

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 22, 2022

The Honorable Christopher Wray  
Director  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington DC 20535

Dear Director Wray:

It was recently reported that gang members inside of Georgia's second-largest prison for women have established a criminal racket of using violence and threats to extort money from other prisoners and their families. According to the reports, gang members are using violent assaults, including sexual abuse, to generate money and maintain control within the prison. The increasing prevalence of brutality and lawlessness at Pulaski State Prison ("Pulaski") in Hawkinsville, Georgia is tragic and wholly unacceptable. I write to bring these matters to the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") and respectfully request that your office consider opening an investigation into these horrific reports.

On March 4, 2022, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* ("AJC") reported that for several months, incarcerated women at Pulaski have experienced brutal acts of violence, as gang members have bullied, intimidated, and overwhelmed the prison's understaffed security detail. Two prisoners reported being sodomized at knifepoint by gang members seeking money for protection. Another prisoner had a portion of her ear bitten off as four gang members staged what authorities have characterized as a "gang initiation."<sup>1</sup>

According to the reports, gang members are also using violence to extort not only the incarcerated women but also their families. One mother, whose daughter is incarcerated at Pulaski, estimated that she has paid out over \$10,000 via Cash App to gang members threatening violence against her daughter. The mother, who relies on Social Security, says she reached out to prison officials several times, but no one acted until she recorded a phone call from a gang member and shared it with them. During the call, the gang member threatened violence against her daughter unless she sent \$300 via Cash App to an unknown recipient.<sup>2</sup> According to another mother of a prisoner at Pulaski, "When the girls don't have money anymore, they get beat up." The mother asked not to be identified out of fear that her daughter would face retribution. Last month, another incarcerated woman's email to her daughter revealed that gang members

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ajc.com/news/women-sexually-assaulted-beaten-at-georgia-prison/MOPFXLZR5FCKXIFLJL6LUMSOSM/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ajc.com/news/crime/gangs-using-violence-to-extort-inmates-families-at-ga-prison-for-women/HXL66I6VLR5O5N45TXK6NDAXE/>

were forcing incarcerated women to pay for every-day activities, such as taking a shower or using a phone.<sup>3</sup>

On January 20, 2022, another incarcerated woman at Pulaski was beaten by several gang members, forcing her to give them her personal possessions. Gang members then forced her to call her brother demanding that he send money via Cash App. Her brother called the prison three times between 9 p.m. and 1 a.m., but a correctional officer purportedly told him, “Anything involving gangs, we can’t do a thing about it.” Finally at 4 a.m., an officer called for an ambulance to take his sister to the hospital.<sup>4</sup>

These reports have come to light amidst the Department of Justice’s (“DOJ”) civil rights investigation into the conditions of confinement in Georgia’s prisons, focusing specifically on whether Georgia is providing prisoners with “reasonable protection from physical harm at the hands of other prisoners.”<sup>5</sup> DOJ’s investigation, announced on September 14, 2021, extends to Pulaski. In a [letter](#) that I wrote to Assistant Attorney General Clarke on March 18, 2022 seeking an update on the status of its investigation, including when it expects to issue findings and whether the scope of its investigation has changed, I cited recent reports of rampant brutality across several of Georgia’s prisons.

According to a national study by the DOJ Bureau of Justice Statistics pursuant to the Death in Custody Reporting Act, from 2001 to 2019—the last year that this data is available—Georgia ranked sixth in the total number of prisoner deaths, third in the total number of prisoner homicides, and sixth in the total number of prisoner suicides.<sup>6</sup> At least 457 prisoners in the custody of the Georgia Department of Corrections died in the 20 months preceding the Department’s announcement of its investigation. In 2020, there were 57 homicides in Georgia prisons, triple the total from 2018.<sup>7</sup>

As you know, the FBI has authority under the criminal provisions of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (“RICO”) Act to investigate those responsible for crimes such as extortion and money laundering, regardless of whether the perpetrators are incarcerated or not. Due to the disturbing and violent nature of the acts described, I ask that the FBI consider looking into this pattern of gang-related extortion at Pulaski and other Georgia prisons where it may be occurring.

The challenges facing Georgia’s prisons are not new. This work is urgent. I will continue to monitor efforts to protect the safety, wellbeing and civil rights of both incarcerated people and prison employees.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ajc.com/news/women-sexually-assaulted-beaten-at-georgia-prison/MOPFXLZR5FCKXIFLJL6LUMSOSM/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-investigation-conditions-georgia-prisons>

<sup>6</sup> <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/mortality-state-and-federal-prisons-2001-2019-statistical-tables#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20federal%20prisoners,259%20per%20100%2C000%20federal%20prisoners>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ajc.com/news/crime/records-reveal-53-georgia-prison-inmates-slain/KZ3JV4MT3FH4HLBLZQIA7AFYGA/>

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Should you have any questions, please contact Sara Schaumburg, General Counsel in my office, at (202) 228-6199 or Sara\_Schaumburg@ossoff.senate.gov. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff  
U.S. Senator

cc: Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke

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