

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ron Johnson
“Sexual Abuse of Female Inmates in Federal Prisons”
December 13, 2022

As submitted to the record:

Over the last eight months, the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (“PSI” or “the Subcommittee”) conducted a bipartisan review of sexual abuse of female inmates in federal prisons. Although our work mostly focused on cases of male Bureau of Prisons (“BOP”) staff abusing female inmates at only four prisons, what we uncovered should raise serious concerns about BOP’s failure to prevent horrific instances of sexual abuse at federal prisons.

PSI found that since 2012, there have been several documented instances of sexual abuse of female inmates by male staff at the Federal Correctional Complex Coleman in Florida, Metropolitan Correctional Complex in New York, and Metropolitan Detention Center Brooklyn, also located in New York. Just last week, the warden at Federal Correctional Institution Dublin in California, which the press dubbed a “rape club,” was convicted of sexually abusing female inmates.

The Subcommittee determined that BOP failed to proactively investigate and review data that could have led to improvements to prevent sexual abuse of female inmates. Specifically, BOP did not look at trends in complaints by facilities that could have been used to identify potentially problematic BOP institutions. Finally, the Subcommittee found that, as a result of a significant backlog of misconduct cases, BOP failed to hold its employees accountable for wrongdoing in a timely manner. BOP is required to resolve complaints involving employee misconduct within 180 days. The Subcommittee uncovered that some of BOP’s 8,000 outstanding cases involving staff misconduct were pending for more than five years, resulting in delays in staff accountability.

The findings of this investigation underscore the need for BOP to take immediate corrective actions to prevent sexual abuse of female prisoners by BOP employees. BOP should proactively analyze trends in complaints by facility or employee to pinpoint potential misconduct. In addition, BOP must address its backlog of outstanding cases involving employee misconduct. Delays in accountability—particularly for individuals who have committed sexual violence—are unacceptable. Congress should continue to demand transparency from BOP to ensure that failures in the federal prison system are adequately addressed.

Anyone who is found guilty of a crime, must face the consequences of their actions. Indeed, one witness will tell the Subcommittee that she was “sentenced and put in prison for the choices [she] made.” Regardless, no one should endure sexual abuse ever. I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony today.