



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patrick M. Gallivan

Senator Gallivan Urges Suspension of Full-Contact Visitation in Wake of Dangerous Drug Exposures

JIM RANNEY August 22, 2024

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Three Incidents in 10 Days Highlights Risks to Correctional Officers & Staff

Senator Patrick M. Gallivan (R-C, Elma) joined 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 until the inflow of deadly drugs into the facilities is stopped.

Their demand comes in the wake of several life-threatening incidents where correctional officers and staff have fallen ill after being exposed 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 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.

“Recent incidents at Collins Correctional Facility and elsewhere serve as reminders of the dangers Correctional Officers and other staff members face every day,” Gallivan said. “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. The Governor and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision must take immediate action to ensure the safety of our correction officers and staff.”

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.

“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,” said Kenny Gold, NYSCOPBA Western Region Vice President. “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.”

Senator Gallivan is the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Crime Victims, Crime and Correction. He is also a former State Trooper and Sheriff of Erie County.

