

The following Op-Ed by Commissioner Joe Ponte appeared in the
New York Daily News on November 6, 2014:

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION BOSS SAYS VIOLENCE REDUCTION IS HIS HIGHEST PRIORITY AMID REPORT THAT INVESTIGATOR SMUGGLED RAZOR AND DRUGS INTO RIKERS ISLAND

JOE PONTE SAYS SWEEPING REFORMS ARE UNDERWAY TO STOP CONTRABAND FROM ENTERING JAIL

BY JOSEPH PONTE

Thursday, November 6, 2014

I have zero tolerance for anyone, including staff, bringing contraband into Department of Correction facilities.

My highest priority is violence reduction, and part of the sweeping reforms already underway include stopping contraband before it gets inside one of our facilities, but meaningful change takes time.

All items, including food and medications, brought into a facility by anyone must be X-rayed. Anyone entering must empty all their pockets. A team of specially trained officers has been assigned to conduct random checks of all facilities during shift changes, including front gate procedures. All magnetometers are being recalibrated to make certain they are used correctly. New signs have been posted warning that anyone entering a DOC facility, including staff, will be subject to enhanced screening.

In the coming year we will increase the use of canine units that will be randomly deployed at all front gates. We are exploring enhanced screening techniques and equipment similar to those used at airports.

However, better technology is not the only solution to the contraband problem. To ensure meaningful change the investigation division is conducting a comprehensive review of our procedures, staffing, and case management protocols to make sure incidents involving contraband are investigated aggressively and in a timely manner.

This situation did not develop overnight and will take time to correct; that's why another key element of my reform agenda is a change in the culture. That means improved training and putting in place strong oversight measures so we can ensure accountability.

We have been, and will continue to work closely with the Department of Investigation. I am not pleased, but I am not surprised by the findings in their latest report. We are taking seriously the need to enhance security in our jails.

One thing is for sure: meaningful change is coming.