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18TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON RULES

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
HORTICULTURE AND ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LIVESTOCK, DAIRY AND POULTRY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
CONSERVATION, CREDIT, ENERGY AND RESEARCH

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-0518

September 17, 2008

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The Honorable Robert "Bobby" Scott  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security  
Committee on the Judiciary  
2138 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Scott:

As you know, on June 20, 2008, two inmates viciously attacked and killed Correctional Officer Jose Rivera at the United States Penitentiary (USP) Atwater in my congressional district. This tragic event, and the alarming level of inmate-on-inmate violence that has since occurred, has rocked our community to the core and has shed additional light on the systemic problems regarding the safety of USP Atwater and our federal prisons. I bring this issue to your attention in the hopes that your Subcommittee can investigate this situation, and together we can respond as necessary.

It is not just coincidental that the federal prison system is at a significant crossroads. Staffing levels are decreasing while inmate populations are increasing. USP Atwater is operating at 85% of necessary staffing levels to watch over a prisoner population 25% over capacity, leaving correctional officers vulnerable. In the past week alone there have been four separate, severely violent inmate-on-inmate incidents at USP Atwater involving at least 20 inmates. Ten inmates were critically assaulted and five of those inmates were transported to local hospitals for sustaining serious stab/puncture wounds. By comparison, there were seven inmates critically assaulted during the entire year of 2007 at USP Atwater. Currently, the prison is back on lockdown, only one week after prison officials lifted a three-month lockdown that ensued after Officer Rivera's death.

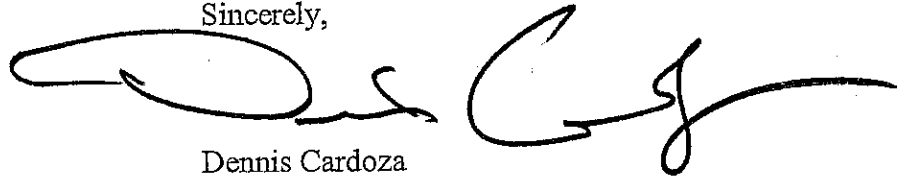
During my tenure in Congress, I have advocated for adequate funding for the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and sufficient resources for our nation's correctional officers to do their jobs. In April of 2008, I wrote a letter to Harley Lappin, Director of the BOP, regarding the status of BOP facilities throughout the State of California. In the letter, I highlighted my concerns about inmate assault levels, overcrowding, and understaffing in such facilities, and inquired about stab-proof vests for correctional officers. In order to help protect our correctional officers from future inmate assaults, in July, I introduced legislation to provide all federal correctional officers with stab-resistant vests. Shortly thereafter, Director Lappin enacted policy changes to provide all

staff with stab-resistant vests, give local penitentiaries greater control over inmates, and supply penitentiaries with additional staff during evening and weekend watch.

While I am pleased with these changes, I believe Congress must provide greater oversight of federal prisons to ensure that our correctional officers have the tools they need to safely and efficiently do their jobs. A congressional oversight hearing under your Subcommittee's purview would provide increased transparency on the operations and safety issues at our federal prisons. I am hopeful our attention to the problem will provide an opportunity to explore practical solutions to ensure that our prisons and our communities are safe.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns. I look forward to working with you on this issue. If you have any questions, please contact Matt Pennington of my staff at 202-225-6131.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dennis Cardoza', written in a cursive style.

Dennis Cardoza  
Member of Congress