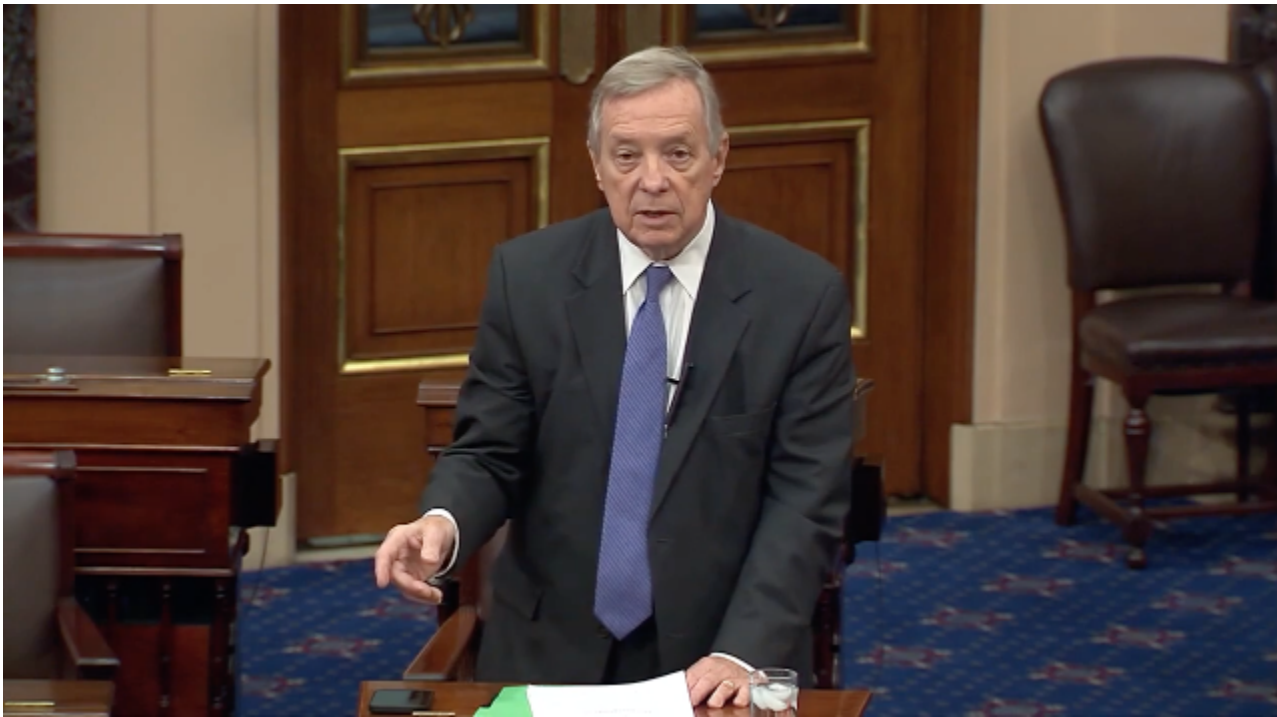


In Speech On Senate Floor, Durbin Previews Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing On Preventing Deaths Of Incarcerated Individuals In Federal Prisons

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, today delivered a speech on the Senate floor previewing tomorrow’s Senate Judiciary Committee hearing entitled [“Examining and Preventing Deaths of Incarcerated Individuals in Federal Prisons.”](#) In his remarks, Durbin reaffirmed his commitment to holding the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) accountable

for the operational and managerial deficiencies that have created unsafe conditions and critical threats to those in BOP custody.

Durbin began his speech by sharing the story of Bobby “AJ” Everson, who died while in BOP custody in December 2021.

“In December of 2021, Bobby Everson was killed while he was in the care and custody of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, allegedly by his cell mate. At the time of his death, he was housed at the federal prison in Thomson, Illinois, in the Special Management Unit, a unit notorious for poor management, harsh conditions, even before the Bureau of Prisons moved it to Thomson from USP Lewisburg in 2018,” Durbin began.

Following Everson’s death and an investigation by the Marshall Project and NPR, Durbin called on the Department of Justice (DOJ) Inspector General (IG) Michael Horowitz to examine Thomson, as well as other BOP facilities, as part of an investigation into hundreds of deaths in BOP facilities. Last year, the Special Management Unit at USP Thomson was closed.

“The Inspector General found things that are truly disturbing about our American prison system... like the failure to comply with policy understaffing has increased the risk and contributed to more and more deaths that are preventable,” Durbin said. “A prison sentence should not be a death sentence in America.”

IG Horowitz’s report also found that more than half of the deaths in the investigation’s scope were suicides, and nearly half of those suicides occurred in restricted housing—more commonly known as solitary confinement.

Earlier this month, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report on BOP’s use of solitary confinement, originally requested by Durbin. The report revealed that as of October 2023, BOP housed almost eight percent of its prison population in solitary confinement. In many cases, incarcerated people were confined to their cells for 23 hours a day.

“We know that the overuse of solitary confinement causes lasting, irreparable mental harm to incarcerated people. That is why I will soon reintroduce the [Solitary Confinement Reform Act](#), legislation that will greatly limit the use of solitary confinement in our nation’s prison system,” Durbin said. “Depriving incarcerated adults of basic human rights and endangering their lives is no way to achieve justice. Bureau of Prisons must do more to create safer and more humane conditions.”

Durbin then spoke about his work as Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee to bring oversight to BOP, including holding a hearing tomorrow on deaths in BOP custody.

“As Chair of the Judiciary Committee, I have established a practice of holding annual oversight hearings for the Bureau of Prisons. Tomorrow, we will hear from Bureau of Prisons Director Colette Peters and DOJ IG Horowitz to discuss the IG report and examine what led to these deadly failures,” Durbin said.

“The goal of our criminal justice system must be to rehabilitate offenders and prepare them to successfully reenter society,” Durbin said. “It is long past time for BOP to achieve this goal, and it will only do so through transparency, accountability, and reform.”

Video of Durbin’s remarks on the floor is available [here](#).

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