



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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State Legislators Call on Governor Hochul to Suspend Full-Contact Visitation in Prisons in Wake Of Life-Threatening Drug Exposures

GEORGE M. BORRELLO August 15, 2024

| ISSUE: **CRIME AND CORRECTIONS, HALT, PRISONS; CORRECTIONS OFFICERS; DOCCS; VIOLENT INMATE ATTACKS**



Three incidents in the last 10 days highlight the risks facing prison staff

IRVING, NY – Senator George Borrello was joined by several of his legislative colleagues, local members of the law enforcement community and members of the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association (NYSCOPBA) in calling on Governor Hochul to issue an executive order suspending full-contact visitation in state prisons to stop

the inflow of deadly drugs into the facilities.

Their demand comes in the wake of several life-threatening incidents where correctional officers and staff have been made dangerously ill from exposure to suspected fentanyl and other unknown drugs during interactions with inmates.

In a letter to the Governor, legislators cited three instances in the last 10 days where correctional officers and sergeants fell gravely ill and required emergency hospital care after coming into contact with unknown drugs while attending to inmates. The incidents occurred on August 4 and 13 at Collins Correctional Facility and August 8 at Wyoming Correctional Facility.

“The recent series of hazardous drug exposures that have put the lives of NYSCOPBA members at risk are a wake-up call that current security procedures are failing. Even the smallest amounts of a deadly drug like fentanyl or other synthetic opioids can be life-threatening. The seriousness of these incidents demands a serious response, which is why we are calling on the governor to suspend full-contact visitation until better screening protocols can be put in place,” **said Senator Borrello.**

Senator Borrello questioned why body scanners that were authorized in the 2023 state budget to help detect contraband are not being used to screen prison visitors.

“We have access to technology that can greatly reduce the incidence of drugs and other contraband coming into the prisons. However, by all accounts it is not being used to screen visitors, as it was intended,” said Borrello. “It’s outrageous and another example of the criminal coddling mindset that has brought us to this point.”

Assemblyman Joseph M. Giglio, Assembly Minority Conference Ranking Member on the Corrections Committee, said Gov. Hochul needs to immediately issue an executive order

suspending contact visits between prisoners and visitors at New York's correctional facilities.

"Like all law-enforcement officers, the brave men and women who protect law-abiding New Yorkers as corrections officers risk their lives every day to keep the rest of us safe. The governor likes to say that her number one job is to protect all New Yorkers, well, this is her opportunity to do that," said Giglio. "Drugs are entering our prison system, endangering the lives of corrections officers and inmates. We know the danger and we know how to stop it. But it requires executive action by the governor. She needs to find the courage of her convictions and do the right thing to save lives."

"Recent incidents at Collins Correctional Facility and elsewhere serve as reminders of the dangers Correctional Officers and other staff members face every day. We should all be concerned about the safety of the men and women who work in our prisons, and in the communities where they are located, **said Senator Patrick Gallivan, Ranking Member of the Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee.** "The governor and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision must take immediate action to ensure the safety of our correction officers and staff."

"The recent incidents of hazardous drug exposures in New York State prisons should be a wake-up call for this administration," **said Assemblyman Stephen Hawley, Assembly Deputy Minority Leader.** "Our correctional officers have been overworked, underpaid and mistreated by a Majority Conference that seems more concerned with making sure convicted criminals feel comfortable than keeping these officers safe. These incidents are a clear sign our current security measures have failed and must be investigated immediately. I will continue to work with my colleagues in state government to make sure our correctional officers are protected and criminals are held accountable."

Leaders from NYSCOPBA stated that their members are at the breaking point as a result of the increased violence in the prisons, chronic understaffing which results in frequent mandatory overtime and now, concerns that they may be accidentally exposed to a lethal drug while at work. The stresses are straining families and taking a toll on officers' health and well-being.

“The dedicated men and women of NYSCOPBA have been facing an alarming rise in violence within our prisons. It is crucial that the State prioritizes the safety and well-being of our correctional officers. Immediate action is necessary to ensure a safe and secure work environment for all,” **stated Chris Summers, NYSCOPBA President.**

“Our members walk inside the walls and fences everyday not knowing if they will make it back to their families due to the ongoing violence, daily mandatory overtime-upwards of 24-hour shifts, and now they are faced with fellow Officers and Sergeants going to the hospital every other day for doing their job and being exposed to unknown substances. They are at the breaking point and need the Governor to step in immediately to address this issue. There are body scanners placed in all facilities statewide just to take up space apparently, they cannot effectuate any change when they are not being used on the visitors. We are thankful certain legislators like Senator Borrello are listening and trying to help our members, and hope the Governor realizes she has a duty to protect the staff that work in state prisons, not just the convicted that live there,” **said Kenny Gold, NYSCOPBA Western Region Vice President.**

The letter sent to the Governor by Senator Borrello and his legislative colleagues is attached.

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