

October 21, 2015

Dear Members of the Board of Correction,

We write to you as the “community” members on the DOC Visiting Workgroup to provide you with an update and convey to you the current status of the Workgroup, as well as what we have achieved to date. As you may remember, in July we submitted a letter to you expressing both our hopefulness and our concern; we now write to you more with frustration and dismay. We have been meeting since June and continue to commend the Department for the formation of this Workgroup. As of our second meeting in July, the Workgroup had already identified numerous concrete improvements to the visiting process (listed below) that would greatly increase security *and* were met with enthusiasm by high-level uniformed staff who participated in this process. To date and to our knowledge, no progress has been made on any of the first 5 points listed below.

At our meetings, we have repeatedly requested data which would aid in the process of developing solutions for reducing contraband, increasing security, and improving the visiting process. This has not been provided or has been presented in an incomplete or general way, limiting our ability to develop effective data-informed solutions. It has been helpful to have high-level DOC Chiefs and Captains at our meetings, although it is often different people who attend and our last meeting was not well-attended (only the coordinating policy advisor and the three of us were there, with a Captain joining for the last 15 minutes).

We urge you to consider the concrete and urgent ways that security must be tightened during the visiting process. The first 5 were developed in and by the Visiting Workgroup; the second 5 emerge from our experiences, observations, and discussions, including with Commissioner Ponte. **The recommendations that are highlighted should be incorporated into any revised minimum standards for visiting, *though all of the below improvements can be made without changing the existing standards:***

1. **Separating discharges from visitors:** Currently individuals discharged from Rikers exit through the Central Visit House, where visitors (sometimes in the hundreds) are being processed. This is confusing and inefficient for those being released, challenging from a security standpoint for DOC staff to manage these different populations, and complicates the focus on processing visitors only in that space. Discharges should occur through the Perry Building.
2. **Separating those only leaving packages:** Right now, people coming to Rikers *solely* to leave packages and not visit, wait on the visitors’ line and are processed as visitors. This causes Officers to search individuals who will not be visiting, slows down the visiting process for visitors, and could increase the likelihood that something additional is put into the package. There should be a “package only” window within the Perry Building, again diverting people who are not visiting from the Central Visit House.
3. **Separating those coming to pay bail:** Similarly, those coming to post bail for someone on Rikers also wait in the visitors’ line, are searched and treated like visitors, only to go to the bail

payment window. Since the whole bail process (from start to finish) can take from 10-13 hours, it is unclear whether some of these individuals are then waiting in the Central Visit House for hours. Posting bail should also happen within the Perry Building and not be mixed with visitors being processed.

4. Improving consistency of screening practices: There appears to be inconsistency of visitor screening and search processes and room to tighten this up, via training on interacting with visitors and what exactly the proper search techniques are.
5. Improving the uses of the lockers, amnesty boxes and signage to better inform visitors were all discussed as needed.
6. Posting a sign that alerts visitors that finger printing is OPTIONAL.
7. Informing the incarcerated person of who is visiting them so that they can refuse to be visited by that person *before* they are strip-searched and brought on the visit floor.
8. Reviewing and immediately repairing booths that do not allow for clear vision and clear audio during booth visits.
9. Reducing the number of searches that visitors undergo.
10. Developing child-sensitive protocols for visitors with children, and ensuring that booth visits are the last resort for visitors with children.
11. Data on child visitors (under age 16) must be kept and reported on including how many children participated in booth versus contact visits, and how many visit denials involved visitors with children.

We remain committed to working with DOC and yourselves to improve the visiting process and experience, as well as increasing safety for all on Rikers. We sincerely hope that DOC's commitment to the Visiting Workgroup will continue and we urge you to carefully consider the above recommendations.

Sincerely,



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Incarcerated Parents