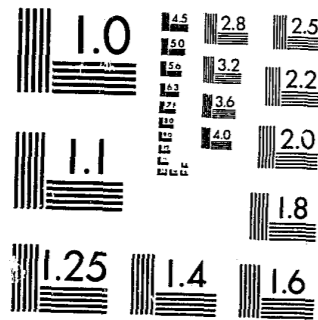


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Department of Justice

STATEMENT

OF

NORMAN A. CARLSON
DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF PRISONS

BEFORE

THE

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COURTS, CIVIL LIBERTIES,
AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONCERNING

BUREAU OF PRISONS OVERSIGHT

ON

FEBRUARY 23, 1983

NCJRS

MAR 8 1983

ACQUISITIONS

PP. 5-7 5-

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you once again to discuss the programs and plans of the Federal Prison System.

Correctional systems throughout the nation are experiencing unprecedented growth in offender populations. In the past two years the Federal Bureau of Prisons has experienced a 21 percent increase in population, from 24,000 inmates to over 29,300 today, an increase of 5,000. A major portion of this growth is the direct result of recently announced Federal law-enforcement efforts directed at drug trafficking and organized crime. New inmate admissions in 1982 for narcotics offenses increased by 23 percent over 1981. At the same time that inmate admissions are increasing so too are the length of sentences imposed by the Federal courts. In the one year period between 1981 and 1982, the average sentence length for robbery and narcotics offenses increased 7 percent and 11 percent, respectively.

While the prison population is increasing, it is important to remember that only one-third (32%) of all offenders under Federal supervision are incarcerated in Federal institutions. There are many alternatives to incarceration which continue to be extensively used by the courts, particularly for non-violent and non-dangerous offenders. Seven out of every ten offenders under supervision in 1982 were placed in pre-trial diversion programs, probation or parole supervision or placed in community "half-way" houses.

During the recent period of rapid population growth, we have taken a number of steps within existing resources to insure that inmates continue to serve their sentences in a safe and humane environment. The new classification system has been developed to insure that offenders are placed in the least restrictive correctional environment. The percentage of offenders placed in

minimum security facilities has increased under this classification system and currently stands at 25 percent of the total sentenced population. At the same time, the escape rate had decreased. We have continued to provide programs of vocational training, education, industrial work experience and recreation. Nevertheless, the current population of over 29,000 offenders is housed in facilities which are rated for a capacity of 24,000. This results in a shortage of 5,000 beds or expressed in other terms -- an overcrowding level of over 20 percent.

The long-range planning attempts to project prison populations several years in the future. I want to be the first to admit that population forecasting is far from an exact science. The factors that impact on inmate population levels are many and the relationships are not all that clear, easily understood, or controllable. However, when we look at the Federal inmate population trends and project them into the future using various statistical methods, the conclusion is that, without question, the inmate population will continue to increase during the 1980's.

We currently estimate that the Federal prison population will average at least 30,000 during FY 1984 and will reach 31,300 by FY 1987. This projection is admittedly conservative and averages only two percent growth per year over the five year period between 1982 - 1987. We believe that a conservative estimate is justified to insure that we do not needlessly expand inmate capacity and, thereby, waste scarce Federal resources. I am convinced, however, that the population projections will be reached, and in all probability exceeded.

We currently have funds available for the construction of a Federal Correctional Institution in Phoenix, Arizona which will provide 400 additional beds. Site preparation is currently underway and building construction will begin in November. The facility will be ready for operation in May of 1985.

In the FY-1983 Continuing Resolution, the Department received funds to expand seven existing institutions by 780 beds as part of the Attorney General's Organized Crime and Narcotics Program. The 1984 request for this program includes funds for an additional 340 beds at three more existing institutions.

In the authorization request before you, we are proposing the construction of a critically needed 500-bed Metropolitan Correctional Center in Los Angeles, and one 500-bed Federal Correctional Institution in the Northeast. We are also seeking funds for site and planning of an additional 500-bed Federal Correctional Institution in the Northeast Region.

The Metropolitan Correctional Center will provide a long term solution to a serious detention problem in the Los Angeles area. We are temporarily housing over 400 detainees in the Federal Correctional Institution at Terminal Island, California. This is an unsatisfactory situation as the facility was not designed for detention purposes and therefore has major security weaknesses. Also, defendants must be transported considerable distances back and forth to Federal Court at great inconvenience to the judges, the U.S. Marshals Service and to the inmates and their attorneys. With the construction of the Metropolitan Correctional Center, the Terminal Island institution can be converted back to its original mission of housing sentenced Federal offenders and thereby alleviate serious overcrowding in the Western Region.

The two 500 bed Federal Correctional Institutions requested for the Northeast Region are urgently needed. In addition to helping reduce overcrowding, the proposed institutions will permit us to keep a higher percentage of offenders closer to their homes. This is a goal which we believe facilitates the maintenance of family ties, thereby increasing the chances of an offender's success following release.

We fully understand the considerable cost of new prison construction and are actively seeking alternatives. For example, surplus property can be converted to correctional use in a short period of time and at a relatively low cost. Recent acquisitions of this nature include the Federal Prison Camps at Boron, California and Big Spring, Texas. Although we have met some local opposition, we continue our efforts to acquire the former Mt. Laguna Air Force site near San Diego for use as a Federal Prison Camp. We are now exploring the use of the former Windham College property in Putney, Vermont. The existing buildings are owned by the Federal Government and we believe that the property can be converted in a cost effective fashion to an excellent 500-bed minimum security prison camp. We are also looking into the possible acquisition of an educational facility in Sheridan, Oregon which we believe could be converted to a correctional institution.

While the facilities proposed in our budget constitute a substantial increase in capacity, we would still be overcrowded by at least 16 percent following their activation. If these projects are not approved, we will be at least 24 percent overcrowded by 1987. Given the trend toward longer sentences and more violent offenders, I believe this would be an intolerable level of overcrowding which could lead to increased violence within institutions and higher escape rates. Furthermore, we would expect serious criticism from the Federal Judiciary regarding "conditions of confinement" issues.

The recent tragic murders of two of our staff members is illustrative of the increasing violence we are facing throughout the Federal Prison System. On Christmas day, a staff member was killed during an inmate altercation at the Federal Correctional Institution in Petersburg, Virginia. On February 6, a

correctional officer was killed by a group of offenders attempting to escape from the Metropolitan Correctional Center in San Diego. We cannot tolerate such violence and we must act responsibly to assure that staff, as well as inmates, are provided security and protection.

Additional facilities are not the only way that we are attempting to address the problem of overcrowding. The FY 1984 budget includes a request for an additional \$6 million to increase the Community Treatment Center program. This action will permit us to place an additional 500 inmates, who are nearing release, in centers and thereby reduce our institution population.

As I have stated on a number of occasions, prison space is a finite and increasingly scarce resource in the Criminal Justice System. We must use it wisely in order to maximize its impact. In this context, I continue to support reform of the Federal Criminal Code -- particularly the proposal for the establishment of a sentencing commission which would develop sentencing guidelines. As demonstrated in Minnesota, available and planned prison capacity is an important criteria which can be used in developing sentencing guidelines in order to insure that prison space is available for violent and dangerous offenders. At the same time, we can not fall victim to the "tail wagging the dog" syndrome and permit insufficient prison capacity to thwart our Federal law enforcement efforts. It is a delicate balance that must be continually examined. I believe that the Federal Prison System's FY 1984 authorization request is a realistic one which seeks to maintain a proper balance.

In addition to the facilities proposals, the budget for FY 1984 also requests a program increase of 181 positions, the majority of which are for the medical program. The Federal Prison System is committed to providing comprehensive and high quality health care. The additional staff requested will permit the activation of a newly renovated 105-bed unit at the Springfield Medical Center and will provide increased medical coverage at all institutions.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to comment briefly on the Federal Bureau of Prisons role in assisting state and local correctional agencies. The National Institute of Corrections has, in my opinion, been extremely effective in responding to recommendations of the Chief Justice and the Attorney General's Task Force on Violent Crime by establishing the National Academy of Corrections in Boulder, Colorado. Improved training for correctional officers and administrators is, in the short run, the single most important action that the Federal government can contribute to assisting state and local governments. Since I last appeared before you, the Bureau of Prisons has moved its own staff training to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center at Glynco, Georgia. This action has not only reduced training costs but has dramatically increased the quality and consistency of training efforts. We allot 10 percent of student capacity at Glynco to state and local correctional personnel. I have received considerable feedback from correctional administrators praising these training programs.

This concludes my formal statement, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or your colleagues may have.

END