August 6, 2013

The Honorable Charles E. Samuels, Jr.
Director
Federal Bureau of Prisons
320 First St. NW
Washington, DC 20534

Dear Director Samuels:

I write on behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA) to urge you to defer the planned transfer of women prisoners from the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Danbury, Connecticut, to the new facility in Aliceville, Alabama, until more information is available regarding the effects of this course of action. As you know, eleven U.S. Senators, led by Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and Kristen Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), have called on the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to suspend its transfer plan and provide further information to them. The Senators have emphasized how this planned move could disrupt the family ties of the women prisoners at Danbury, currently the only federal facility designated for women in the Northeast. The ABA supports the Senators’ request because we agree that the likely impact of the planned move would be to disrupt family ties and access in a manner that is harmful to prisoners and their families.

The Senators’ letter to you urges you to consider the dramatic difference that the locations of the two prisons could make in the lives of women prisoners and their families. While Danbury is accessible by public transportation from Hartford, New York, and Boston, Aliceville is in a remote area of Alabama with no airport or train station. Many of the families of the FCI Danbury prisoners will be unable to make the trip from the Northeast corridor to Aliceville. This means that family ties will inevitably be disrupted, severely diminishing the incarcerated mothers’ ability to see their young children.

The Senators point out that the BOP is planning to continue to use FCI Danbury as a prison facility, rendering less rational the transfer of women to Alabama to make more room for male prisoners and the elimination of the only federal facility in the Northeast designated for women.

The ABA Standards on the Treatment of Prisoners (2010) would require that prisoners have access to community services and to visitation with their families. Both factors are critical for prisoners’ successful reentry. ABA Standard 23-8.1 (Location of Facilities) states:

"Governmental authorities should strive to locate correctional facilities near the population centers from which the bulk of their prisoners are drawn, and in
communities where there are resources to supplement treatment programs for prisoners and to provide staff for security, programming, and treatment.

ABA Standard 23-8.5(a) (Visitation) provides:

To the extent practicable, a prisoner should be assigned to a facility located within a reasonable distance of the prisoner’s family or usual residence in order to promote regular visitation by family members and to enhance the likelihood of successful reintegration.

We have every reason to believe that the BOP shares the ABA’s goal of facilitating family visitation and preserving family ties. As recently as June, the BOP launched a program to serve the children of incarcerated parents and issued a memorandum to all federal inmates encouraging them to have their families bring their children to visit. Moving the women prisoners 1000 miles from Danbury to Aliceville seems blatantly inconsistent with these stated BOP goals. It is not an exaggeration to say that, given the prohibitive expense and difficulty of traveling from the Northeast to rural Alabama, this move is likely to prove disastrous for the children and families of women prisoners in federal facilities.

The American Bar Association joins in requesting that the BOP suspend the planned transfer of the Danbury women. We appreciate your careful attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Susman