

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 9, 2020

George C. Zoley  
Chief Executive Officer  
The GEO Group, Inc.  
Suite 700  
621 NW 53rd Street  
Boca Raton, FL 33487

Dear Mr. Zoley:

I write to request information about the policies and procedures that The GEO Group, Inc. (GEO) has in place to prepare for and manage a potential spread of the novel coronavirus among federal prisoners in GEO's custody and among correctional staff at GEO facilities.

As of this week, a new strain of coronavirus, which causes COVID-19, has infected over 110,000 people, leading to over 3,800 deaths worldwide.<sup>1</sup> On January 31<sup>st</sup>, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency.<sup>2</sup> As of today, there are over 600 confirmed cases and 22 deaths from coronavirus in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

Over 175,000 individuals are incarcerated in federal prisons and jails, with over 17,500 of those in the custody of private contractors, such as GEO. Thousands of incarcerated people, their family and friends, and correctional staff move in and out of federal prisons every day.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the uncontained spread of coronavirus in privately-contracted federal prisons endangers the prison population, correctional staff, and the general public.

According to public health experts, incarcerated individuals "are at special risk of infection, given their living situations," and "may also be less able to participate in proactive measures to keep themselves safe, and infection control is challenging in these settings."<sup>5</sup> In China, officials

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<sup>1</sup> The New York Times, "Coronavirus Map: Tracking the Spread of the Outbreak," K.K. Rebecca Lai, Jin Wu, Richard Harris, Allison McCann, Keith Collins, Derek Watkins and Jugal K. Patel, March 4, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/asia/china-wuhan-coronavirus-maps.html>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Secretary Azar Declares Public Health Emergency for United States for 2019 Novel Coronavirus," Press Release, January 31, 2020, <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/01/31/secretary-azar-declares-public-health-emergency-us-2019-novel-coronavirus.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Johns Hopkins University - Center for Systems Science and Engineering, "Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by Johns Hopkins CSSE," March 4, 2020, <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons, "Statistics," [https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/population\\_statistics.jsp](https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/population_statistics.jsp).

<sup>5</sup> "Achieving A Fair and Effective COVID-19 Response: An Open Letter to Vice-President Mike Pence, and

have confirmed the virus spreading at a rapid pace in Chinese prisons, with over 500 reported cases as February 20, 2020, including prison staff.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the vulnerability of the prison population, there are unique challenges in ensuring that incarcerated individuals receive appropriate monitoring and care. Dr. Homer Venters, the former chief medical officer of the New York City Department of Correction, warned that, because of the separation between prison health care services and the rest of our national health care system, “management of this pandemic will be harder and less effective for incarcerated people, their families and staff in these institutions.”<sup>7</sup>

Given the spread of the virus in the U.S.—and the particular vulnerability of the prison population and correctional staff—it is critical that GEO have a plan to help prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus to incarcerated individuals and correctional staff, along with their families and loved ones, and provide treatment to incarcerated individuals and staff who become infected. To inform Congress and policymakers on the state of GEO’s coronavirus preparedness, please respond to the following questions no later than March 16, 2020.

1. What policies or procedures does GEO have in place to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus within its prisoner population and among visitors and correctional staff and their families? Please provide copies of any relevant policies and procedures.
2. How does GEO plan to identify individuals in its custody or correctional staff who are at heightened risk of serious illness if they become infected with coronavirus, including pregnant women, and individuals with compromised immune systems and chronic illnesses?
3. How will GEO ensure that individuals in segregation or special housing are properly monitored for signs of infection?
4. How will GEO address staffing concerns if a significant number of correctional staff become infected or quarantined and are unable to work?
5. How will GEO manage food service if incarcerated persons who work in prison kitchens become infected or quarantined and are unable to work?
6. What policies or procedures does GEO have in place to track and collect data on the spread of coronavirus?
7. What steps has GEO taken to ensure that it is integrated with the response plans in the communities and states in which its facilities are located?
8. How does GEO plan to monitor the outbreak of and response to coronavirus across each of its facilities?

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Other Federal, State, and Local Leaders from Public Health and Legal Experts in the United States,” March 2, 2020, [https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/center/ghjp/documents/final\\_covid-19\\_letter\\_from\\_public\\_health\\_and\\_legal\\_experts.pdf](https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/center/ghjp/documents/final_covid-19_letter_from_public_health_and_legal_experts.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> CNBC, “China says more than 500 cases of the new coronavirus stemmed from prisons,” Evelyn Cheng and Huileng Tan, February 20, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/02/21/coronavirus-china-says-two-prisons-reported-nearly-250-cases.html>.

<sup>7</sup> The Hill, “4 ways to protect our jails and prisons from coronavirus,” Dr. Homer Venters, February 29, 2020, <https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/485236-4-ways-to-protect-our-jails-and-prisons-from-coronavirus>.



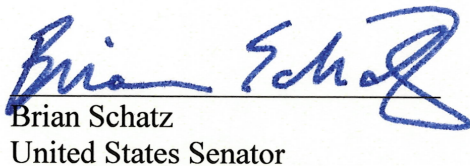
9. Does GEO have a plan to rapidly expand the number of nurses and other medical professionals available to monitor cases and treat infected individuals in its custody?
10. What steps has BOP taken to improve sanitation and hygiene in federal prisons and jails, including frequent cleaning and disinfecting of common areas and ensuring that soap, hand sanitizer, tissues, and other personal hygiene products and supplies are widely and readily available?
11. How does GEO plan to isolate individuals in its custody who are exposed to or become infected with the virus?
  - a. Where will they be housed?
  - b. How will GEO ensure that these individuals are properly monitored and treated?
12. Has GEO appointed a point-person to manage its response to the novel coronavirus?
  - a. If so, who is the appointee?
  - b. If not, does GEO plan to do so?
13. How will BOP maintain normal operations, such as visits and transfers, during the course of the coronavirus epidemic, and how will BOP determine when these operations need to be curtailed?
14. How will GEO communicate its coronavirus prevention and response plans with incarcerated persons in its custody, prison staff, and their families?

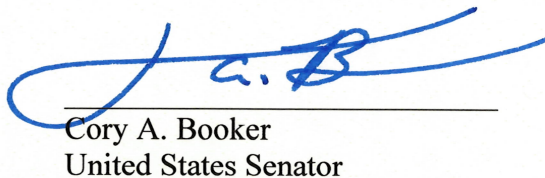
Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

  
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

  
Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

  
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

*ally*  
Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin

Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

*ally*  
Bert Sanders

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris

Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

Mazie Hirono

Mazie Hirono  
United States Senator

Tina Smith

Tina Smith  
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator