



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

## Helming Bill to Crackdown on Prison Contraband Passes Senate

ARON ASHRAFIOUN - 518-455-2366 March 21, 2018

| ISSUE: **CONTRABAND**

GENEVA, NY – Senator Pam Heming today announced legislation (S.7582A) she sponsors to crackdown on contraband in New York’s state correctional facilities passed the Senate 57-4. The bill would require the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to establish a contraband screening plan in correctional facilities. As Vice-Chair of the Senate’s Committee on Crime, Crime Victims, and Corrections, Helming believes more effective screening of packages and visitors is essential to keeping weapons and dangerous drugs out of State prisons.

“Over the last several months, I’ve met on a number of occasions with NYSCOPBA President Michael Powers and many correction officers who see firsthand the growing contraband problem inside our state correctional facilities. Whether its drugs or weapons, contraband continues to find its way into prisons at alarming rates – leading to more violence amongst prisoners and more attacks on our brave correction officers. This legislation updates the current contraband screening policies and procedures to give our correction officers the tools they need to ensure a safer environment. I want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for supporting this critically important legislation. As State Senator, I will continue to support our brave correction officers and ensure that we do everything possible to keep them safe,” said **Senator Pam Helming**.

**Chairman of the Senate’s Committee on Crime, Crime Victims and Corrections Senator Patrick M. Gallivan** said, “Contraband remains a serious problem in our correctional facilities and often leads to fights among inmates, putting correction officers and staff at greater risk. It is time to update the screening procedures and utilize the latest technology to better detect drugs and weapons in order to ensure a safer environment for everyone.”

The legislation requires the Commissioner of DOCCS to establish a contraband screening plan in correctional facilities to include:

- Random selection and search of visitors’ vehicles entering a correctional facility’s grounds;
- Use of leashed and controlled canines at the entrances (at least 12 facilities per week, on a random but rotating basis);
- Search of visitors entering the facility including but not limited to electronic searches, image scanning searches (not backscatter technology), pat searches and visual searches;
- Training of staff on current contraband screen procedures; and
- Require Commissioner of DOCCS to provide the Legislature with an annual report summarizing the current plan and the results of the prior year’s plan.

“NYSCOPBA applauds Senator Helming, the sponsors of this legislation, and all lawmakers who voted today in its favor,” said **Michael Powers, president, NYSCOPBA**. “The growing problem of contraband making its way into our facilities, often in the form of drugs and weapons, amplifies the dangers faced by our members and the inmate population in their care. Since the start of the year and as of last week, we have already seen 797 instances of contraband being seized at New York state prison facilities. The frequency of these occurrences, and the dangerous situations created as a result, underscores the need for new measures, like the legislation passed today, designed to protect correctional officers and

inmates.”

Despite the concerted efforts of correctional officers to curtail the influx of contraband, the measures currently in place have done little to impact the level of inmate drug abuse. Senator Helming recently met with parents who have a son that is incarcerated. The parents expressed how the availability of drugs in the prison is hindering their son’s recovery and rehabilitation. Just last week, at Orleans Correctional Facility, an inmate was saved after overdosing on heroin. An investigation led to the discovery of 24 packets of heroin. The increase in contraband coming into state correctional facilities is making it harder for officers to control both drug use and violence.

In July 2017, the *Auburn Citizen* released an article highlighting prison contraband entering Auburn Correctional Facility. The report cited data from 2012 to 2015. Auburn Correctional Facility recovered 1,178 illegal contraband items from inmates and visitors at the prison. Of that contraband, there were 708 weapons, 359 drugs, and 111 miscellaneous items such as cash or cell phones. Attempts to bring drugs and weapons into state correctional facilities reached record levels in 2017.

Data collected indicates that 2017 marked the most violent year inside state prisons since 2007, the year statistics began being recorded. According to statistics provided by DOCCS, assaults on staff statewide has risen from 645 incidents in 2013 to 798 in 2017. As of March 1, 2018, there has already been 120 incidents of assaults on staff. For assaults on inmates, the numbers are even higher. In 2013, there were 767 assaults on inmates statewide and grew to 1,220 in 2017. There has already been 199 assaults on inmates in the first three months of 2018. Every metric tracked by DOCCS (inmate-on-staff assaults, inmate-on-inmate assaults, use of chemical agents, contraband) rose above the previous year’s numbers. These alarming statistics and the several incidents since the beginning of this year underscore the critical

need for changes to current protocols set forth by DOCCS.

The bill will now be sent to the Assembly, where it is sponsored by Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner.

*Senator Helming represents the 54<sup>th</sup> Senate District, which consists of Seneca and Wayne Counties, parts of Cayuga and Ontario Counties, and the towns of Lansing and Webster. For more information, please visit Senator Helming's [website](#), or follow @SenatorHelming on Facebook or Twitter.*

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### **2017-S7592**

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- Introduced
  
- - In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
  
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
  
- - Passed Assembly

- Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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January 29, 2018

In Senate Committee **Consumer Protection**

Sponsored by **David Carlucci**

Do you support this bill?