

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

MASSACHUSETTS BLACK AND LATINO LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

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For Immediate Release: March 20, 2019

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Caucus Meeting with the Department of Correction Leads to Visitation Policy Change

BOSTON — The Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus joined Executive Office of Public Safety and Security Secretary Thomas Turco III, Department of Correction (DOC) Commissioner Carol Mici, and staff recently at their Milford headquarters to discuss a range of matters, including the Department's visitation policy implemented under 103 CMR 483. With Black and Hispanic inmates accounting for approximately 50% of the DOC prison population according to a 2017 report, the Caucus has made a renewed effort to collaborate with the DOC for the betterment of the populations they serve.

Caucus Chairman **Representative Carlos González** (D – Springfield) stated, “Our discussions have been fruitful. We are encouraged by and thankful for the collaboration between our Caucus, Secretary Turco, and Commissioner Mici as we work to make changes that may have a substantial impact on rehabilitation.”

Inmates must seek preapproval of their visitors under 103 CMR 483. Originally, that preapproved list could only be amended twice per year and was limited to 5, 8, or 10 visitors depending on the security level of the facility. While discussing the limitations, members noted that some inmates have large families as well as many friends whom they see as brothers, sisters, and uncles and who may not fit the traditional definition of a relative. The Department of Correction does allow for exceptions under special circumstances.

The policy change agreed to by DOC, at the request of the MBLLC, will now allow inmates to update their preapproved list of visitors every 120 days and will increase the number of authorized preapproved visitors per inmate from 5 to 8 at maximum security prisons.

Meeting attendees also discussed inmate classification, an important matter for Caucus member Representative Andy Vargas (D – Haverhill). Moving forward Rep. Vargas will represent the Caucus as a stakeholder in ongoing discussions on how to update the classification policy.

Secretary of Public Safety Thomas Turco stated, “Successful prisoner reentry back into their communities has a direct positive impact on public safety. These updates to the visiting policy will certainly help inmates to maintain positive community ties.” Department of Correction **Commissioner Carol Mici** stated, “The Department recognizes the importance visitors have on

an inmate's well-being and successful reentry into the community, and on the encouragement of family reunification. These updates will offer additional visiting privileges to inmates while still maintaining our commitment to ensuring the safety of all public, staff, visitors and inmates throughout the Massachusetts Department of Correction.”

The Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus is a group of state legislators seeking to define, highlight and analyze those issues and concerns affecting people of color in the Commonwealth. For more information, please visit: www.mablacklatinocaucus.com

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