

March 14, 2023

New York City Board of Correction
1 Centre St., Room 2213
New York, NY 1007
Sent via email to boc@boc.nyc.gov

Re: DOC request for Variance Request to Board of Correction Minimum Standards Section 1-12(a) Regarding Packages and Section 1-11(e)(1)(i) Regarding Correspondence

Dear Chair Sampson and Members of the Board,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the variance request submitted by the Department of Correction regarding the Board Minimum Standards [§ 1-12\(a\)](#) and [§ 1-11\(e\)\(1\)\(i\)](#) regarding packages and mail. As a primary care and addiction medicine doctor, I am writing to highlight my concern about the psychosocial impact of banning physical mail and personal packages for people who are incarcerated and to challenge the dangerous false claims the DOC is using as rational for this cruel policy.

In their variance request letters, the Department claims that fentanyl is coming into the facilities via mail and packages, stating:

- “At present, drugs, including fentanyl, are entering our facilities, in part, through correspondence sent in from the outside, often with deadly consequences. Paper is literally soaked in fentanyl and mailed in to those in our custody”
- “Items soaked in the drug are placed in packages and mailed in. Pictures of the contents of two such packages – a fentanyl-soaked T-shirt and a book laced with fentanyl – are attached to this submission.”

Although illicitly-manufactured fentanyl is responsible the deadly surge in the overdose crisis, fentanyl misinformation about incidental fentanyl exposure is further harming public health. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl cannot be absorbed through the skin. It is frequently incorrectly reported in the media that incidental exposure to fentanyl lead to overdoses, particularly by law enforcement. People report symptoms such as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, and fainting- none of these are consistent with an opioid overdose.¹

To protect DOC officers from accidental fentanyl exposure, they should be advised not to ingest any mail items and use hand hygiene.

The best way to protect incarcerated individuals from accidental overdose is to offer evidence-based medications for opioid use disorder and make naloxone available. Taking away a source of connection to family and friends makes nobody safer.

¹ Beletsky L, Seymour S, Kang S, Siegel Z, Sinha MS, Marino R, Dave A, Freifeld C. Fentanyl panic goes viral: The spread of misinformation about overdose risk from casual contact with fentanyl in mainstream and social media. *Int J Drug Policy*. 2020 Sep 16;86:102951. doi: 10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102951. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 32949901; PMCID: PMC7492952.

Sincerely,



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