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POLITICS

Federal Bureau of Prisons says falling concrete is forcing it to close a prison near Los Angeles



A sign for the Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons is displayed at the Metropolitan Detention Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York on July 6, 2020. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File)

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BY [MICHAEL R. SISAK](#)

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The federal Bureau of Prisons is closing a [California](#) lockup that was once home to Al Capone and Charles Manson over concerns about crumbling infrastructure, including falling concrete that threatens to knock out the facility's heating system, according to an internal memo obtained by the Associated Press.

Director William K. Marshall III told staff on Tuesday that the agency is suspending operations at the Federal Correctional Institution, Terminal Island, a low-security prison [south of Los Angeles](#). It

currently houses nearly 1,000 inmates, including [cryptocurrency fraudster Sam Bankman-Fried](#) and disgraced [celebrity lawyer Michael Avenatti](#).

The decision to close the facility, at least temporarily, “is not easy, but is absolutely necessary,” [Marshall wrote](#), calling it a matter of “[safety](#), common sense, and doing what is right for the people who work and live inside that institution.”

[FCI Terminal Island](#), opened in 1938, is the latest Bureau of Prisons facility to be targeted for closure as [the beleaguered agency](#) struggles with mounting staff vacancies, [a \\$3 billion repair backlog](#) and an expanded mission to support President Donald Trump’s immigration crackdown by taking in thousands of detainees.

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Marshall cited problems with underground tunnels containing the facility's steam heating system. Ceilings in the tunnels have begun to deteriorate, causing chunks of concrete to fall and putting employees and the heating system at risk, he said.

"We are not going to wait for a crisis," Marshall told employees. "We are not going to gamble with lives. And we are not going to expect people to work or live in conditions that we would never accept for ourselves."

Bureau of Prisons spokesperson Randilee Giamusso, responding to the AP's questions about FCI Terminal Island, confirmed that the agency is taking "immediate action" to "safeguard staff and inmates."

Inmates at the facility will be moved to other federal prisons "with a priority on keeping individuals as close as possible to their anticipated release locations," Giamusso said. In his memo to staff, Marshall indicated that the process could take several weeks.

The facility's future will be decided once the Bureau of Prisons has "assessed the situation further and ensured the safety of all those involved," she said.

The Bureau of Prisons has long been bedeviled by FCI Terminal Island's aging infrastructure, Giamusso said. In April 2024, an architectural and engineering firm contracted by the agency identified more than \$110 million in critical repairs needed over the next 20 years.

The closure echoes that of the [agency's federal jail in Manhattan](#) in 2021.

The Bureau of Prisons, the Justice Department's largest employer, has more than 30,000 workers, 122 facilities, about 155,000 inmates and an annual budget that exceeds \$8.5 billion. But the agency's footprint has shrunk over the last year as it wrestles with financial constraints, chronic understaffing and changing priorities.

An [Associated Press investigation](#) has uncovered deep, previously unreported flaws within the Bureau of Prisons, including [rampant sexual abuse](#), [widespread criminal activity by employees](#), dozens of [escapes](#) and the free flow of guns, drugs and other contraband.

In December 2024, in a cost-cutting move, the agency announced it was [idling six prison camps](#) and permanently closing a women's prison in Dublin, California, that was known as the "rape club" because of rampant sexual abuse by the warden and other employees.

In February, an agency official told Congress that 4,000 beds meant for inmates at various facilities were unusable because of dangerous conditions like leaking or failing roofs, mold, asbestos or lead.

At the same time, the agency is building a new prison in Kentucky and, at Trump's direction, exploring the possibility of reopening Alcatraz, the [notorious penitentiary](#) in San Francisco Bay that last held inmates [more than 60 years ago](#).

Marshall, his top deputy and Attorney General Pam Bondi visited in July, but four months later, Alcatraz remains a tourist attraction and a relic of a bygone era in corrections.

In addition to failing facilities, the Bureau of Prisons has been plagued for years by severe staffing shortages that have led to long overtime shifts and the use of prison nurses, teachers, cooks and other workers to guard inmates.

That problem has only worsened in recent months, in part because of a hiring freeze and recruiting by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which has lured correctional officers away with promises of signing bonuses of up to \$50,000.

In September, Marshall said the Bureau of Prisons was canceling its collective bargaining agreement with workers. He said their union had become “an obstacle to progress instead of a partner in it.” The union, the Council of Prison Locals, is suing to block the move, calling it “arbitrary and capricious.”

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