

My name is Anna Pastoressa, and I am a member of Freedom Agenda. My son spent 6 years on Rikers Island waiting for trial and I visited him every weekend. It was a very stressful and long-lasting process to get to Rikers and one of the most important parts of the visit for me was to bring a package of clean clothes to him. For my son the most important things about a visit were seeing me, hugging me, talking to me and also receiving a package of clean laundry each week. At the end of each visit the visitors used to stop by a counter and receive packages of dirty laundry back from our loved ones. Many times in the dirty laundry I would also find a drawing or art work that my son sent home to us. That was a ritual we did each time we visited, and I saw many mothers, wives, sisters, and other family members doing the same.

When I brought these packages to my son, I was able to bring him the scent of home and comfortable, warm clothes and shoes. My son was able to send a card with his drawing back home for the family. The Department of Correction always had limitations to what items to bring. Pretty much we were only allowed to bring clothes and shoes. So blocking packages means blocking clean laundry to be brought in, warm clothes for the infamous winters on Rikers, and dirty laundry to be taken out to wash, along with any cards or letters incarcerated people wish to send home. All those items were regularly scanned and searched by correction officers.

Each time I arrived on Rikers, I was sniffed by canines, checked by metal detectors and subjected to invasive hand searches. In 6 years visiting my son I saw a lot of abuse by officers, but not by visitors who are trying to bring clean clothes and needed undergarments and socks to their loved ones in jail.

By blocking packages, you would be putting another obstacle in the way of keeping hygiene among the incarcerated people, who are forced to hand wash their clothes in the showers, with minimal soap and then hang the laundry on their bunk beds, all over and around the bathrooms and day rooms in filthy conditions.

Those clothes hang for days drying slowly and always smell like mildew, which in hot months are topped by flies buzzing around. Blocking packages is only blocking detainees from living in healthy and hygienic conditions, which is already a great challenge in the already filthy and decrepit facilities. Blocking US postal mail is only blocking detainees from living in healthy mental conditions. Maybe the Department of Correction believes that they can take over the US postal service and control and dominate the detainees federal rights to receive mail. Maybe the Department of Corrections believes that families should also be forced to purchase new clothing items every week from Amazon or whatever vendors they allow. If they do, they clearly aren't aware or don't care that people are at Rikers mostly because their families cannot afford bail, and that families are already suffering the financial burden of sending money for commissary to supplement the minimal food that DOC provides, and in many cases, also dealing with lost income from the family member who is incarcerated.

Packages and mail sent by families to detainees support health, hygiene, better mental condition and dignity so that the innocent until proven guilty can survive the hell of Rikers without being exposed to an environment that can lead to disease and illness. This should not be taken away from them.

I urge every member of this Board to vote NO on DOC's proposed variance to ban mail and packages from family members. There is no reason to take new measures that only accommodate DOC's efforts to shift the blame from their own staff for illegal drugs entering the jails. It is very obvious that visitors cannot enter Rikers carrying illegal drugs. It is very obvious

that your new package rule is only comfortable for the Dept. of Correction and punishes the innocent waiting for trial and their families.

Regards,

Anna Pastoressa  
Member of Freedom Agenda