



Federal Bureau of Prisons

Washington, D.C. 20534

August 15, 1991

Mr. Glenn Good  
6948 N. Ashland Avenue, #3A  
Chicago, IL 60626

Dear Mr. Good:

Your recent letter regarding the administrative maximum security prison being constructed by the Bureau of Prisons in Florence, Colorado, has been referred to this office for response. You raise a number of issues regarding the operation of this planned facility.

The administrative maximum security institution will be one of four components of a complex built on the same site, and that will be opened over a period of time beginning in late 1992. This institution is not planned as a "control unit prison." The Florence administrative maximum security institution will take over the function currently performed by the U.S. Penitentiary in Marion, Illinois. It will house the highest security inmates in the Federal Bureau of Prisons, those not suitable at a given point in their sentences for assignment to an open prison population. The Bureau intends that inmates not spend their entire sentences at Florence, but instead be given the opportunity there - in a setting that provides for both staff and inmate safety - to demonstrate non-dangerous behavior that will eventually permit their transfer to institutions with a more traditional, open program.

While serving a function similar to Marion, the modern design of the Florence facility will incorporate many improvements intended to enhance the safety of staff and inmates, while providing humane living conditions for this difficult inmate population. The security design will generally require less use of physical restraints on inmates than is the case at Marion, and will enable staff to provide improved recreational and other program opportunities in a less restrictive environment than is now the case. There is no intention of lessening inmates' important human contacts with staff, such as by using machines to deliver food to cells.

Much of your inquiry centers on inmate classification and transfer policies. There has recently been a major change in the Bureau's security designation and custody classification system, so that we no longer classify our institutions by numerical ranking of level 1 through 6, but rank them as do many other correctional

systems, by minimum, low, medium, and high security categories.

Under this system, inmates are classified in two general ways. First, they are assigned a security classification level of minimum, low, medium, or high, which parallels the institution classification system. This classification is based on pre-commitment factors such as severity of offense, length of sentence, record of previous confinement, history of violence or escapes, and any pending detainers or warrants. Based on this rating, inmates are generally assigned to a facility that matches their security needs.

A second type of classification has to do with the custody level of an inmate within the institution, that is an indication of the individual's supervision needs within the institution. This categorization combines pre-commitment information with post-commitment factors, including length of time served and disciplinary record while in custody. These considerations yield a custody classification of community, out, in or maximum, which can result in assignment to institutions of greater or lesser security throughout a sentence, as these factors change.

Inmates assigned to the new facility at Florence would generally be those with a high security classification rating and a maximum custody rating, just as has been the case at Marion. In a few instances, there likely will be inmates committed directly to Florence from court, based on some element in their sentence. These factors might include the extremes in the nature of an offense, length of sentence, escape potential, criminal sophistication, or in some cases, court recommendations. At Marion, such direct commitment cases involve less than 4% of the inmates confined.

Many operational issues at Florence have not yet been finalized. However, the general approach will be closely patterned after the operation at Marion. There will be a stratification of inmate housing units, so that inmates may progressively engage in less structured programming as they demonstrate responsible actions. The physical plant will include a control unit with a capacity of about 50, several general population units, an intermediate unit, and a pretransfer unit.

Inmates will only be assigned to the control unit after a hearing by an administrative officer and a review by the Regional Director and the Bureau's Assistant Director for Correctional Programs. As is currently the case, inmates may be represented by a staff member at these hearings, but there is no provision for attorney representation. This due process structure provides inmates with the opportunity to exercise applicable rights with respect to long-term detention in a unit of this kind.

Assignment of non-control unit inmates to Florence will be made by the Regional Director of the Bureau's North Central Region. There is no provision in the Bureau for a hearing in such routine prisoner transfer cases, nor is one required by law.

The capacity of the Florence facility will be about 500, which is similar to that of Marion. I might point out that the population at Marion has remained stable for a number of years, averaging between 350 and 375, in spite of the growth in the overall Bureau population, from 24,000 to 63,000 in the last 10 years. Currently, inmates assigned to Marion account for only about 0.6% of the total Bureau population.

Regarding dining issues, the control unit and the general population unit inmates will eat in their cells. There likely will be congregate dining in the unit for the intermediate unit inmates; pretransfer unit inmates will eat in a common dining room.

As at Marion, the number of hours a prisoner spends out of his cell each day will vary by unit, and will include several levels of stratification. For instance, control unit inmates likely will only spend about one hour a day out of their cells, while pretransfer unit inmates will be out of their cells from early morning until late evening.

There will be similar stratification among the units for recreation opportunities. There will be indoor and outdoor group recreation facilities in most of the units, including the general population, intermediate, and pretransfer units. In the control unit and the special housing unit there will be smaller, more secure individual recreation areas.

Beds in the facility will be similar to those at Marion; they will be reinforced, poured concrete, and each inmate will be provided with a mattress and other typical bed covers. As a matter of policy, inmates are issued prison clothing and are allowed to purchase certain items of recreational clothing. Current Bureau policy governing search and restraint procedures at all Federal prisons will continue in effect at Florence.

Generally, social visiting will be permitted several times a month, on a non-contact basis. Of course, attorney-client visits will provide for appropriate contact. Contact with families and the community will be facilitated by open correspondence and periodic telephone calls. The number and length of telephone contacts will vary from unit to unit.

Work opportunities will be available, primarily in the pretransfer unit through a prison industry program, and to certain other inmates in each unit for such functions as barbering and

sanitation maintenance.

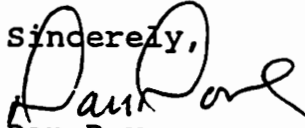
As at Marion, there likely will be educational opportunities through the combined use of a closed circuit television channel and one-to-one assistance by teachers. These programs will in all probability involve GED, Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and various other self-study courses. Legal materials and reference works will be available to each inmate who requests their use.

As at Marion, there will be opportunity for congregate religious services on a weekly or monthly basis. These services will cover faith groups of inmates in the general population, intermediate unit, and pretransfer unit. Control unit inmates will be provided services in the unit, through the ministry of religious workers visiting them in their cells.

There will be health care facilities with trained professional staff, in line with community health care standards. These include 24-hour medical staff coverage in the facility, and extensive emergency and in-house medical care resources. The specific staffing pattern for the medical department has not yet been determined.

After a period of renovation, USP Marion will house high security inmates in a more traditional, open penitentiary setting. There are no plans at present for another administrative maximum security facility in the Bureau of Prisons.

Thank you for your interest in the operation of our new facility in Florence, Colorado. I hope this information serves to reassure you that the conditions at both Marion and Florence are in line with contemporary professional correctional standards, and that the Bureau's approach to confining its maximum security population is a balanced one.

Sincerely,  
  
Dan Dove  
Chief, Office of Public  
Affairs