

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 19, 2020

Michael Carvajal
Director
Bureau of Prisons
320 1st St NW
Washington, DC 20534

Frederick Entzel
Warden
Federal Correctional Institution Pekin
2600 S. Second Street
Pekin, IL 61554

Dear Director Carvajal and Warden Entzel:

We write to urgently request that the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) immediately provide on-site COVID-19 testing for all staff and inmates at Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Pekin.

Currently, at least three staff and 74 inmates reportedly have tested positive for COVID-19 in four units at FCI Pekin. In addition, more staff and inmates are in quarantine while awaiting test results. While we appreciate the work of FCI Pekin to test those known to have been exposed to COVID-19, more testing is urgently needed to find asymptomatic cases, prevent the spread of the virus in this densely populated facility and protect the local community.

As you know, individuals with COVID-19 can spread the virus without presenting symptoms. Further, asymptomatic spread is of heightened concern in correctional facilities, given their dense living and working conditions. This point is supported by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, which states, “[c]ongregate living or working conditions, such as in correctional and detention facilities, have potential for rapid and widespread transmission of SARS-CoV-2.” As such, more testing must be undertaken immediately to identify asymptomatic COVID-19 cases at FCI Pekin.

Further, CDC guidance supports a more aggressive testing strategy for facilities facing significant outbreaks. It notes, “...if there is concern for widespread transmission following identification of new-onset SARS-CoV-2 infection among [inmates] or staff, facility management should consider a broader testing strategy, beyond testing only close contacts within the facility, to reduce the chances of a large outbreak.”

In addition to CDC guidance supporting a more robust mitigation strategy, so too do our constituents, whose family members and community are at risk. For instance, on October 12, 2020, a concerned parent of an FCI Pekin employee wrote our offices. The communication notes, “[m]y daughter is employed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons in Pekin. She is afraid to go to work due to the lack of mitigation inside this prison... I am scared for my daughter but also fearful of an outbreak with employees getting infected and infecting others in the community.”

Given the significant number of cases in the facility —and the potential risk to staff, inmates and the local community —you must immediately provide on-site testing for all staff and inmates at FCI Pekin.

Thank you for your attention to this important and time-sensitive matter. We look forward to working with you to protect the staff and inmates of FCI Pekin, as well as surrounding communities, from a potentially severe and significant outbreak of COVID-19. Given the urgent public-health matter in question, we look forward to your prompt response no later than October 26, 2020.

Sincerely,

/s/ Cheri Bustos

Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress

/s/ Dick Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator