

FCI Thomson Prison: Sen Duckworth Visits with AFGE 4070, Reaffirms Commitment to Address Staffing Shortages and Pay Cuts

THOMSON, IL, UNITED STATES, October 15, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Senator Tammy Duckworth visited Thomson Federal Prison last week, meeting with AFGE Local 4070 representatives and prison management amidst a severe staffing crisis and recent pay cuts by Federal Bureau of Prisons Director Peters. The senator's visit highlights the urgent need for action to address the prison's dwindling staff numbers and the unfair financial burden placed on employees.



Senator Duckworth meeting With AFGE 4070

"I am deeply concerned about the staffing levels at Thomson," said Jon Zumkehr, President of AFGE Local 4070. "Our dedicated employees are doing an impossible job with insufficient resources. The Federal Bureau of Prisons must immediately address this crisis and restore the pay that Director Peters cut."

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I would be failing in my representational duties if I did not say candidly, that Thomson Federal Prison is experiencing a staffing crisis, bar none in the Bureau of Prisons”

Jon Zumkehr

Thomson Federal Prison currently has [114 vacant positions](#), the highest of any standalone federal prison in the country. The correctional officer staff is particularly depleted, with 83 current vacancies set to increase to 94 in November. This will leave the facility at just 58% staffing capacity in its correctional services division.

The pay cuts have also led to the resignation of two nurses in the last month, who left for higher-paying jobs. The medical services department has been hard hit. The local community is also feeling the impact, with over 60 staff lost

this year and less money being spent locally. The Thomson Hangout, a local business, was forced to close because staff could no longer afford to eat out due to the pay cuts.

"The employees at Thomson are the backbone of this facility, and, astonishingly, they're able to maintain operations given the current conditions," said Jon Zumkehr, President of AFGE Local 4070. "But the constant stress of short-staffing is taking a toll on their physical and mental health. We can't afford to wait any longer for action."

The prison's remote location makes recruiting new employees challenging, with limited housing options and long commutes common. A 2019 letter from then-Warden Donald Hudson highlighted the need for additional amenities like affordable housing and childcare to attract staff.

Federal Employees' health insurance will increase by an average of 13.5% in 2025, with many plans costing more. President Biden has proposed a 2% average pay increase for federal employees, but with inflation and rising healthcare premiums, this will result in a 9% pay cut for Thomson staff.

"Quality staff at Thomson are crucial for the safety of our communities," said Dan Gosa, President of the Quad City Federation of Labor. "We stand in solidarity with the employees who are fighting for the pay they deserve. Slashing their wages will only make a bad situation worse."

AFGE National President Everett Kelley said, "Our members risk their safety every single day at work, only to be hit with what is effectively a 25% pay cut. At a time of rising costs, this is a crushing blow for hundreds of essential workers and their families. The workers who safeguard our communities deserve far better."

[AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler](#) also weighed in on the situation. " These workers are federal employees doing hard and dangerous work. It is important that this administration take seriously the health and safety concerns of its own employees and be a role model for all employers. I ask you to step in and assure that this untimely and potentially dangerous decision is retracted.."

AFGE Local 4070 is grateful for the support of Senator Durbin, Senator Duckworth, and [Representative Sorensen](#), AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, AFGE National President Everett Kelley, AFGE District 7 National Vice President Jason Anderson, Illinois AFL-CIO President Tim Drea, Illinois Fraternal Order of Police Corrections Lodge 263 President Scot Ward, and Dan Gosa, President of the Quad City Federation of Labor.

The union will continue to push for immediate action to address the staffing crisis at Thomson and ensure that employees receive the fair compensation they deserve. Last year AFGE Local 4070 held over 75 job fairs to help recruit qualified staff. We are grateful for the Illinois coalition to demand that the Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons return the pay to the hardworking staff at Thomson

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