

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051  
MINORITY (202) 225-5074  
<https://oversight.house.gov>

April 26, 2021

The Honorable Carolyn Maloney  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Oversight and Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Maloney:

Last week, I requested a briefing from Mayor Muriel Bowser about reporting that 1,500 people incarcerated in the District of Columbia (D.C.) jail have been subjected to over a year of COVID-19 lockdowns for 23 hours a day in their cells.<sup>1</sup> As reported by the *Washington Post*, D.C.'s local incarcerated residents have grown beards and long hair due to being unable to visit a barber; sleep at odd hours due to their one hour per day outside of their cell—sometimes coming at 3 a.m.—and talk to themselves due to solitary confinement.<sup>2</sup> Not until this month have inmates even been allowed outside.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the disturbing nature of this reporting—potentially a grave human rights abuse by the D.C. government—I expected Mayor Bowser to respond promptly to my request for information. However, she has ignored this issue, seemingly hoping it will simply go away. This morning, however, we learned that the D.C. government appears to have double downed on its alleged abuse of its inmates. According to the *Post*, D.C. officials have said “they have no plans to relax the virtually around-the-clock confinement of 1,500 jail inmates to their cells[.]”<sup>4</sup> In fact, a week after this reporting became public, D.C. officials have failed to even begin to plan how it will end this unprecedented and cruel treatment of its own residents.<sup>5</sup>

The conduct of D.C.'s government in perpetuating these human rights abuses is unacceptable. Likewise, it is unacceptable that the Mayor continues to ignore all congressional inquiries. Therefore, I am requesting an emergency hearing before the Committee on Oversight and Reform to examine D.C.'s alleged human rights violations. Let us use the power of our Committee to shine a spotlight on, and bring an end to, these gross abuses that are happening right at our doorstep.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Hon. Muriel Bowser, Mayor, Washington, D.C. from Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight and Reform (Apr. 19, 2021), available at <https://republicans-oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/4-19-2021-Mayor-Bowser-re-D.C.-Prisoners-.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Jamison, *An ‘Insane’ Covid Lockdown Two Miles from the Capitol, with No End in Sight*, WASH. POST (Apr. 19, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/04/19/dc-jail-lockdown-covid/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Peter Jamison, *D.C. Officials Ignore Growing Pressure to End 23-Hour Coronavirus Lockdown at Jail*, WASH. POST (Apr. 23, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/04/23/dc-jail-covid-lockdown-officials/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

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Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

James Comer  
Ranking Member