

Contraband Elimination and Safety Act of 2021

The Federal Bureau of Prisons is directed to enter into a pilot project to test a solution to reduce the amount of contraband that enters its correctional facilities without restricting inmates' rights to receive postal mail. This solution would permit their correctional facilities to receive pre-screened postal mail and packages without the risk of contraband, protecting the safety of employees and the inmate population while ensuring effective, ongoing inmate communication with loved ones, a key tool in preventing recidivism.

The solution will process and authenticate postal mail in a secure facility and then ship to the final destination, eliminating the risk of contraband; prescreen postal mail digitally in advance of its arrival from a secure, web-based dashboard; allow attorneys to send verifiable legal mail directly from their law office protecting attorney-client privilege, and must not require additional equipment or change to current mail process or infrastructure.

A two-year pilot program will commence within 180 days of enactment, shall represent not less than 10 percent of individuals incarcerated at federal prisons, and the Bureau of Prisons will report to Congress on efficacy, impact, and plans for sustainability.

Benefit:

- Mail service is one of the oldest and most commonly used methods to introduce contraband into correction facilities, creating an expensive and often lethal problem for both inmates and corrections facility staff. Processing mail in house puts staff members in danger of substance exposure and increases risk of contraband items entering the facility, a risk that is mitigated by this solution.
- Because the mail between incarcerated individuals and their attorneys have legal protection, verifying that a letter has, in fact, come from an attorney can also be a challenge. A multi-factor authentication process can ensure that a letter sent directly to an incarcerated individual from an attorney is confirmed through a parcel code that can authenticate that the letter is (1) known beforehand, and (2) coming from a verified attorney.
- Since mail is screened digitally by staff in advance of its arrival, any parcel that does not meet facility guidelines can be returned to sender without opening the envelope, saving the facility returned mail postage cost.
- Alternative technologies that process mail in-house through the use of electronic solutions that can open, scan, and print mail are costly (estimated \$4,000,000 annually to serve 50,000 prisoners), require additional staff, and provide no protection from employee exposure to dangerous substances.
- Studies have consistently found that prisoners who maintain close contact with their family members while incarcerated have better post-release outcomes and lower recidivism rates.
- The solution ensures that prisoners' right to receive mail is protected and gives prison officials a safe, defensible alternative to mail restrictions that are unreasonable and arbitrary

By the Numbers:

- One state Department of Corrections, with an annual average prisoner population of 48,000, receives and processes over 12 million pieces of first class mail a year.
 - They estimate current costs due to ER visits and violent misconduct resulting from contraband at roughly \$5,000,000 annually
 - If 10 percent of those 12 million pieces of mail are opened and returned in an average year, the state is paying for return postage for 1.2 million pieces (at \$.50 each, that cost is \$600,000)
- Based on sample data above, the per prisoner cost of ER visits and violent misconduct resulting from contraband, plus return postage, is \$116/annually.

Cost:

Pilot project estimated cost per inmate of \$50 annually for a comprehensive solution that will fully implement both parcel authentication and remote screening, or approximately \$750,000 annually to provide this solution to federal prison facilities that house 10% of those who are incarcerated.

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