

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 8, 2011

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary
United State House of Representatives
2409 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0001

The Honorable John Conyers
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
United State House of Representatives
2426 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0001

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Conyers:

We write to you in support of the Oleoresin Capsicum Spray Pilot Program Act of 2011 (H.R. 1175) and request its consideration by the House Committee on the Judiciary.

H.R. 1175 would direct the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to conduct a pilot program in order to determine the effectiveness of providing pepper spray to staff. As you are aware, staffing levels in federal prisons are decreasing while inmate populations are steadily on the rise. According to Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report 11-410, the number of federal inmates per BOP staff member rose from 4.13 in fiscal year 2000 to 4.82 in fiscal year 2010. Provided that there are fewer correctional officers per inmate, we are concerned that officers be best equipped to appropriately deal with instances of inmate hostility.

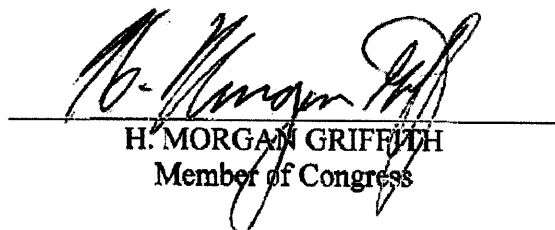
In contrast to BOP officers, GAO noted that “[s]tates have discretion over the equipment they make available to their officers.” 10 of the 14 states contacted for GAO’s report permit their correctional officers to carry pepper spray. Additionally, GAO found that “[m]ost BOP officers and union officials with whom we spoke found that carrying additional equipment while on duty... would better protect officers.”

While correctional officers will always be subject to a certain level of risk by the very nature of their jobs, pepper spray could be an invaluable tool in mitigating bodily threats to officers in unpredictable situations. H.R. 1175 would take an important first step in assessing the use of pepper spray by correctional officers. Therefore, we ask for the Committee to consider H.R. 1175, and at a minimum, hold a hearing to discuss the importance of this legislation for the safety of the BOP officers. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



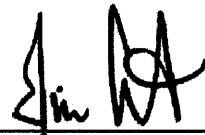
DENNIS A. CARDOZA
Member of Congress



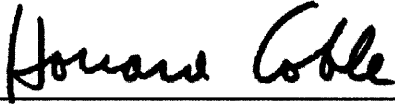
H. MORGAN GRIFFITH
Member of Congress



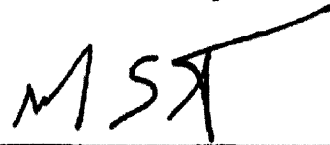
JOHN R. CARTER
Member of Congress



JIM COSTA
Member of Congress



HOWARD COBLE
Member of Congress




MARK S. CRITZ
Member of Congress



NAN A. G. HAYWORTH
Member of Congress



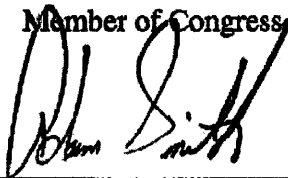
TOM MARINO
Member of Congress



BRAD MILLER
Member of Congress



KURT SCHRADER
Member of Congress



ADAM SMITH
Member of Congress