

**New York City Board of Correction
Hearing on Proposed Rule Changes**

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My name is Terry Hubbard and I'm a member of the Jails Action Coalition. I'm here today because I'm a human rights activist and what we are talking about today is a human rights issue. I am also a mother who has a son who has special needs who is incarcerated in New York.

When my son was on Rikers Island, I tried to visit as often as I could. But the wait, it is horrendous. It can be pretty grueling to have to wait four hours for a one hour visit. And then those inmates with special needs have to wait for an escort so the wait for the family can be even longer. One time when I arrived at the facility, after all the initial lines and waiting, what usually takes an hour to locate my son took four or five hours. I and the officer on the floor knew something was wrong – it shouldn't take four hours to bring someone down to a visit. I never had a problem with searches, but I know for a fact that there are those who are mistreated when they go to visit. Many families do not visit because of the long wait and searches plus the very long trip to get to the Island. But not being able to see their loved ones creates an emotional detachment and hurts everyone. When my son went upstate, I went through a thirty day background check to visit him in Central NY Psychiatric Center. In that time, while they wanted to see if I had a criminal record, I could not see him at all, and in that time anything could happen. After applying, you have to wait for a letter of approval. Sitting and waiting for 30 days, you don't know what the outcome will be after. The fear I felt in that time, waiting. I felt violated; I was in despair not knowing what the outcome was going to be. I felt that I didn't have a voice, I was at the whim at the Department of Corrections and OMH as I waited patiently to be able to see my own child. It's difficult because, not only the wait but at that point in time, in those 30 days, my son was stripped of his medication that he needed to survive, and he couldn't let me know how he was suffering.

When my older son and I were approved to visit at Central NY we traveled all the way to the facility. When we got there, they said that they didn't have any records or computer documentation of our approval. Luckily, I had a physical copy of the letter I had received in the mail, otherwise I would not have gotten in. The information should have been in their database but it wasn't. My older son also had a copy of the letter we had received in the mail, but even with that, they would not allow him to enter to see his brother. They gave no answer for this – no response at all.

People need visits and human contact. Especially those with disabilities, whether it be physical, mental, or cognitive impairments, they may have substantial limitations and depression can come in even more so.

I feel emotional about this. From my point of view, not being able to touch or hug my son, I don't know how to put it into words. A mother's touch. In one of the facilities I went to visit my son, there was a barrier between us – it was difficult to hug because of the barrier and the hug was very brief. When we said goodbye, he wasn't allowed to touch me or hug me to say goodbye, he could only wave his hand. From his point of view, he missed this rare opportunity for a caring, human touch. He was frightened and lonely. I know he felt that he would never be able to hug or kiss his mom again. How could there be anything positive that comes out of denying someone that touch, that love?

The package thing I went through when my son was in Ulster County and it's very heinous. You have to order food, any clothing, anything through a catalogue. It was more expensive, we had to pay shipping and handling and taxes. Many incarcerated people's families have limited funds and are unable to afford these prices. I could only afford one package, that was it. Even to put money on an inmate's account you have to use a debit or credit card and pay a fee. This is not economically sound for families. Imagine if someone doesn't have a credit or debit card – their loved ones won't be able to receive packages.

When my son did get the package, he felt loved – he felt love from home and not alone. My son always asks me to send him books so he can learn to read, even though he has dysgraphia and dyslexia, he loves to read. One thing he wishes he could get is his GED but he always had difficulty in school. An incarcerated person may feel the love of their family through this package.

Don't pass this rule to limit packages to approved vendors because it will create an economic barrier for both the incarcerated individuals and their families. And it will further target families who are economically disadvantaged and their loved ones inside. Lastly, as I have testified before, solitary confinement is torture and it destroys the individual emotionally, physically and mentally which can bring on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as well as other mental deficiencies.

I speak from the heart. Please take a moment to empathetically put yourself in our shoes, the shoes of the family members who go through visiting their loved ones, worrying about their loved ones, saving up to pay for transportation or packages.

My son is doing ok but he hasn't spoken to his counselor in two months. I travel all the way upstate once a month and take him some food and books. These visits and small things I can bring him are what sustain him. Don't stop people in Rikers from having these basic rights.