



February 4, 2019

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chair
House Committee on the Judiciary
2141 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Doug Collins
Ranking Member
House Committee on the Judiciary
2141 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Nadler and Ranking Member Collins:

More than 1,500 individuals in the Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) in Brooklyn, N.Y., were forced to live in freezing, dark cells for more than a week. This unconscionable treatment has sparked public protests and international outrage. The BOP's failure to maintain safe and humane conditions during extreme weather events, in this case and others, demands this committee's attention. We urge you to investigate the BOP's policies and practices in such events and hold an oversight hearing as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman, we are aware that you visited MDC on Saturday and Sunday to examine conditions for yourself. We thank you for doing so. While we understand that the BOP has restored the heat at MDC, we think it is imperative that the Committee investigate how the conditions at MDC came about and how they were allowed to continue for so long. The families of those who were exposed to such inhumane conditions deserve to know when the BOP knew of the problem at MDC, what steps they took to resolve it, and what notice family members were given about the situation. And, they must be reassured that infrastructure failures like this will be addressed immediately.

The Committee should be aware that this is not the first time the BOP's response to extreme weather events has come under scrutiny. Various government entities are investigating the federal prison in Mendota, California, where a lack of air conditioning endangered several hundred incarcerated individuals during a heat wave last summer. That prison also apparently had mold so pervasive and toxic that it led to respiratory illness among the prison's staff. Also, we have heard from numerous family members about a lack of heat and air conditioning in BOP facilities around the country.

Finally, we believe the Committee should scrutinize how the BOP plans for and responds to natural disasters, especially hurricanes. We are concerned that the BOP too often fails to ensure safe conditions. Individuals housed in the United States Penitentiary (USP) in Beaumont, Texas, were not evacuated before Hurricane Harvey hit Texas in August 2017 and were forced to endure horrible and unsanitary conditions in the hurricane's aftermath, including a lack of

drinking water. Conditions were even worse at the USP in Beaumont after Hurricane Rita in 2005.

Prisoners are especially vulnerable when natural disasters or other events overwhelm prison infrastructures. They are trapped in cells facing life-threatening conditions with no ability to seek safety. They are literally at the mercy of their wardens. Whatever punishment our justice system imposed, we did not authorize the suffering these prisoners have endured.

Again, Mr. Chairman, we thank you for the personal attention you have given to the deplorable situation at MDC in Brooklyn. We urge you to follow up with a more comprehensive investigation by the Committee that looks not only at the causes of MDC's problems, but the BOP's policies and practices related to extreme weather events.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin A. Ring". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kevin A. Ring
President
FAMM