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CONTACT

DR. ARTIE ANN BATES

CONCERNED LETCHER COUNTIANS

606-233-0097

Kentucky Advocates Express Concerns Over Irregularities in Planning Process for Federal Prison in Letcher County

Letcher County, Kentucky - On December 18, 2023, the Concerned Letcher Countians (CLC) and members of the Building Community Not Prisons Coalition (BCNP) delivered [a letter to Federal Bureau of Prisons \(BOP\) Director Colette Peters](#) expressing concerns over irregularities in the planning process for the proposed federal prison in Letcher County, Kentucky. As of January 15, 2024, there has been no reply from the BOP.

In the letter, CLC and BCNP express concerns that the Bureau of Prisons gave two private meetings to a non-governmental corporation, the Letcher County Planning Commission, who is the leading proponent for the proposed Letcher prison. Meanwhile, BOP has refused to meet

with Concerned Letcher Countians and BCNP, both of whom oppose the construction of the prison.

In a potential violation of the Sunshine Act, the BOP's website-posted synopses of these two meetings failed to publicize the attendees, the depth of discussions that occurred, and/or whether decisions were made concerning the development of an Environmental Impact Statement. Most significantly, these meetings with a non-profit corporation were not open to the public.

In the letter, BCNP and CLC request that in the spirit of openness, transparency, accountability and compliance with the Sunshine Act that the BOP rectify our concerns immediately by:

1. Hosting a virtual meeting with CLC, BCNP and any other concerned stakeholder organizations;
2. Posting online access to the video of the two zoom meetings between BOP and LCPC;
3. Releasing a transcript of the meetings that occurred between BOP and LCPC;
4. Releasing the full minutes of these two meetings, including a list of all participants and materials exchanged or discussed; and
5. Releasing the names of those who proposed the meetings and those who consented to them.

Since 2017, both the Trump and Biden Administrations have requested that the original funding for the prison be rescinded, and top officials at the Department of Justice have publicly stated this new construction is unnecessary due to a declining federal prison population.

"The proposed FCI Letcher would be the fifth federal prison in eastern Kentucky's 5th congressional district, where there are already more incarcerated people than in the entire state of New York," says Dr. Artie Ann Bates, a local Letcher county resident and member of Concerned Letcher Countian. "The 5th congressional district has 2% of the population of the BOP's Mid Atlantic District (MTX), but 20% of the federally incarcerated population."

At Roxana, the strip mine site where the proposed prison would sit, "The land is starting to look reclaimed with plants and small trees starting to grow back. So why pour concrete there?" says Mitch Whitaker, local Letcher county resident who lives adjacent to where the prison is proposed to be built.

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