Legislative Updates

H.R. 5266 FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS FENTANYL MAIL PROTECTION ACT

H.R. 5266 will be introduced in the Senate and has 89 cosponsors in the House.

Morgan Joe Luttrell is now a Cosponsor

H.R. 3199 (Pay Our Correctional Officers Fairly Act) was introduced in the Senate, and a bill number will be posted soon.

Garland Hale Barr IV is now a Cosponsor

H.R. 1323 The Law Enforcement Officer Fair Retirement Act

Peter Allen Stauber is now a Cosponsor

Emanuel Cleaver II is now a Cosponsor

H.R. 3199 (Pay Our Correctional Officers Fairly Act)

would revise locality pay rates for employees of the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) located outside of an established General Schedule locality pay area to ensure competitive and fair pay.

Federal prisons located outside of established General Schedule locality pay areas fall in "Rest of U.S." (RUS) locality pay. These facilities are experiencing extremely high levels of staff turnover and retirement, low morale, and increased mandatory overtime. Several of the BOP facilities classified as RUS are located within 200 miles of the nearest locality pay, meaning that these facilities are near enough to areas with higher cost of living, yet are unable to provide their workforce with wages that take into consideration cost of living and competitive pay opportunities located in comparable professional fields. The GS pay scale was created by the Classification Act of 1923 and refined in the Classification Act of 1949 and is still used today. The current pay scale that is in use is over 90 years old. It is an old and outdated system that needs to be addressed and adjusted so that staff members can be adequately compensated.

This low rate of pay results in understaffed prisons, overworked employees, creating a dangerous work environment for staff and inmates. Additionally, inmates are negatively impacted because there are not enough staff to supervise them, forcing prisons to scale back, reduce, and eliminate activities such as visitations, recreational time, academic enrichment, and or vocational opportunities, which can result in negative impacts on the Congressionally mandated First Step Act.

The Pay Our Correctional Officers Fairly Act (H.R. 3199) would positively address the staffing and retention problems facing BOP facilities by allowing for competitive pay that considers factors such as cost of living, commute times, and the hard work and dedication of our correctional officers. Our correctional professionals consist of law enforcement officers, mothers, fathers, and veterans that have taken on the task of protecting our communities. They are often the forgotten component of law enforcement equation and community. They are in dire need of your assistance. Specifically, BOP facilities located within 200 miles of the nearest General Schedule locality pay area would be eligible for an increase in their base salary that would make them more competitive with other various local, state, and government agencies. Our correctional officers work to keep our communities, staff, and inmate population safe and the value they add to civil society should be adequately reciprocated.

Pay Our Correctional Officers Fairly Act

HR 2380 and S 1047, the Prison Cellphone Jamming Reform Act of 2023

On February 26, 2013, Lieutenant Osvaldo Albarati was on his way home from the Federal Detention Center at Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, when he was ambushed by a gang and shot to death. His death left me without a husband, a son, and two young daughters without their father. It was a tragedy none of us will ever get over.

The reason for his murder is cell phones inside the prison walls. My husband had discovered the use of contraband cell phones to contact outside criminal enterprises, particularly organized drug gangs which were being advised and directed from inside the prison walls. The “hit” on my husband was actually organized from within the walls of Guaynabo.

When a criminal is incarcerated, it is too often believed that his criminal activity has been interrupted and, for the moment, has ceased altogether. Nothing could be further from the truth. There has been an increase in cell phone activity within the institutions of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, allowing inmates to carry on their criminal pursuits unimpeded by prison walls. This simply cannot be tolerated.

HR 2380 and S 1047, the Prison Cellphone Jamming Reform Act of 2023 address this critical issue. I respectfully ask that you see the importance of this bill and vote it into law. Criminal activity does not just exist on the streets. It exists within our prison walls as well, and we need to take whatever steps are necessary to put a stop to it. Please let my husband’s sacrifices, and the ongoing pain endured by this family count for something. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Helen Albarati

Wife of fallen Federal Officer Lt. Osvaldo Albarati

Board Member, Voices of JOE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS FENTANYL MAIL PROTECTION ACT

H.R. 5266 will be introduced in the Senate and we are thankful to Senator Heinrich from New Mexico and Senator Cornyn from Texas as the Republican co-lead

On March 17, 2022, an employee from the Bureau of Prisons was working diligently in the mailroom of the USP Thomson, a federal prison located in Illinois. The Officer was sorting through hundreds of packages and letters addressed to inmates when he suddenly started to sweat and feel short of breath; he soon began vomiting and had to be rushed to a nearby hospital. After conducting the test, it revealed that the officer had unknowingly come into contact with 19 pieces of mail that were saturated with a potent amphetamine.

in 2019, multiple Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) staff at USP Canaan were sickened and required hospitalization as a result of exposure to synthetic drugs smuggled through mail directed to prisoners.

Throughout the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Fentanyl, Carfentanil, K2, Suboxone, Ecstasy, Synthetic Cocaine, and other illegal substances are introduced into our Federal Facilities through the mail every day. This has caused a growing number of staff members to suffer from accidental exposure from these substances. Fortunately, there have been no fatalities, but serious injuries have been suffered along with undetermined long-term effects of exposure. The Council of Prison Locals supported a Pilot Program that has mail going through an off-site screening facility. Mail is scanned, and the inmates receive a copy of the original piece of mail, keeping any substance from entering the facility. The funding used for this pilot program has been exhausted, and the Bureau of Prisons will be ending its use. This is an urgent matter. It is imperative to immediately fund this program as it was successful and has saved countless lives and prevented and stopped the mass introduction of illicit narcotics from entering our federal prisons, but it cannot be continued or expanded due to a budgetary shortfall.

By preventing the introduction of life-threatening substances like Fentanyl and Carfentanil, countless lives have been saved, both employees from inadvertent exposures to inmates from overdoses.

H.R. 1323 The Law Enforcement Officer Fair Retirement Act

We participated in a conference call with legislative counsels from Congressman Pascrell’s office. The issue discussed was the status of H.R. 1323, and how VOJ can help move that bill forward. Melanie’s conference went well, and the Congressman’s office was appreciative of Voices of JOE’s willingness to help move the bill.

For those not familiar, in a nutshell, this bill will ensure that Federal LEOs and first responders are paid the full compensation they have earned. It will allow for officers to elect to have the OPM consider the full value of overtime compensation accrued in calculating their retirement annuity. i.e. the overtime hours you worked will be counted when calculating retirement benefits.

HERE IS WHAT WE NEED TO PROVIDE TO THE CONGRESSMAN: We need some testimony from you on how this bill directly impacts you. A paragraph will do. Please forward this to:

voicesofjoe@gmail.com.

FLAG: This testimony is considered VITAL to get this bill moved forward. Please take the time to write something, and not dismiss this. IT S YOUR RETIRMENT – YOUR MONEY. DON’T TAKE IT FOR GRANTED.