

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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Faith & Human Rights Leaders Working to End Federal Solitary Confinement Respond to Senator Durbin's Call to Remove the Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons

Following an Associated Press Scathing Report on the Bureau of Prisons Hotbed of Abuse, Graft and Corruption, Federal Anti-Solitary Taskforce Urges New Transformative BOP Leadership that Will Prioritize Decarceration and Ending Solitary Confinement

(Washington, D.C.) - Today, following a [scathing Associated Press report](#) on the horrific and rampant abuses of the federal Bureau of Prisons, members of the Federal Anti-Solitary Taskforce (FAST) joined [Senate Judiciary Chairperson Dick Durbin](#) in calling for new leadership at the abusive federal Bureau of Prisons. Led by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, ACLU, Unlock the Box Campaign, Vera Institute for Justice, Center for Constitutional Rights, and #HALTsolitary Campaign, FAST is urging the Biden Administration to ensure BOP leadership that prioritizes decarceration, ending solitary confinement, and stopping rampant staff abuse. In June, the Taskforce released a [Blueprint for Ending Solitary Confinement by the Federal Government](#), and believes new BOP leadership should be committed to immediately implementing the Blueprint to fulfill the campaign pledges of President Biden and Vice President Harris to end solitary confinement.

The inaction of Director Carvajal on ending the torture of over 10,000 people currently being held in solitary confinement in federal prisons is both a moral failure and political malpractice, given President Biden's pledge to end solitary, said Rev. **Ron Stief, Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture**. That Director Carvajal continues to allow the criminal activities of prison employees to go unpunished is an affront to human dignity and a danger to our nation. Senator Durbin is right. Carvajal needs to go.

We echo the sentiments of Senator Durbin and applaud him for his leadership to call for the removal of Director Michael Carvajal, said **Jessica Sandoval, National Director of the national advocacy campaign, Unlock the Box**, a campaign focused on ending solitary confinement in U.S. jails, prisons and juvenile facilities. In addition to the myriad of longstanding abuses of the federal Bureau of Prisons, what we observed during the pandemic has been and continues to be a failed response to manage the virus that has already led to the deaths of nearly 300 people in federal custody, and contributed to the 500% increase in the use of solitary confinement. New, effective leadership is badly needed to fundamentally transform this racist and abusive institution, starting with decarceration and an end to solitary confinement.

Federal prisons, like state and local facilities, are places void of hope and dignity for all those who live and work inside, said **Johnny Perez, solitary confinement survivor and the Director of the U.S. Prisons Program of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture**. Any person who is leading the Bureau of Prisons must lead in such a way as to preserve the dignity of all incarcerated people. We commend Senator Durbin for being mindful of these values and uplifting the need for leadership to do the same. We need true leadership that will prioritize decarceration and immediately implement the blueprint to end solitary confinement once and for all.

The recent revelations of rampant abuse and crime by correctional officers and supervisors in the Federal Bureau of Prisons add to what we already know of our country's prison system. It is a place of avoidable death and illness, segregation and discrimination based on race and religion, and torture in solitary confinement, said **Rachel Meeropol, Senior Staff Attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights**. The removal of Director Michael Carvajal is a necessary first step to changing this long-standing reality. We need bold leadership open to a fundamental change in how we, as a society, address crime, punishment, and rehabilitation.

I sincerely applaud Sen. Durbin's call for the removal of federal Bureau of Prisons Dir. Michael Carvajal whose failed leadership has led to the increased trauma, torture and death of incarcerated persons and a lack of oversight that has resulted in 100+ prison workers since 2019 who have been arrested and/or convicted, said **Jerome Wright, organizer for the #HALTsolitary Campaign and survivor of solitary confinement**. As a formerly incarcerated person and organizer for the #HALTsolitary campaign I know all too well how important it is to have leadership that is not only progressive and transformative, but who also value the dignity and humanity of those under their care. When the entire mood and movement of this country is to decarcerate, reform and dismantle the racist ideologies that permeate our criminal justice system, there is no place for leadership that is either complicit or indifferent. The time is now to replace Carvajal with someone who will be a leader who cares about ending the torture of solitary confinement and putting forth an agenda that speaks to the growing sentiment that incarceration that is not reform-minded and dignified is no longer acceptable.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons should set the norm for a national corrections system that is humane and safe. There should be no place for abuse, graft, and corruption behind prison walls. We thank U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) for sounding the alarm and urging immediate action to address the BOP's failures, said **Nick Turner, president and director, Vera Institute of Justice**. The administration must take two critical steps to deliver safety and humanity behind bars. First, limit the number of people incarcerated by

using the provisions available under the First Step Act and through compassionate release to the fullest. Second, enact a plan to address inhumane conditions so that the horrors recently uncovered never occur again."

Background:

Earlier this week, an investigation by the [Associated Press documented](#) horrific abuses of the federal prison system that people who have lived through that system and their family members have long known. Specifically, the AP investigation found that the federal Bureau of Prisons, with an annual budget of nearly \$8 billion, is a hotbed of abuse, graft and corruption, and has turned a blind eye to employees accused of misconduct. In some cases, the agency has failed to suspend officers who themselves had been arrested for crimes.

Following that report, Senator Dick Durbin, chairperson of the Senate Judiciary Committee, demanded Attorney General Merrick Garland immediately remove the BOP director. As [NPR reported](#), Sen. Durbin's demand came two days after the AP revealed that more than 100 Bureau of Prisons workers have been arrested, convicted or sentenced for crimes since the start of 2019. Durbin took particular aim at Director Michael Carvajal, who has been at the center of the agency's myriad crises. Under Carvajal's leadership, the agency has experienced a multitude of crises from the rampant spread of coronavirus inside prisons and a failed response to the pandemic to dozens of escapes, deaths and critically low staffing levels that have hampered responses to emergencies.

The failings of the current BOP leadership have exacerbated longstanding abuses of the federal Bureau of Prisons, including the widespread infliction of solitary confinement, staff brutality, deprivation of basic needs, and self-harm, suicide, and death. These abuses have disproportionately been inflicted on Black people, Latinx people, Native people, and other people of color. As the [AP reported](#) earlier this year, a key part of Biden's agenda is combating racism, and nowhere is racial equity a more fraught issue than inside prisons -- institutions that first proliferated in the 1800s as a way to lock away Black men for minor offenses after the abolition of slavery and that are still disproportionately filled with Black people. While Black people comprise roughly 14% of the entire U.S. population, over [38% of people in federal prisons are Black people](#).

Specifically related to solitary confinement, separate from the inappropriate use of solitary to address COVID-19, over [10,000 people](#) on any given day are officially in solitary confinement in federal Bureau of Prisons facilities alone (not including other forms of federal detention), representing nearly 8% of the total federal prison population. This is a substantially higher percentage than the [national average](#) in state prison systems and even higher than in the federal BOP a [decade ago](#) before reductions were made under the Obama administration.

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