



Policy Brief from the Office of Assemblywoman Latoya Joyner

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18 Months

The length of time a family may wait for the State Commission of Correction to complete an investigation of an inmate death

501*

*Total number of inmate deaths between 2009-2012

Source: New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Why clarity is needed when a loved one passes behind bars

Currently, family members are required to wait for the State Commission of Correction to investigate inmate deaths before receiving any information, a process that can take up to 18 months after loved one passes behind bars. This process needs to change for our families. According to New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), there were a total of 501 inmate deaths during the four year period from 2009-2012. Eighty-one percent of inmate deaths were due to natural causes, which are defined as deaths by injury sustained in a fight or assault, complications from medical conditions, overdose, heart attacks, and more. This legislation calls for the DOCCS to promptly provide information to a prisoner's family members should they pass while in custody.

Assembly Bill A.7500 calls for DOCCS to be responsive to an inmate's next of kin or other designated person, who seeks additional information regarding the circumstances surrounding their passing. This piece of legislation amends the state's correction law by requiring that DOCCS relay all information relating to the death of the inmate – including all medical procedures used and preliminary and final cause of death.

Legislation:

Assembly Bill A.7500: An act to amend the correction law, in relation to notification of death of inmates to next of kin. This bill would require the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to be responsive to the next of kin or other designated person who inquire as to the circumstances surrounding the death.

Message from Assemblywoman Joyner:

Every inmate is someone's mother or father, brother or sister, son or daughter. No one should have to wait 18 months before receiving details regarding the death of someone they care about that is in custody. This bill will help family members gain clarity by speeding up the process by which they obtain information. The death of a loved one is a difficult situation for any family or community, this legislation will make it easier so that they can grieve their loss.