

## **Congressman Cardoza meets with Federal Bureau of Prisons Director Harley Lappin**

### ***Safety at Prisons and USP Atwater Discussed***

WASHINGTON, DC — Last week Congressman Dennis Cardoza met with Federal Bureau of Prisons Director Harley Lappin to discuss the safety of correctional officers in federal prisons and other issues at USP Atwater. Today Mr. Cardoza reiterated his concerns in a letter to Director Lappin which specifically identifies the large wage discrepancy between state and local correctional officers and those at USP Atwater. Mr. Cardoza plans to follow up with the Director in 30 days to see what progress is being made.

Earlier this month Mr. Cardoza introduced HR 6462, the “Jose Rivera Correctional Officer Protection Act” to provide all federal correctional officers with stab-proof vests. The bill authorizes \$20 million for the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to purchase the vests and mandates that officers wear them while on duty. The legislation came in response to the tragedy on June 20, 2008 in which two inmates brutally attacked and killed Correctional Officer Jose Rivera at the Federal Penitentiary in Atwater, California. The two inmates who attacked Officer Rivera had been classified by the BOP as ‘unable to rehabilitate’, and were among the most dangerous in the prison population.

Congressman Cardoza will continue to monitor the situation and ensure that federal correctional officers have a safe work environment and the compensation that they deserve. A copy of Mr. Cardoza’s letter to Director Lappin is below.

July 21, 2008

Mr. Harley Lappin

Director

Federal Bureau of Prisons

320 First Street, N.W.

Washington, DC 20534

Dear Director Lappin:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and my staff on July 17, 2008. I appreciate your willingness to discuss issues of concern to our federal correctional officers, and I am thankful for your continued support for the staff at USP Atwater and the family of Officer Jose Rivera.

As you know, during my tenure in Congress, I have worked to ensure the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is adequately funded and our nation’s correctional officers are given sufficient resources to do their jobs. Earlier this month, I introduced H.R. 6462, the Jose Rivera Correctional Officers Protection Act, which provides all federal correctional officers with stab-resistant vests. I was

pleased to see that your more recent BOP-wide policy changes included providing all BOP staff with stab-resistant vests, and local penitentiaries with greater control over inmates and additional staff during evening and weekend watch.

I was also encouraged to know that you are willing to look into a top request of mine: finding solutions to reduce the large disparity in starting wages between federal correctional officers at USP Atwater and local law enforcement and correctional officers. As you are well aware, employees at USP Atwater are vastly underpaid in comparison to the cost of living in their surrounding communities and to similar positions. This disparity inevitably affects the ability for USP Atwater to recruit and retain staff for all occupations. In order to best maintain a low turnover rate and recruit additional staff, I believe it is essential that correctional employees at USP Atwater receive a pay increase comparable to similar occupations in nearby localities. I understand BOP has several options to administratively fix this disparity, in addition to the legislative options I mentioned during our meeting. Because it is a top priority of mine, I plan to follow up with your office in 30 days to assess the progress made on this issue.

Lastly, I look forward to taking you up on your offer to tour USP Atwater together and meet with the staff to discuss issues pertinent to the prison and our local community. I will have my staff coordinate with your office to schedule a tour in the coming months.

I look forward to working with you to ensure that the Bureau of Prisons is fully funded and equipped to keep our local communities and prisons safe. If you have any questions, please contact Matt Pennington of my staff at 202-225-6131.

Sincerely,

Dennis Cardoza

Member of Congress

cc: Whitney LeBlanc; Assistant Director; Human Resource Management Division

Thomas R. Kane; Assistant Director; Information, Policy, and Public Affairs Division

William F. Dalius; Assistant Director; Administration Division