



September 6, 2023

Kristen Clarke
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Henry C. Leventis
U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee
719 Church St., Suite 3300
Nashville, TN 37203

Dear Ms. Clarke and Mr. Leventis:

In response to the mounting evidence of unsafe conditions, violence, deaths, and understaffing at Trousdale Turner Correctional Center (Trousdale Turner), we urge you to open an investigation, pursuant to the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA), to determine whether the conditions present in the institution violate the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The families of those incarcerated, and the taxpayers who subsidize this institution, deserve to know if the state is violating its constitutional obligations and endangering the lives of the individuals in its custody.

In addition to publicly reported information about the conditions at Trousdale Turner, we have received disturbing letters and emails from individuals incarcerated there, their families, and even former staff. Allegations include sub-par medical care, neglect of medical and physical needs, sexual and physical assault by staff, and use of force, threats, and retaliation by staff. Families report to us that incarcerated loved ones often go hungry, have cell doors with broken locks, live in unsanitary conditions, and are denied essential medicine. Others report that gangs run various pods in the facility and that contraband drugs are rampant. These conditions of confinement seem similar to if not worse than those deemed unconstitutional by the Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorneys for Alabama in their April 2, 2019, report on Alabama's state prisons for men.

We do not claim to know and are unable to verify the full scope of problems at Trousdale Turner, but we have received numerous complaints over the past several years and have seen news stories suggesting that the problems are not isolated or anecdotal, but rather, systemic. The violence and neglect at Trousdale Turner have generated a number of past and ongoing lawsuits and settlements. Media reports include high numbers of drug overdoses, suspicious deaths in custody, violent fights involving groups of incarcerated people, assaults on staff, and lack of timely or adequate medical and mental health care. Tennessee has fined CoreCivic, which

operates Trousdale Turner and three other prisons, almost \$20 million for maintaining sub-standard conditions in their facilities. Despite these fines, the state continues to renew and extend CoreCivic's contracts. We have confidence that a thorough Justice Department investigation will determine whether Tennessee is living up to its constitutional obligations.

We wish to call your attention to an additional factor that is often neglected in discussions about prison conditions and understaffing. When prisons are understaffed and conditions become unsafe, facilities are frequently locked down. During lockdown, all in-person visits are canceled. One family recently shared with us that there was a month-long lockdown at Trousdale Turner. Another shared that even phone calls to families were withheld during lockdown. Families also report to us that Trousdale Turner regularly cancels family visitation due to lack of adequate staffing. These lengthy family separations can be especially difficult on spouses and children. They also undermine public safety, as research shows that maintaining strong family ties helps to reduce recidivism. Thus, everyone is affected when unsafe prison conditions lead to lengthy lockdowns. We hope your investigation will include an examination of this important issue.

For all of these reasons, we urge you to immediately commence an investigation into the conditions at Trousdale Turner Correctional Center. Please also make any findings publicly available so that lawmakers and officials can respond with appropriate action.

Thank you for your consideration of our request and for your commitment to making our prisons safer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Molly Gill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Molly" and last name "Gill" clearly distinguishable.

Molly Gill
Vice President of Policy