



February 12, 2020

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

Michael Horowitz
Office of the Inspector General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Barr and Inspector General Horowitz:

I am writing to urge you to investigate the serious allegations of rape and sexual abuse, as well as dangerous living conditions, at the Coleman Federal Correctional Complex in Coleman, Florida. We have heard similar allegations at other federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) facilities. However, fear of retaliation and other factors often prevent people detained there or their families from bringing these charges to your department's attention. The situation at Coleman is different, as more than a dozen women, some of whom are still incarcerated there, filed suit against the BOP in their own names, alleging rampant sexual abuse, coercion, and intimidation by male correctional officers. By fully and expeditiously investigating these alleged abuses, you have the opportunity to demonstrate to the tens of thousands of families across the country who have loved ones in federal prisons that the Justice Department is committed to protecting their health and safety.

Last December, the *Miami Herald* published a disturbing report detailing allegations of widespread sexual abuse of women incarcerated at the Coleman Federal Correctional Complex. Fourteen women filed a lawsuit alleging that they were raped, abused, and harassed by male correctional officers who acted brazenly and with little oversight for years. We are aware that Senator Marco Rubio wrote in a letter to the attorney general that the *Herald* story "reveals that the environment at FCC Coleman has enabled systemic and pervasive sexual abuse and misuse of authority by BOP employees over a number of years." Calling the alleged behavior "abhorrent," Senator Rubio urged the attorney general "to take immediate action to ensure such behavior is neither happening, nor tolerated, at FCC Coleman or any other BOP facility."

We agree that such behavior should not occur anywhere in our federal prisons, but we also know that it has and will again until there is vigorous, ongoing, and independent oversight of all facilities. Until that happens, we urge the Justice Department to undertake an investigation whenever allegations like this arise and to hold any wrongdoers accountable.



1100 H Street NW, Suite 1000 • Washington, D.C. 20005



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This is not the only time the dangerous environment at Coleman has been exposed. In 2017, female corrections officers, teachers, and nurses reached a \$20 million settlement with the BOP as a result of sexual harassment they endured from incarcerated men at Coleman, while prison management failed to protect them. In the past two weeks, the BOP, after initially refusing to communicate, finally confirmed that numerous women being held at Coleman have tested positive for Legionnaires' disease, a severe form of pneumonia. A news report published just yesterday stated that a total of 23 people have tested positive and that there is reason to believe that the bacteria that causes the disease is still circulating in the densely populated prison. Family members claim that many of their incarcerated loved ones have not been tested and that the BOP is not sharing information about the outbreak.

The BOP has long said that reentry begins on the first day someone is incarcerated, and that is a worthy objective. Roughly 95 percent of all people in federal prison are going to return to their communities at some point. As such, rehabilitation and successful reentry are critical. That is one reason we supported the First Step Act and now applaud the administration's latest budget request for more rehabilitative and recidivism-reducing programs. But systematic sexual abuse and a potentially fatal disease are about as far from rehabilitation as you can get. People will not heal in an environment where they are subject to physical and mental abuse. With specific regard to Coleman, the obvious needs stating: Women serving time shouldn't be sexually assaulted, and they shouldn't be living in an environment where the very air they breathe and water they use could kill them.

We urge you to investigate the allegations of rape, abuse, and dangerous living conditions at Coleman. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin".

Kevin A. Ring
President, FAMM