



NYSCOPBA Critical of DOCCS Inmate Drug Testing Program

Repeated failures have made program unreliable and prisons more dangerous

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Albany, NY - For the second time in recent years, the New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association (NYSCOPBA) has found that the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) has failed to maintain proper testing protocols for inmates suspected of using illegal drugs. Just last year, the Department failed to properly administer urinalysis tests of inmates under the influence of contraband drugs or alcohol. Now, the Department has failed to maintain an accurate system of testing and identifying suspected contraband drugs and substances brought in through packages and visitors.

“Steps need to be taken immediately to ensure that the hard working men and women of NYSCOPBA can properly administer these tests. We need to ensure that prison rules are being followed and we won’t stand for carelessness that puts our members’ safety in jeopardy,” said NYSCOPBA President Michael Powers.

Late last week, the DOCCS determined that its onsite testing kits for suspected contraband drugs had yielded false positives. However, they have yet to provide information as to how long these tests have been faulty. Now these inaccurate tests have resulted in large numbers of inmates being released from special housing units and their records expunged.

Packages and visitors are two primary sources by which drugs and other illegal contraband enter state prisons and corrections facilities. Make no mistake about it, when a glove finger of an unknown substance is deliberately and secretly stashed in a sausage link inside of a package, it is filled with an illegal substance that needs to be tested and identified. A false positive test does not change the fact that these drugs are illegal and that corrective action needs to be taken. The linchpin connecting the illegal activity with the corrective action is an accurate and reliable drug test. However, DOCCS’ failures pull out that linchpin.

These drugs are seized by the hard-working men and women who work the front lines at these facilities, including NYSCOPBA members. Intercepting illegal contraband is no easy feat, and NYSCOPBA members are trained to be on high alert at all times for all manner of trafficking in illegal drugs. They also work in specialty units designed for drug deterrence. They know when unidentified substances are illegal drugs regardless of the tests. Employees have lost an invaluable mechanism by which to protect facilities and to hold inmates accountable for their actions. If they cannot test, morale among the employees is dangerously low and inmates are bound to know that.

It is common knowledge that correctional facilities are more dangerous without testing, and it is no secret that drugs are a powerful currency within prison walls. Such a currency creates inherent conflict and unrest, which often leads to violence. The way to keep these facilities safe is to withhold privileges from inmates, temporarily relocate them to special housing or other more restrictive units and to charge them criminally. It's easy to connect the dots — without reliable positive tests, there can be no safety inside prisons walls.

When the inmates learn about the false positives and the fact that the Department's drug testing system is toothless, the flood gates will open. DOCCS must fix this problem, and must do it immediately. As always, NYSCOPBA stands at the ready to assist the Department in keeping its facilities safe.