



**New York State Correctional Officers
& Police Benevolent Association, Inc.**

“Keeping New York Safe”

**New York State Department of Labor Investigation Finds
Fentanyl-Laced Inmate Packages and Mail Created Dangerous
Working Conditions for Staff**

*Nearly 20 PESH Citations Spanning two Central New York Correctional
Facilities Issued*

*NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Directed to
Enhance Safety Precautions in Facility Package Rooms*

*Findings Support State-Implemented Secure Vendor and Mail
Photocopying Programs to Decrease Exposure Staff to Dangerous Drugs*

Albany, NY – The New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association, Inc. (NYSCOPBA) is reacting to recent [findings](#) of an investigation by the New York State Labor Department (DOL), which found unsafe working conditions created by significant exposure to illicit drugs. Staff discovered fentanyl while searching incoming incarcerated individual mail and packages for contraband in two Central New York-area correctional facilities. Incarcerated individual mail and packages often comes from friends and family members of the inmates. This investigation was prompted by NYSCOPBA filing a Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) complaint with DOL after several incidents of serious fentanyl exposure on staff in the summer of 2021.

NYSCOPBA President Michael Powers said: “The safety of everyone inside a correctional facility is our top priority and illicit drugs in prisons has long amplified

the dangerous conditions. Our members have been frequently exposed to fentanyl, which is smuggled into the prisons when frisking mail, documents, packages, incarcerated individuals, and their living spaces. Staff who are exposed to these drugs while simply performing their jobs is unacceptable and this investigation shows the State needs additional tools to protect its employees.”

NYSCOPBA filed these PESH Complaints after several staff members were hospitalized after being exposed to fentanyl while searching incoming incarcerated individual correspondence in facility package rooms from June to August 2021. After these complaints were filed, a DOL investigation was launched and ultimately twelve citations were issued at Marcy Correctional Facility and seven citations issued at Mid-State Correctional Facility requiring that the State take additional steps to enhance the safety in package rooms, reduce exposure to illicit drugs, and provide more robust PPE.

“Illicit drugs entering our prisons through the mail and package rooms has long been an issue, and exposure to these drugs has put our members’ health and safety directly at risk. The incidents at Marcy and Mid-State last summer upended the lives of multiple staff members who were given Narcan due to exposure and required a trip to a nearby hospital for further treatment. This was a wake-up call to everyone that more needed to be done, and I’m glad that we’re seeing progress to enhance safety measures within our walls and fences,” **said NYSCOPBA Central Region Vice President Bryan Hluska.**

The findings of the PESH investigation also concluded that DOCCS should consider other policies aimed at decreasing staff exposure to fentanyl such as a secure vendor program and photocopying of incarcerated individual mail. This investigation was conducted prior to DOCCS’s implementation of its revitalized secure vendor program and mail scanning initiatives and serves to further support DOCCS’s mission to restrict the methods of packages and mail sent to correctional facilities by incarcerated individual families and friends.

“For years, we’ve been calling on the State to institute a vendor program as we’ve seen countless examples of contraband entering our prisons through a multitude of ways in the mail room, the package room, and through visitors,” **said President Powers.** “Thankfully, through the work of the DOCCS Prison Violence Task Force, which solicits input from NYSCOPBA, other unions, and incarcerated individual

liaisons, a Vendor Package Program has been instituted across all 44 state facilities and early data shows that it's working. Despite what some may allege, this vendor program allows family and friends to send incarcerated individuals packages at fair market prices without the fear of price gouging like in previous iterations of the program and for those packages to come direct from the store warehouses without ever touching private hands. Through these efforts, along with mail photocopying pilot programs and the expansion of drug sniffing K9 units, we're seeing less dangerous drugs enter our prisons and we hope to continue that trend in an effort to keep both our staff and the incarcerated population safe from fentanyl and other dangerous forms of contraband."

