



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

102 Hackett Blvd., Albany, NY 12209
(518) 427-1551 www.nyscopba.org nyscopba@nyscopba.org



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Mr. Anthony Annucci
NYS DOCCS Acting Commissioner
1220 Washington Ave; Building 9
Albany, NY 12226

Dear Commissioner Annucci:

As you know, NYSCOPBA members are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, our members are afforded a unique perspective into the dangers and weaknesses that are inherent in the correctional facility setting when it comes to preventing further spread of deadly infectious diseases like COVID-19. With this perspective in mind, NYSCOPBA now calls upon DOCCS to stay the course with its preventive measures and to continue to extend the suspension of visitation to correctional facilities for the benefit and protection of staff and inmates and to resist calls to reopen facilities to visitation.

Throughout New York State, many regions are beginning to slowly reopen in the first phase of Governor Cuomo's plan. Several more regions are on the cusp of reopening. These regions are public spaces that are entirely different from a correctional setting. Therefore, the pace of facility visitation reopening should be delayed until after data compiled from fully reopened regions within New York State indicate that the spread of COVID-19 has continued to steadily decrease.

NYSCOPBA opposes the reopening of state correctional visiting rooms at this time. As of May 25, 2020, 492 of the approximately 40,000 inmates incarcerated by DOCCS have contracted the virus. The low rate of infection in DOCCS facilities can be attributed to, at least in part, the cessation of visitation. NYSCOPBA was among the earliest and most vocal advocates calling for the suspension of visitation at DOCCS facilities. COVID-19 can travel silently into DOCCS facilities due to the asymptomatic nature of many of those infected. These facilities are uniquely vulnerable to the introduction of infection within their walls, as the confined spaces and close contact inherent therein prevent the social distancing best practices prevalent within society outside of these facilities. Since society is only now slowly beginning to reopen on a regional basis in the State of New York, any reopening of the visit rooms at DOCCS facilities should be considered premature and plainly contrary to prevailing science and medicine. Furthermore, due to the numerous COVID-19 hotspots that still exist throughout the State of New York and the fact that visitors may come from those areas, visitation should remain closed to DOCCS correctional facilities.

However, NYSCOPBA acknowledges that visitation rooms cannot remain closed forever. Therefore, NYSCOPBA plans to offer to DOCCS a proposal for how to safely and effectively reopen visit rooms at DOCCS facilities in a way that protects both staff and inmates from a greater risk of COVID-19 infection from visitors. It is our hope that we can work together with DOCCS and provide our unique frontline perspective in order to accomplish this goal.

Sincerely,

Michael B. Powers
President