

NATIONAL
HARM REDUCTION
COALITION

March 13, 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 the National Harm Reduction Coalition, a nationally recognized organization staffed by harm reduction experts, 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.”

In order to smoke fentanyl a person needs to vaporize it with indirect heat through a glass pipe or other vaporizer device. Smoking paper would burn off the drugs before they had any significant impact on the user. There is also no risk to DOC officers by touching fentanyl. Fentanyl cannot be passed through your skin. This myth has been debunked by toxicologists, researchers, and drug experts but still has persisted in the media. The myths of fentanyl exposure causing overdoses has led to panic attacks by officers who encounter fentanyl and believe they are overdosing.

(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0955395920302851?via%3Dihub>) NYC should be educating DOC officers that they are not at risk of overdose from touching or being close to fentanyl.

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Mail and packages from family are a critical source of connection that give people in custody hope and fuel the tenacity needed to survive incarceration. The Department's reasoning for this variance is patently false. The Board of Correction should deny both variance requests.

Sincerely,

Mike Selick, MSW
Associate Director of Capacity Building
National Harm Reduction Coalition