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Board Of Correction Proposes Changing Standards In Jails

DIAL UP BROAD BAND

At a hearing Tuesday, the agency that overseas jails discussed proposals to change the standards of living for inmates. As NY1's Criminal Justice reporter Solana Pyne explains in the following report, there were plenty of people at the meeting to voice their opposition.

"This board should take the proposed amendments, tear them up, and start over," said John Boston of Legal Aid.

Boston and others complained to the Board of Correction Tuesday about suggested changes to standards for the city's jails. The changes were proposed by the Board of Correction, which oversees how the Correction Department manages the jails.

But many attorneys, prisoner's rights activists, and former prisoners say the board never sought any outside input.

"Where was any consultation with any community groups or representatives in the formulation of these proposals?" said John Brickman of the Correctional Association.

One proposal would add ten more inmates to dormitories, something everyone from former inmates to the correction unions said would increase violence.

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"Increasing the number of inmates in the dorms definitely jeopardizes the security levels in the jails," said Sidney Schawartzbaum of the Deputy Wardens Association.

But Department of Correction Commissioner Martin Horn said ten per room is standard at state prisons.

"You would have to show me that the jails in Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland, Orange, and Monroe are overcrowded," said Horn. "And you can't show me that they are."

Other proposed regulations would allow the DOC to record phone calls and put inmates in uniforms. They would repeal requirements for a minimum number of Spanish language interpreters.

And, these changes, would allow inmates kept out of the general population for their own protection, to be locked in cells for 23 hours a day.

"The proposals that we see from the Board of Correction, from the oversight agency for the city jails, gives us more crowding, more people in isolation, fewer opportunities for Spanish-speaking people to have Spanish speaking people in the jails so they understand what's going on, more surveillance," said Maddy deLone of The Innocence Project.

The chair of the board began the hearing by saying members would not respond to criticism, but would consider all suggestions. And other board members asked for specific recommendations.

"Are you going to submit language that would help us do what you say we should be doing?" said one board member.

But many of those who spoke at the meeting said there is not enough time to come up with counter-proposals since the comment period ends in just over a month, and the board spent several years coming up with its plans.

-Solana Pyne

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