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DISTRICT 27



COMMITTEES:  
PUBLIC SAFETY,  
Chairman  
FEDERALISM, REGULATORY  
AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT  
EFFICIENCY

April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025

Dear Director Thornell,

I am writing to express my serious concern over the incident that occurred on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at the Arizona State Prison Complex in Tucson. The murder of three inmates in one of our state's prisons is deeply troubling and raises significant questions about the safety and security protocols of Arizona correctional facilities under your purview.

The alleged perpetrator, Mr. Wassenaar, is not a stranger to those of us who remember his heinous acts during the hostage incident at Lewis Prison in 2004. How was an individual currently serving 16 consecutive life sentences, and who reportedly confessed to killing his cellmate in 2024, in a position to inflict this level of harm? I find it incredibly disturbing an inmate with this history was not in maximum custody and had less restrictive access to correctional officers and other inmates. What would have happened if Mr. Wassenaar had decided to harm an officer that day?

Further, I reject the Department's claim that staffing on April 4<sup>th</sup> met operational needs. How could an adequately staffed facility allow for one inmate to kill three other inmates in less than a 24-hour span?

As Chairman of the Senate Public Safety Committee, I request the following information:

- A timeline of events leading up to and culminating in the April 4<sup>th</sup> murders. Please include:
  - Any reports received by the Department expressing concerns over Mr. Wassenaar's desire to harm other inmates and the Department's response to those reports.
- Dates, times, and the Department employee(s) who authorized any changes made to Mr. Wassenaar's security classification during his time as an inmate in Arizona.
- A detailed history of Mr. Wassenaar's criminal record prior to, and during, his time as an inmate in Arizona, or any other jurisdiction.
- A comprehensive list of all policy changes implemented during your tenure as Director including:
  - Policies related to inmate classification, including those that govern the downgrading of inmate security levels.
  - Policies related to the Department's approach to controlled movement of inmates.

- Current staffing levels in the Cimarron Unit where the incident occurred. Please include overall staffing numbers, including authorized FTE positions and the number of vacancies.
- Comparative staffing levels in the same unit from two years prior. Please include overall staffing numbers, including authorized FTE positions, and the number of vacancies.
- Full staffing rosters for the week before, during, and after the April 4<sup>th</sup> incident.

I request this information be provided to my office by May 1, 2025.



Kevin Payne  
Arizona State Senator  
District 27