

LOCAL NEWS OCTOBER 16, 2026

Federal watchdog finds staffing gaps, care delays at FCI Berlin prison



A DOJ watchdog found staffing, medical and security shortcomings at FCI Berlin, where ICE detainees have added pressure. New Hampshire's delegation says staffing has fallen further since the inspection.



Gabriel Perry
Union Leader Staff



The new Federal Correctional Institution in Berlin sits on a hill north of the city proper. COURTESY

A U.S. Department of Justice [Office of the Inspector General's report](#) found major shortcomings at Federal Correctional Institution Berlin, exacerbated in part by influx of Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainees.



The report, authored after an unannounced January inspection of the North Country prison, and released Thursday, pointed to widespread staffing vacancies, issues providing routine medical care, security violations and deviations from the Bureau of Prisons' policy for tracking sexual misconduct complaints.

Vacancies are particularly acute in the Correctional Services, Health Services and Psychology Services departments and "collectively strained employees' abilities to maintain operations."

"These staffing challenges have been exacerbated in some ways by the BOP receiving a new custody population from ICE under the terms of an interagency agreement between the BOP and ICE to house ICE detainees at certain BOP institutions," the report read.

FCI Berlin officials did not immediately return a request for comment.

FCI Berlin began housing ICE detainees in March 2025, and the OIG report noted that population has needs distinct from the broader BOP population. Those needs created additional burdens on employees at the Berlin facility.

When federal investigators audited the medium-security prison, actual headcount was at about 52% of physical capacity, which is 1,532 persons, excluding the prison's minimum security camp's capacity of 128.

On the first day of the inspection, Jan. 12, FCI Berlin held 194 ICE detainees and 600 in the medium-security facility and 52 at the camp. Detainees stay at the facility for about two months, on average. The BOP can approve or reject a transfer request up front. Further, the BOP can return disruptive detainees to ICE within 48 hours, according to the report.

While federal investigators credited prison staff as being "dedicated to maintaining a safe environment" and said they "sought available solutions to meet the various mission needs driven by the distinct populations in its custody," but said the prison's ability to meet operational needs would be at risk if the population were to increase.

The staffing crunch contributed to various issues inside the prison, auditors said. FCI Berlin "struggled to address BOP inmate requests for routine medical care inside the institution" and to facilitate inmates in seeing medical providers outside of the prison.



“Despite what we identified as a generally dedicated workforce, we identified certain security violations, including inconsistent monitoring rounds by Correctional Officers and deviations from the BOP’s policy for tracking sexual misconduct complaints,” the report said.

Federal investigators left the BOP with eight recommendations for improvement, including one having to do with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The BOP should clarify with ICE the appropriate procedures for informing detainees how to report sexual misconduct, and follow through with ensuring those procedures are followed at FCI Berlin.

Many of the recommendations pertain to making improvements to the ways that medical issues are handled, general security within the facility and the detection and removal of contraband inside of the prison’s housing units.

“The institution’s ability to sustain operations has depended heavily on short-term measures that are not sustainable in the long term to meet essential safety, security, and healthcare needs for both BOP inmates and ICE detainees,” the report said. “We found various areas in which FCI Berlin’s institutional practices and operational limitations pose risks to the institution.”

Issues with staffing at the prison have long been known to legislators. In January, U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and Sen. David McCormick, R-PA, introduced the Federal Correctional Officer Paycheck Protection Act, which would provide a 35% salary rate increase to officers in federal prisons across the country with the goal of boosting recruitment and retention.

Gov. Kelly Ayotte did not return a request for comment on this story, but New Hampshire’s congressional delegation issued a joint statement to the Union Leader, noting that staffing levels at the prison have decreased since the date of the inspection.

“The challenges outlined in the report must be taken seriously, especially a lack of vigilance surrounding sexual misconduct complaints and medical care deficiencies. While we are glad to see that BOP claims to be working to address the issues identified in the report, we remain alarmed about the ongoing safety issues at FCI Berlin, particularly given that staffing at the facility has only further dropped since this inspection was completed,” wrote Sens. Shaheen and Maggie Hassan and Reps. Chris Pappas and Maggie Goodlander.





Gabriel Perry

Union Leader Staff

Reporter Gabriel Perry can be reached at gperry@unionleader.com

