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August 15, 2024

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor, New York State
Executive Chamber, State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

In light of multiple recent incidents of prison staff and inmates being gravely sickened by exposure to undetermined toxic substances, we are writing to urgently request that you issue an executive order to immediately implement non-contact visitation for all prisons and correctional facilities in New York State.

As you know, on August 4, 10 correctional officers, a sergeant and a nurse performing life-saving measures on an inmate at Collins Correctional Facility became gravely ill from exposure to suspected fentanyl and were taken to the hospital. All 11 officers were administered Narcan before going to the hospital, with some of those officers requiring multiple doses of Narcan to be revived.

This is just one of three recent incidents. The other two include:

- An **August 13 incident at Collins** involving two officers and a sergeant who entered the cell of an inmate who was behaving irrationally. Shortly thereafter, the three officers experienced life-threatening symptoms requiring emergency care at the hospital.
- An **August 8 incident at Wyoming Correctional Facility** involving five officers and a sergeant who approached an inmate who was acting disoriented and was in possession of a crushed pill. All six of the officers became ill from the encounter and needed emergency care at the hospital.

In all of these incidents, it was by the grace of God that no lives were lost, although those on the scene report that the situations were dire. However, without intervention by your administration, it is only a matter of time until a fatality occurs.

It is clear that drugs and contraband are being brought to prisons and given to inmates by their friends and family. Despite the purchase and use of body scanners for visitors, inmates and staff being authorized in the 2023 state budget, *they are not being used to screen visitors at any state facility*. We urge you to investigate why this potentially life-saving technology is not being utilized for visitors.

You have stated on several occasions that your number one responsibility as governor is to keep New Yorkers safe. Yet, our corrections officers and prison staff are not being kept safe. Every day they walk into facilities that are a minefield because of deadly drugs that have been smuggled in, escalating violence because of the HALT Act and severe understaffing.

Corrections officers already face enormous risks as they protect the law-abiding from the lawbreakers and supervise the inmates entrusted to their care by the criminal justice system. It is the responsibility of their employer – New York State – to take every measure possible to protect them from further unnecessary harm. That is why we urge you to take action immediately by replacing full-contact visits with non-contact visitation.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



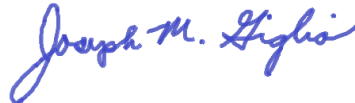
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