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Duluth Federal Prison Camp to Stay Open After Closure Plans Reversed by New Leadership

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A federal minimum-security prison camp in Duluth, Minnesota, once slated for closure due to concerns over aging infrastructure, will now remain open. The decision, made by the new director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), comes as a major relief to staff, local leaders, and the surrounding community who have spent months in limbo.

The Bureau of Prisons, which operates under the U.S. Department of Justice, originally announced in December 2024 that the Duluth Federal Prison Camp would be “deactivated.” The decision was part of a broader realignment strategy led by former BOP Director Colette Peters, appointed during the final months of the Biden administration. Several other facilities were also included in the plan, with officials citing outdated infrastructure as a primary concern.

However, during a recent visit to the facility, new BOP Director William Marshall III, a Trump administration appointee, decided the closure was not necessary. According to BOP spokesperson Donald Murphy, Marshall assessed the prison camp in person and concluded it should continue operating.

Local Impact

The Duluth facility, located in Hermantown near the city’s airport, currently employs about 90 people. When the closure was announced, officials said those workers would be offered roles at the Federal Correctional Institution in Sandstone, about 70 miles south. But many questioned whether Sandstone could realistically absorb the full Duluth workforce.

“It would have made no sense for me to go down to Sandstone,” said Tonya Gajeski, union president and Reentry Affairs Coordinator at the prison camp. “There just wasn’t enough work there. I’d be doing half the job for the same pay. It’s not a good use of taxpayer money.”

Gajeski, who has worked at the facility for years, said the last few months have been filled with uncertainty and stress. “We’re just very relieved. It’s been a long road, not knowing if we were staying here or being sent somewhere else.”

When the closure was first announced, the Duluth camp housed more than 700 inmates. Since then, many have been transferred or released, and the population now sits at around 275. But with the facility’s future now secured, that number is expected to increase again.

Gajeski also pushed back on claims that the buildings were too run-down to be useful. While the facility was built in the 1950s, she said the idea that it was beyond repair was exaggerated.

With the reversal now official, employees and the community are looking forward to returning to normal and continuing the prison’s mission of rehabilitation and reentry

preparation for low-risk inmates.