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March 22, 2021

Michael Carvajal  
Director  
Federal Bureau of Prisons  
320 1st St NW  
Washington, DC 20534

Dear Mr. Carvajal,

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty society representing 38,800 physicians specializing in psychiatry, we are reaching out to discuss the use of batons in psychiatric units of prisons. While we understand the need to ensure the safety of correctional officers and prison staff, APA has been made aware of a policy change that could affect the safety this vulnerable population by requiring all personnel, including physicians, to carry rotation batons in psychiatric units of correctional facilities beginning this year.

In 2018, there was a total of 1,465,200 prisoners in both state and federal prisons. According to a survey conducted that same year by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 14 percent of prisoners in state and federal facilities met the criteria for having serious mental health conditions. In local jails the number was 26 percent. The introduction of these less lethal weapons has an inherent risk for the potential of unintended harm to other inmates and staff.

The presence of weapons may trigger aggression and agitation worsening behavioral dysregulation. This can erode the physician-patient relationship, limit access to care, and increase the vulnerability of those individuals and communities who have experienced systemic racism and violence from law enforcement officers.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons Program Statement on Psychiatric Services suggests least restrictive clinical interventions including the use of non-physical interventions, as well as voluntary medication, voluntary special housing, seclusion, involuntary medications, and restraints when working with prisoners with serious mental health conditions. APA strongly recommends continued enforcement of the existing policy, and the retraction of the proposed change which will undoubtedly put more individuals with serious mental illness at risk.

We request to arrange a call to discuss our concerns further. We look forward to continued conversation with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. If you have any further

questions, please contact Michelle Dirst, Director, Practice Management and Delivery Systems Policy at [mdirst@psych.org](mailto:mdirst@psych.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Saul Levin, MD, MPA". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Saul Levin, MD, MPA, FRCP-E, FRCPsych  
CEO and Medical Director