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ELEMENTARY, AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W., Room 7100
Washington, DC 20548

February 27, 2026

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Incarcerated individuals in federal facilities have been exposed to unsafe and inhumane temperature conditions due to aging infrastructure and lack of adequate heat and air conditioning. Extreme heat and cold in federal prisons are serious issues that could lead to sickness or death.

Over the past few years, temperatures across the country have increased, resulting in record heat waves. In July 2025, hundreds of cities throughout the U.S. reached all-time daily high temperature records, with some temperatures soaring as high as 117 degrees. Incarcerated individuals kept in these conditions could have a heat stroke, become dehydrated, or die. While no national statistics are available on heat-related deaths or illnesses in prisons, a 2022 study reported that approximately 13 percent of deaths in Texas prisons between 2001 and 2019 may be attributed to extreme heat days, with an average of 14 inmate deaths per year in facilities without air conditioning. Conversely, extreme cold conditions could lead to hypothermia, frostbite, or death. In 2019, more than 1700 incarcerated individuals at MDC Brooklyn endured sub-freezing temperatures which led to legal actions being filed against the Bureau of Prisons, members of Congress expressing concern about facility conditions, and incarcerated individuals becoming disruptive following protests outside of the facility.

The Eighth Amendment protects incarcerated individuals against cruel and unusual punishment. Incarcerated individuals cannot control the temperature in their housing units, nor can they open windows or adjust thermostats. They rely on BOP officials for their safety.

We have significant concern about the impact of extreme temperatures on people who work and are incarcerated in our federal prison facilities. Several reports, including one conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, emphasized the ongoing crisis BOP facilities face due to severe staffing shortages and deteriorating infrastructure. Aging infrastructure poses significant risks to facilities lacking proper heating and air-conditioning systems, which are critically important in preventing serious health issues associated with extreme heat and cold. Staffing shortages limit staff capacity to mitigate extreme heat and cold dire

issues, making those with medical and mental health conditions that are exacerbated by high and low temperatures more vulnerable to heat- and cold-related illnesses or deaths.

It is vital that safe temperature control measures and effective heating and cooling systems are implemented to prevent incidents of heat- and cold-related illnesses or deaths. It is not only necessary for those working in our federal prisons, but also for those who are housed there because of incarceration.

Therefore, we request that the GAO conduct a study to examine:

1. To what extent do BOP facilities monitor and adjust, as appropriate, temperatures within housing units and spaces commonly used by incarcerated people and staff to ensure it falls within the parameters of their guidance?
2. To what extent does BOP capture data on extreme heat or cold related illnesses, injuries, or death?
3. To what extent is BOP taking steps to ensure fully functioning air and heating infrastructure in the housing units of its prisons?
4. To what extent are BOP facilities implementing relevant staff trainings that are outlined in the BOP's guidance for heat-illness prevention and management?
5. To what extent does the BOP track and respond to extreme temperatures-related complaints from incarcerated individuals and staff?
6. To what extent does the BOP account for how extreme temperatures impact vulnerable populations such as elderly people, pregnant people, and those with compromised thermoregulatory systems in its heat-illness prevention efforts?
7. Is the current capital repair project request system effective in addressing, in a timely manner, system failures that cause temperatures to vary outside the guidance range?
8. How effective are BOP facilities at managing the health crises that may arise with HVAC system failures?

Thank you for your support on this matter.

Sincerely,



Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Crime
and Federal Government Surveillance