

Thomson Federal Prison Faces Crisis: 130 Vacant Positions After Pay Cuts by BOP Director Peters

Thomson Federal Prison has 130 vacant positions, with a concerning 92 (59%) being for correctional officers.

THOMSON, IL, UNITED STATES,
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EINPresswire.com/ -- Thomson Federal Prison is struggling with a critical staffing shortage, with [130 vacant positions](#) following a decision by Federal Bureau of Prisons Director Colette Peters to cut pay for law enforcement officers. This decision was made without considering historical staffing challenges, leading to severe consequences. Previously, Illinois was unable to open the facility due to staffing issues, and now the situation has worsened.



The Lieutenant Osvaldo Albarati Stopping Prison Contraband Act

In an interview on January 4, 2024, [former Warden Thomas. Bergami](#) noted that Thomson was overstaffed. Yet, just ten months later, Thomson now has the highest number of vacancies among standalone federal prisons. The decision to eliminate retention pay has driven correctional officer staffing levels down to just 59%, leaving 92 roles unfilled.

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The time is now for
Congress to take action.”

Jon Zumkehr

The crisis has had ripple effects on the local community, where small businesses have closed due to lost income

from prison staff. Thomson’s remote location, combined with limited housing and childcare options, forces many staff members into lengthy commutes, often exceeding 45 minutes. The situation has taken a significant toll on the mental health of staff, with three attempted suicides since the pay cuts took effect.

Illinois Senators Durbin and Duckworth, along with Congressman Sorensen (IL-17) and [AFL-CIO](#)

[President Liz Shuler](#), have called for the restoration of pay for all Thomson staff.

This escalating crisis is further compounded by a surge in illegal drugs, particularly fentanyl, entering the prison through mail. The influx of drug-laced mail has already hospitalized six staff members due to exposure. Despite Director Peters' mandate to increase the availability of Narcan—a medication that can reverse opioid overdoses—the issue persists, sparking calls for action to secure prison mail systems and prevent the prison from becoming a drug trafficking hub.

In response, Representative Bacon has introduced H.R. 5266, the Interdiction of Fentanyl in Postal Mail at Federal Prisons Act, with Senators Heinrich and Casey introducing the companion bill S. 5128. This legislation would require all mail to be scanned offsite for illicit drugs, providing a vital safeguard against the ongoing threat.

"The health and safety of our staff, inmates, and communities depend on swift action to secure our mail systems," said Jon Zumkehr, President of AFGE Local 4070. "We cannot allow our prisons to become centers for illegal drug trafficking. We urge Congress to pass H.R. 5266/S. 5128 immediately to address this crisis."

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