

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

November 17, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
905 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

I write to express my strong objection to the recent closure of Bannum Place of Wheeling in Wheeling, West Virginia. I share the expressed concerns of the judges serving on the United States District Court in the Northern District of West Virginia and urge you to reopen this facility as soon as possible.

Residential reentry centers promote addiction recovery, job training, and most importantly, community reintegration. Located in the heart of downtown Wheeling, Bannum Place of Wheeling maintained excellent working relationships with local law enforcement, employers, and community leaders. The strong relationships cultivated by the center and its outstanding director, Lynette Banks, contributed to the 90% completion rate and an extremely high rate of employment following completion of the program. The success of this facility cannot be overstated. It had been, without question, fulfilling its mission to reduce recidivism and strengthen communities.

The pervasive nature of the opioid epidemic and the urgency with which attention is needed has been underscored by several members of the Trump Administration including the President himself during his recent declaration of a public health emergency. In his speech, he mentioned the "shocking death toll" observed across the country and, most importantly, stated that "we can be the generation that ends the opioid epidemic." I, too, believe that we can end the opioid epidemic and request the assistance of the Bureau of Prisons and the Department of Justice to achieve this goal.

West Virginia currently suffers from the lowest labor force participation rate and the highest overdose rate in the nation. In 2016, West Virginia reported 818 overdose deaths – nearly a 13% increase over 2015. For a state with such statistics, it is critical that we do everything necessary to provide treatment to individuals who need help so that they can return to the workforce and rejoin their communities. This problem is getting worse, not better. The state of West Virginia is now home to only three residential reentry centers. Closing Bannum Place of Wheeling is a step backwards in our fight against this epidemic.

Bannum Place of Wheeling was the only residential reentry center in the Northern Panhandle, and I am concerned about the limited treatment and community reentry options now available to

to the residents of that region. Simply redirecting program participants to other residential reentry centers in the state is not feasible. The closest center in the state, located in Clarksburg, West Virginia, is a two hour drive from the jobs these residents have already obtained. Furthermore, the Clarksburg facility, with only nineteen beds, is simply too small to absorb the displaced participants from Bannum Place of Wheeling.

Accordingly, I write to ask that you consider all measures available to reopen the Bannum Place of Wheeling. If it is not practical to renew the service contract with the previous operator of the center, I ask that you award a new contract to another service provider in order to allow the Wheeling Center to reopen and resume its critical role in serving West Virginians and helping our citizens reenter society.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin, III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joe Manchin, III
United States Senator