

Thomson Federal Prison Launches Service Dog Program Amid Staffing Crisis

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Thomson Federal Prison took a bold step forward today with the launch of its Pawsitive Paws Dog Training Program, bringing three tail-wagging recruits inside its walls. The program pairs incarcerated individuals with puppies from a local Service Dog Foundation, training them to assist veterans and people with disabilities.

"These dogs will transform lives both inside and outside our walls," said Jon Zumkehr, President of AFGE Local 4070. "Our inmates gain valuable skills while providing an essential service to the community.

"The initiative marks another milestone in Thomson's remarkable turnaround story. Since June 2023, the facility has seen inmate participation in educational programs skyrocket from 19% to 91%, setting a new standard within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The prison has also expanded its visitation schedule from three to five days weekly, helping inmates maintain crucial family bonds.

But beneath these achievements lies a growing crisis. Thomson currently faces a severe staffing shortage, with 134 vacant positions — the highest vacancy rate among standalone federal prisons. The shortage stems from a controversial decision to cut staff pay last year under Director Peters' leadership."

We're at a breaking point," Zumkehr explained. "While we're proud to launch programs like Pawsitive Paws, we urgently need Senators Durbin, Duckworth, and Representative Sorensen to restore law enforcement officer pay at Thomson. We can't afford to wait for a tragedy before taking action."



Through the new program, incarcerated individuals will spend up to 18 months teaching dogs basic obedience, public behavior, and specialized skills. AFGE Local 4070 continues collaborating with prison leadership to enhance programming, but Zumkehr stresses that addressing the staffing crisis is paramount."

Our vision is clear — we want Thomson to be a model for rehabilitation," Zumkehr said. "But we need Congress to step up. You can't run a safe, effective prison while understaffed by 134 positions."

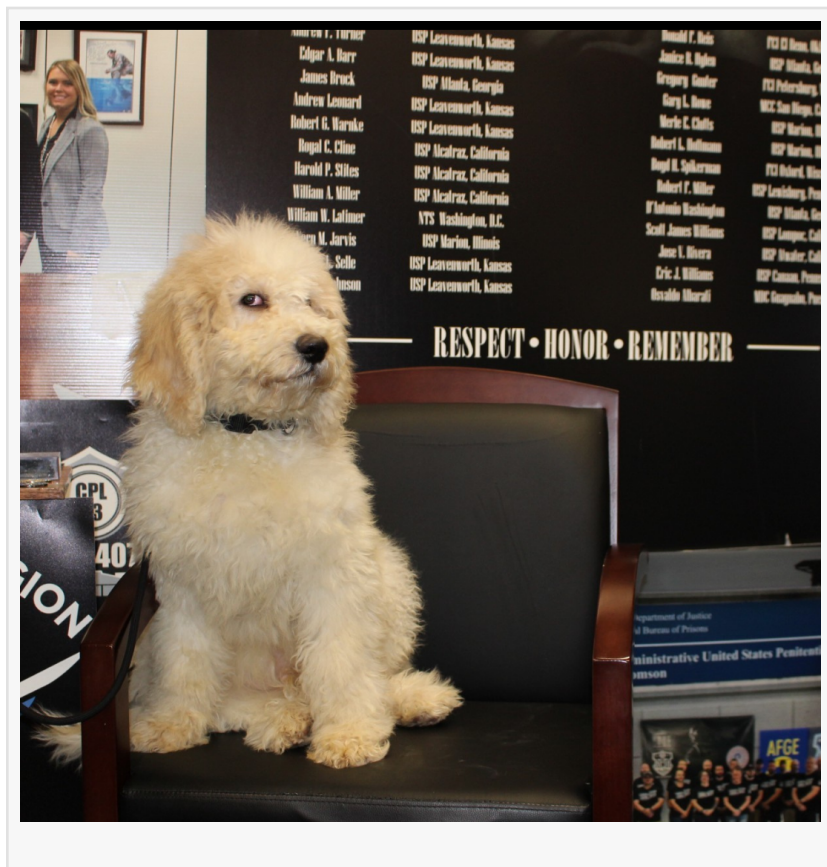
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