of Congress


Larry Bucshon, M.D.
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Member of Congress

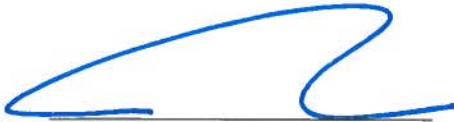

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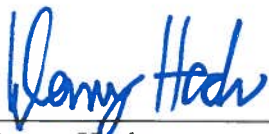
H. Morgan Griffith
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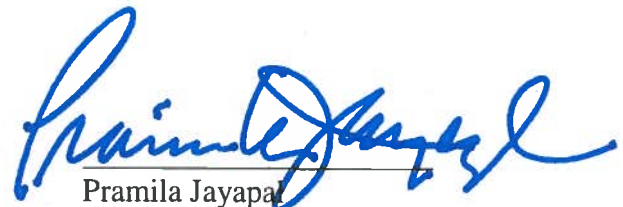
Colleen Hanabusa
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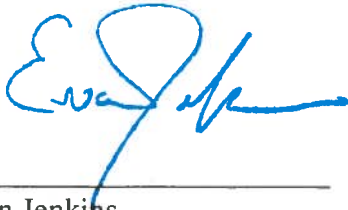
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Denny Heck
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Pramila Jayapal
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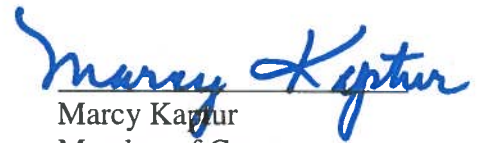
Bill Johnson
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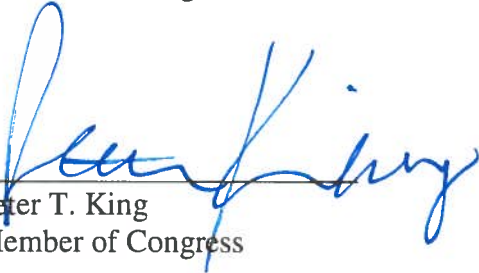
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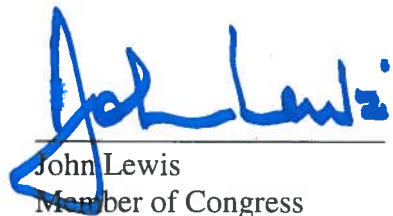
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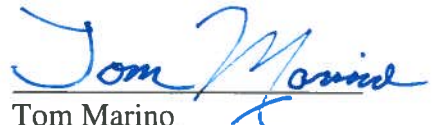
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