

April 27, 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

The undersigned organizations respectfully recommend that Federal Prison Industries (FPI), a Federal government corporation operating under the trade name UNICOR, that uses inmate labor to produce goods and services, temporarily suspend operations.

Since business operations were limited by stay-at-home orders imposed by governors in 45 of the 50 states in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, more than 22 million Americans have filed for unemployment.

FPI was created in 1934 as a prison labor program for inmates within the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Department of Justice. It provides more than 80 product and services from more than 50 locations, employing more than 2,000 inmates. It generates more than \$483 million in annual sales. It is a mandatory source of federal supply for the products it manufactures, meaning it is a sole source monopoly. Federal agencies are mandated by law to purchase products from FPI, with a few limited exceptions.

With our economy in a spiral and law abiding, taxpaying Americans wanting and needing to work to support their families, it makes no sense for federal agencies to be buying products and services from inmates in FPI. Our tax dollars should be used to support our economy, our small businesses, working Americans, and their families. The nearly half-billion dollars FPI receives from Federal agencies could go a long way to putting Americans back to work, supporting their families, and keeping our economy going.

With media reports of Coronavirus outbreaks in Federal prisons and FPI factories, prisoners can work in food service, maintenance, and other work programs within the prison or participate in rehabilitation and education programs to prevent idleness. There are alternatives to FPI and inmates taking jobs away from the American workforce during this critical emergency. It is bad enough that FPI competes with small business in good times, it is unconscionable that they would continue to do so during the Coronavirus pandemic. President Trump has called on all Americans to make sacrifices and we respectfully call on you to take the small but important step of temporarily ceasing operations so that Federal agencies can buy the goods and services they need from law abiding Americans at this time of need.

While small business owners and their workers appreciate the benefits Congress and the President have provided in the CARES Act, including loans, grants, and expanded unemployment insurance, they would much rather be back at work. Relying on the private sector for goods and services, rather than on a prison work program, is one way to get people back to work.

Sincerely,

American Home Furnishings Alliance
American Subcontractors Association
American Traffic Safety Services Association
Business Coalition for Fair Competition
Construction Industry Round Table
Health Agents for America
Independent Office Products & Furniture Dealers Association
National Society of Professional Surveyors
North American Association of Uniform Manufacturers and Distributors
Office Furniture Dealers Alliance
Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors National Association
Taxpayers Protection Alliance
United Motorcoach Association
U.S. Geospatial Executives Organization
Virginia Small Business Partnership

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