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The New York City Department of Correction

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DOC to Return Valuable Property to Inmates Immediately Upon Release

New Rikers Island policy to improve inmate re-entry process

EAST ELMHURST, N.Y. – Commissioner Joseph Ponte today announced inmates discharged from Rikers Island are now able to reclaim their valuable property from one central location without an appointment after they leave DOC custody, helping improve inmate re-entry into their communities after their release. In the past, inmates leaving custody were required to make an appointment to retrieve items such as identification and critical documentation, creating burdensome obstacles to housing and job applications upon release.

The change is part of DOC’s 14-point anti-violence initiative, which aims to promote a culture of safety and rehabilitation at the Department of Correction. Providing inmates with a swift and accessible process for reclaiming their valuable property will help ease their re-entry into the community—giving inmates the documentation and property they need to apply for jobs or purchase necessary items.

“One of our goals is to give our inmates the tools they need to become productive members of their community. By returning valuables to our inmates as they leave DOC custody, we are helping each inmate begin their transition back into society more quickly,” said **Department of Correction Commissioner Ponte**. “Our 14-point initiative aims to promote a culture of safety at the Department of Correction, and a key part of this goal is to ensure our staff and inmates alike are treated with dignity and respect.”

Discharged individuals can now visit the Perry Building on Rikers Island, where items including money, identification, keys, cellphones and jewelry are newly stored, to retrieve their belongings prior to leaving the island. The Perry Building is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to facilitate speedy retrieval.

Under the previous system, an appointment to retrieve property, including valuables, usually necessitated a wait of three to five days for pick up. The appointments required individuals to return back to Rikers to the last jail in which the inmate was housed, and appointments could only be scheduled during certain hours, further restricting their convenience. As a result, in 2014, 8,098 inmates did not retrieve their property from Rikers.

The reform has immediately led to a jump in valuable retrievals, and saves time for both inmates and staff. In January through March of 2014, under the appointment system, there were 1,547 pick-ups of valuable bags at Rikers. For the same period of 2015, under the new immediate-retrieval system, there were 2,257 pick-ups.

The new arrangement for round-the-clock valuable pick-up at the Perry Building took effect on Jan. 1. Former inmates still need an appointment to go back and retrieve their bulk property, such as clothing, at the last facility in which they were housed.

The reform is being hailed by advocates for former inmates.

“Osborne is pleased that the New York City Department of Correction takes seriously the effect that administrative procedures have on people as they are released from Rikers Island,” said **Elizabeth Gaynes, President and CEO of the Osborne Association**, which works to rehabilitate currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. “Allowing people to pick up their property as they exit Rikers Island rather than having to make an appointment to return to collect their valuables – often relying on family members to aid their return – reduces the harmful impact of incarceration on individuals and families. We support every effort to enhance family relationships and reduce the burden on families who are the key to successful reentry and reintegration.”

“The key to successful re-integration for many people being released from incarceration is having a sense of self-worth and self-respect. The importance of the new property retrieval system being announced today should not be underestimated,” said **JoAnne Page, President and CEO of the Fortune Society**. “By facilitating easier access to personal belongings for people upon their release, the New York City Department of Corrections is removing a significant barrier to re-entry and taking a positive step toward treating people with the dignity and humanity they deserve.” For almost 50 years, the Fortune Society has been developing model programs that help formerly incarcerated people successfully re-enter their communities.

About the New York City Department of Correction

The New York City Department of Correction (DOC) manages the jail system for New York City. It operates Rikers Island, which houses 10 individual facilities, four borough-based jails and two hospital wards, as well as court pens in all five boroughs. In FY 2014, DOC had 77,141 admissions involving 56,218 individuals.

Its Average Daily Population is approximately 11,400, over 80 percent of whom are housed on Rikers Island. Most of the inmates in DOC custody are being detained pending the resolution of charges against them; approximately 15 percent are city-sentenced inmates who are serving sentences of one year or less.

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