

Bureau of Prisons Wastes Millions Holding Inmates It Could Transfer to Halfway Houses



Sen. Cory Booker said he will demand answers after a Government Accountability Office report found problems with how the bureau is implementing the First Step Act.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons frequently transfers inmates to halfway houses long past when they are eligible, wasting millions of dollars in interest payments to nonprofits, according to a recent report. And while BOP said it's making progress on addressing the delays, Sen. Cory Booker said it's not happening fast enough.

Under the 2018 First Step Act, BOP is supposed to move some incarcerated individuals who have completed education or workforce training courses into halfway houses or home confinement before the end of their sentences. But the releases were delayed in 70% of cases reviewed by the [Government Accountability Office](#), which released its findings in a report earlier this year.

"At best, this is an infrastructure and process failure; at worst, a blatant disregard for the law and public safety," Booker, one of the co-sponsors of the First Step Act, said in a statement to NOTUS.

Booker called the high rate of delays a "failing grade," and said the delays hurt the chance for incarcerated people to successfully exit prison. "No matter the cause, this report is a rebuke of BOP's management and a due process violation for the likely thousands of people still in prison who shouldn't be there," Booker said. "I will be reaching out to BOP for answers."

Earned-credit programs for halfway houses are designed to reduce recidivism by connecting inmates with social programs and housing during the final months of their sentences. Research shows that housing instability is a key factor in recidivism. Residential reentry centers are also generally cheaper than traditional incarceration.

Gretta Goodwin, the director of the GAO's homeland security and justice office, said delays can be so long inmates may not transfer to a reentry facility at all, affecting their ability to successfully reintegrate into society. "If by the time you get to the [residential reentry centers], you don't have enough time, then that could really affect your ability to successfully reenter," Goodwin said.

The GAO found the bureau has not properly tracked inmates' time earned toward serving portions of their sentence in home confinement or halfway houses, and doesn't know how many individuals currently in prison could have already been moved.

The bureau was also found to frequently pay halfway houses late, resulting in more than \$12 million in interest payments required under the Prompt Payment Act. Goodwin said those delays can strain the relationship between BOP and the residential reentry centers and in turn lead to less availability and more delays.

BOP says it's making progress and actively working to fix staffing issues that are a primary driver of delays. BOP spokesperson Scott Taylor said the agency "has made significant progress in improving the accuracy and timeliness of time credit calculations," which are used to determine when inmates are eligible to transfer into a halfway house or home confinement.

"[I]nmates are now consistently transferred to community placements, such as residential reentry centers or home confinement, in a manner that aligns with the time credits they have earned," Taylor said.

BOP is facing severe staffing shortages. Currently, staff hired to run a prison's administrative and health units are frequently called upon to serve as guards and supervisors, according to Goodwin. The bureau paid more than \$387 million in overtime to staff in 2025 after many workers were lured away by jobs in Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Four House Democrats expressed concern over the safety of both workers and inmates because prisons are so understaffed.

At the BOP's Residential Reentry Management Branch, staffing rates dropped below 70% during 2025, Taylor said.