

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 19, 2024

The Honorable Tyrone Oliver
Commissioner
Georgia Department of Corrections
300 Patrol Road
Forsyth, GA 31029

Dear Commissioner Oliver,

We write to urge the State of Georgia and the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) to promptly address the deeply concerning findings contained in the Department of Justice's (DOJ) October 2024 report on its investigation of Georgia prisons.

On October 1, 2024, DOJ's Civil Rights Division published the findings from its investigation of Georgia prisons. Among its findings are that there is reason to believe the State of Georgia and GDC (1) fail to protect incarcerated people from violence and harm by other incarcerated people in violation of the Eighth Amendment, and (2) fail to protect incarcerated people from harm caused by sexual violence in violation of the Eighth Amendment.¹ DOJ further found that the State and GDC are "deliberately indifferent" to unsafe conditions in state prisons.²

DOJ found exceptionally high homicide and violence rates within GDC prisons. Compared to a national average homicide rate in state prisons of 12 per 100,000 people in 2019, DOJ reports that Georgia's rate in 2019 was almost triple, at 34 per 100,000 people.³ According to the report, from January 2022 through April 2023, there were more than 1,400 reported incidents of violence, including fights, assaults, hostage incidents, and homicides, across 24 of Georgia's prisons, including all close-security prisons and most of the medium-security prisons.⁴

According to DOJ, sexual abuse is widespread in GDC prisons. In 2022, there were 456 documented allegations of sexual abuse between incarcerated individuals, 35 of which were found to be substantiated.⁵ Moreover, a May 2022 review of 388 Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) investigations of GDC found that *none* met all applicable PREA Standards.⁶

¹ Investigation of Georgia Prisons 5, U.S. Dep't of Justice Civil Rights Div. (Oct. 2024), <https://www.justice.gov/crt/media/1371406/dl>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.* at 16.

⁴ *Id.* at 17.

⁵ *Id.* at 60.

⁶ *Id.* at 75.

According to DOJ, the State is “deliberately indifferent” to the risk of harm to incarcerated persons. For example, DOJ found that GDC fails to maintain prisons in reasonably safe and secure conditions.⁷ DOJ found severe staffing shortages, with systemwide correctional officer vacancy rates over 50% since mid-2021.⁸ DOJ also reported that GDC staff struggle to detect and combat weapons, drugs, and contraband. Between November 2021 and August 2023, GDC recovered 27,425 weapons, 12,483 cellphones, and 2,016 illegal drug items in its prisons.⁹ DOJ determined that GDC’s deficient reporting and investigations practices prevent adequate response to these problems.


DOJ recommended 82 remedial measures GDC should take to remedy the violations identified in the report.¹⁰ Among other remedies, these measures include improving staffing, hiring, and training; identifying and remedying physical deficiencies in its facilities; improving conflict response and reporting procedures; conducting more routinized searches of housing units and common areas; and obtaining information about incarcerated individuals’ LGBTI status and other vulnerabilities to better ensure their safety.

In light of these alarming findings, we urge GDC to give DOJ’s report due consideration and act swiftly to remedy the troubling state of Georgia state prisons.

Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



Reverend Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

⁷ *Id.* at 34.

⁸ *Id.* at 24.

⁹ *Id.* at 54.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 79-92.