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The Letcher County, Kentucky Federal Prison  
**Public Comment Toolkit**

***Speak out against this disastrous prison!***

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# EXPLAINER

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) is one step closer to building a massive \$505 million federal prison in Eastern Kentucky. We need your voice now more than ever to end this once and for all.

In response to the public review period (March 1st-April 15th), we have created this toolkit to provide you with the necessary resources, guidance, and information to make your opposition heard, emphasizing the project's impacts and offering detailed instructions on submitting your comment both in writing and in person.

**Please share this toolkit — public outcry must be overwhelming if we are to dismantle this prison.**

If you have any questions about the public review process or any concerns about your comment, please contact [Torie Soriano, Dream.Org Digital Organizing Manager](#).



# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## Brief History

The Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Letcher is a proposed \$500 million federal prison set on the site of a former coal mine in Letcher County, Kentucky. It's a massive 500-acre project that would continue to expand the American prison system in a state that already incarcerates **40% more** than the national average and use taxpayer money to perpetuate a system that is harmful to the environment and the community.

For nearly 20 years, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) has been trying to build FCI Letcher despite it being historically unpopular. Both former President Trump and President Biden have recommended rescinding the \$500 million required for FCI Letcher from their budgets. In 2019, local activists and coalition members successfully halted the construction of the prison.

Despite the government and public disapproval, the project has been green-lit and is moving forward to the next phase of the construction process: the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) public comment period.

## The EIS Review Period (Mar 1–Apr 15)

Before the prison can be built, it must complete an EIS to recognize all the environmental and community impacts the project will have during and after construction. Required following the initial EIS is a 45-day review period, during which individuals, organizations, and stakeholders can submit their views, concerns, and evidence regarding the proposed project.

By law, the FBOP is required to address and consider ALL public comments.

**This is the prime opportunity to overwhelm them with a massive amount of**

**submissions, an obvious display of public opposition they cannot ignore.**

The public comment period closes April 15, 2024. **This may be our final opportunity to speak out against this project.**

The following pages will detail the negative impacts of the proposed prison to supplement your comment and the process of how to write and submit a public review.

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## IMPACTS OF THE PRISON

There is an overwhelming amount of negative impacts and injustices that the project will have on the community. Use these points to help you write your comment.

**Perpetuation of Over-Incarceration:** By focusing on incarceration over rehabilitation, this project reinforces a troubling trend. **The U.S. federal prison population has decreased by more than 10% since 2009**, making the construction of another facility unnecessary. Kentucky already incarcerates at a rate 40% higher than the national average, and building another federal prison only deepens the state's reliance on a flawed correctional system that disproportionately affects marginalized communities.

**Economic Sustainability Doubts:** The promise of economic growth and employment from this prison is shaky at best. Take nearby counties Martin and McCreary as examples, both home to federal prisons and yet among Kentucky's poorest, with Martin County experiencing a staggering **43% drop in employment**, and in McCreary only **8.3% of prison staff were hired locally**.

The \$505 million earmarked for the prison seems a misplaced investment, offering little to no real benefit to the local economy but instead **burdening taxpayers with the cost of the \$500 million project.**

**Environmental Concerns:** The environmental implications are dire. The proposed site is on a former coal mine, a location already suffering from the legacy of pollution and chemical exposure. This project threatens to exacerbate the area's environmental degradation, posing health risks to inmates, staff, and the construction workforce through exposure to toxic substances left by coal extraction. Outside of the coal pollution, the proposed prison would damage the natural landscape, **destroying 6,290 linear feet of streams and 1.99 acres of wetland**, as well as precious habitat for the federally endangered Indiana bat.

**The Strain on Local Infrastructure and Community:** The construction and operation of this facility will demand significant upgrades to local infrastructure, likely leading to increased taxes and diverted funds from essential services.

[Read this article for more facts on why the Letcher Prison will not help the local area.](#)

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## HOW TO WRITE A PUBLIC COMMENT

Public comments are generally composed of **(1)** an introduction, **(2)** a reaction to the proposed project, detailing what sections should be kept, removed, or altered and why, and **(3)** an overall summary or conclusion.

### Your comment should be:

- Brief
- Focus on a personal reaction to the proposed action, such as the impact on yourself or your community.

## PUBLIC COMMENT EXAMPLES

Below are three examples of public comments submitted for the proposed FCI Letcher. Feel free to copy and paste any of the supplemental information, **but make sure to insert details about your personal impact and reaction to the proposed federal prison.**

[Please reference any of these negative impacts on the project in your comment.](#)

**Example 1:** Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed federal prison. My name is Dori Serrano and I've been living in Letcher County for the past 20 years, and I can honestly say that we do not want to see a prison built here in our backyard. If MY TAX DOLLARS are going to be paying for this, put that money towards programs that actually lower crime and addiction, like mental health treatment, NOT ANOTHER PRISON. Don't let what happened in Martin County happen to Letcher, stop this prison!!

**Example 2:** Thank you for the opportunity to express my objections to the idea of building another federal prison in the state of Kentucky. There are currently 5 federal prisons in our state and they are all understaffed and lack the required recidivism risk reduction programs for successful reentry. Additionally, some are in various stages of disrepair. Why is the government wasting out tax dollars to build something new when it should be investing

the money to fix what it has.

**Dream.Org's Comment:** To the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Dream.Org writes with urgent disapproval of the creation of a new prison in Eastern Kentucky. The prison is economically irresponsible, given the intense infrastructure problems faced by existing prisons, the lack of true job creation, and the damage it would cause to the community at large. It is environmentally ill-considered because of the contaminants that the inmates and staff would be exposed to, based on its location over a former coal mine. There is little overall support for the prison, given the rescinding of its funding from both the current and former president and bipartisan lack of support for building new prisons generally.

We ask you to consider the above concerns and rescind this unnecessary prison.

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## HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR COMMENT

1. **Written response:** [Submit your written comment to our petition.](#) We will submit your response for you.
2. **In-person Meeting:** Join the public comment meeting happening **March 28, 2024**, beginning at 6:30 p.m., EST at the **Letcher County Central High School (cafeteria)**, 435 Cougar Drive, Whitesburg, Kentucky 41858  
**Virtual Attendance:** For those unable to attend in person, a virtual meeting service is available. Dial 301-715-8592 or use the link:  
**<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84676485785>**



If you are interested in participating in the in-person meeting, we invite you to join a 30-minute public comment training session on March 26th at 6 pm. **Sign up here!**

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Your voice is crucial in our fight for justice, and we thank you for voicing it in opposition to the FCI Letcher. Please share this tool with your friends, family, and colleagues who also believe in a world beyond mass incarceration. Your support brings us one step closer to a safer, healthier, and more equitable world.