REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE
Pursuant to P.A. 22 of 2025
Article 2, Section 719
Contraband Prevention

Sec. 719. (1) Funds appropriated in part 1 for contraband prevention must be used by the department to enhance a multifaceted approach to contraband prevention that combines technology, rigorous policies, vigilant staff, intelligence gathering, and a commitment to addressing the root causes of contraband, all of which are necessary for preventing contraband introductions and maintaining safe and secure correctional facilities.

2) Funds appropriated in part 1 for contraband prevention must be used by the department to support the prevention of contraband in correctional facilities, including increasing the frequency and enhancing the methods of screening all individuals, including all department employees, and all items entering correctional facilities.

(3) From the funds appropriated in part 1 for contraband prevention, the department must submit a report not later than March 1 on contraband and prevention efforts in correctional facilities. The report must include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

(a) Prevention efforts and strategies utilized by the department.

(b) Challenges faced by correctional staff and other staff in addressing contraband.

(c) Ideas and recommendations on how the legislature can better assist the department with Contraband prevention efforts and strategies.

(a) Prevention efforts and strategies utilized by the department:

Thanks to the assistance of the Legislature, the MDOC has been able to develop an internal intelligence section that carries out several functions for the Department related to contraband, including tracking contraband trends, developing intelligence on contraband introduction efforts that can be shared with facilities and law enforcement, as well as identifying criminal enterprises related to contraband to support criminal charges. The Intelligence Unit also works in conjunction with the MDOC Technology Team and other units to identify necessary or promising technologies to support contraband prevention efforts.

Technologies:

- Package Scanners – These devices are being installed at all facilities at public/staff entry points, as well as warehouses, so that all items (e.g. outerwear, shoes, bags, supply orders, etc.) are scanned prior to entry into the facility to identify potential contraband. These devices are used for property carried by staff, contractors, volunteers, and visitors, as well as items received in warehouses that are brought into the facilities.
- Mail Sender Authentication System – Fake legal mail was identified as a significant source of contraband narcotics entering MDOC facilities. In addition to policy changes (discussed further below), the MDOC implemented a mail sender authentication system for senders seeking to send legal or special handling mail, to ensure they were eligible to send confidential mail.
- Forensic Digital Extraction Tools – When contraband or an altered digital device is found within an MDOC facility, these tools allow for intelligence to be extracted, including potential user and use information to help identify introduction/alteration efforts, as well as larger criminal enterprises being supported with the device.
- Body Worn Cameras – Body worn cameras not only serve to prevent negative behavior on the part of the prisoner population but can also be effective evidence when contraband is discovered or efforts to introduce contraband are thwarted. The digital evidence created can also assist with prosecution.

Policy Changes:

- Due to the high number of incidents where fake or repackaged legal mail was used to introduce contraband drugs into the facilities, the MDOC implemented a new policy of opening, photocopying, and immediately destroying the original of all special handling mail in the presence of the recipient to maintain confidentiality. This has removed a significant source of contraband paper that was adulterated with drugs/narcotics/unknown dangerous substances.
- Policy was changed to prevent the ordering and deliver of hard cover books to prisoners, as these books have a higher likelihood of being used to introduce or conceal drugs. Prisoners can continue to receive and possess soft cover books.
- Used book donations will no longer be accepted by facilities due to the risk of books with contraband soaked into their pages being introduced. Each MDOC facility library was provided with a budget to purchase new books to replenish their library collection.

(b) Challenges faced by correctional staff and other staff in addressing contraband:

Evolving Practices for Introducing/Storing Contraband:

- The use of unmanned aerial systems (Drones) has been identified in proximity to several MDOC facilities. This technology could allow for the remote introduction of contraband.
- The use of packages marked as coming from approved outside vendors (book sellers, catalog orders, hobbycraft vendors, etc.) that have been prepared by outside third parties with the goal of introducing contraband represents a growing challenge within the MDOC.
- Introduction of contraband during visits and when prisoners return inside the secure perimeter after completing work assignments outside of the secure perimeter (gate pass) remain a concern, necessitating consistent application of search policies meant to prevent the introduction of contraband after contact with the public.
- Adulterated paper remains a primary form of contraband drugs and other substances. This presents significant challenges for staff, as nearly any piece of paper within a facility could include contraband. This soaked paper is often soaked in unknown substances, several of which can be harmful to staff that must handle these items when conducting searches, etc.
- Several devices are now available, including miniature cellular telephones and other related items (e.g. smart watches, smart glasses, smart rings) that create a risk of unapproved and unmonitored communications. This type of communication can be used to further criminal enterprises within the facility or in the community, as well as to pursue unwanted communication with victims and others. It is important that in addition to the use of consistent, effective search practices, the MDOC have access to technologies to identify, jam, and/or disable these contraband communication devices.
- Certain third-party tablet devices originally approved for deployment within the facilities are susceptible to alteration by the prisoner population, resulting in unapproved communications and content potentially being available to the prisoner population. The MDOC is currently exploring new tablets that are more secure to replace existing tablets, as well as the implementation of policies that will reduce the likelihood that future tablets will similarly be altered.

- Security Threat Group (gang) activities continue to impact operations at certain facilities, with groups attempting to engage in criminal enterprises within the facilities, including the introduction of contraband, extortion, and other related activities. This can lead to violence within the prisoner population and presents a risk to staff. The Department has appointed a team of staff to review existing Security Threat Group (STG) policies and procedures to better identify STG activities and participants. Increased intelligence support and technology in this area will allow the MDOC to better combat the risks created by these activities.

(c) Ideas and recommendations on how the legislature can better assist the department with Contraband prevention efforts and strategies.

The Legislature has offered key support and funding for initiatives to reduce contraband within the MDOC over the last several budget cycles, including the deployment of body scanners, package scanners, and other devices through the creation of the Contraband Prevention Fund. Maintaining sufficient funding for that purpose must remain a priority within the MDOC budget and the Department will share information about potential specific technology investments with the subcommittees during the appropriations process.

Responding to contraband is not just about investing in technology, it also requires policies and processes that limit the opportunities to introduce contraband, particularly drugs, into secure facilities. The MDOC is continually working to identify sources of potential contraband and welcomes Legislature's support for statutory and policy changes that are intended to directly address this problem. The MDOC applauds the Legislature's work to protect the state's prisons from unmanned arial systems (drones) through increased statutory protections and penalties for those that would use these devices to interfere with MDOC operations. As part of any legislative action on this issue, the Department would respectfully request that the MDOC be granted the authority to actively prevent the use of these devices near MDOC facilities using new technologies, as well as direct staff intervention.

As part of its contraband prevention efforts, the MDOC will be updating several policies to directly prevent the introduction of contraband in 2026. While these policy updates do not require legislative action, legislative support for these necessary changes to protect the safety of everyone working or residing within a prison remains important. Examples include the copying of special handling/legal mail beginning in January of 2026, restrictions on ordering hardcover books that will be implemented in February, as well as other policy changes that will be adopted this year in direct response to contraband introduction techniques via mailed packages and other public sources. Oftentimes, the intention and impact of these necessary policy changes can be misrepresented by media and others. The MDOC welcomes the opportunity to discuss the need for these policy changes to its key committees and will continue to update the committee members on these policy changes and efforts to prevent contraband.