



Durbin Statement On Death Of First Female Federal Inmate Due To COVID-19

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SPRINGFIELD – U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee and a lead author of the *First Step Act* – landmark prison reform legislation – today released the following statement regarding the death of Andrea Circle Bear who is believed to be the first female federal inmate to die of COVID-19. Ms. Circle Bear was a 30-year-old federal inmate who gave birth on a ventilator in early April and had a pre-existing medical condition:

“Simply put, this tragic death was preventable. For more than a month, I have led bipartisan calls from Congress for the Trump Administration to take common-sense measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in federal prisons, which are especially susceptible to this pandemic because social distancing is virtually impossible in such close quarters. Andrea Circle Bear committed a low-level nonviolent drug offense, but she did not deserve to die, and an innocent child did not deserve to lose his mother. The Justice Department and Bureau of Prisons must act to prevent more death and suffering, and they must act now.”

Last week, following the Department of Justice (DOJ) Inspector General’s (IG) decision to assess whether facilities housing Bureau of Prisons (BOP) inmates are complying with available guidance and best practices regarding preventing, managing, and containing potential COVID-19 outbreaks, Durbin, along with Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA), [requested](#) that DOJ IG Horowitz’s review also include the implementation of relevant legislative authorities and Attorney General directives giving BOP authority to transfer at-risk inmates to home confinement, including the recently-enacted *CARES Act* and the *First Step Act*, landmark prison reform legislation authored by Grassley and Durbin.

Last month, Durbin and Grassley led 12 of their colleagues in a [bipartisan letter](#) pressing the Trump Administration to release or transfer to home confinement the most vulnerable inmates as permitted under the *First Step Act*. The Senators called on BOP and DOJ to review and expedite current cases where the Elderly Home Detention Pilot Program would allow for an early transfer – where appropriate – of terminally ill and eligible elderly inmates to home confinement.

Last month, Durbin [spoke](#) with BOP Director Michael Carvajal to discuss how he planned to protect BOP staff and inmates at facilities across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also pressed Director Carvajal on the fact that the Trump Administration had not yet requested any additional funding for BOP to prepare for and combat the pandemic.