



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## Sen Griffo: DOCCS tablet proposal raises many questions, concerns

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO February 16, 2018

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Contact: Alex Gerould – (315) 793-9072

Email: [gerould@nysenate.gov](mailto:gerould@nysenate.gov)

UTICA – State Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-Rome, sent a letter to state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Acting Commissioner Anthony Annucci following the department’s announcement that it would be providing tablets to the approximately 51,000 inmates at state correctional facilities.

The tablets will be provided by a company called JPay. While the devices will not have access to the Internet, they will offer inmates with the opportunity to e-mail family members, listen to music and read e-books, amongst other things.

In his letter, Sen. Griffo raised several questions and concerns about the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision’s initiative.

**The following is the full text of Senator Griffo’s letter:**

Feb. 8, 2018

Anthony J. Annucci

Acting Commissioner

New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision  
Building 2  
1220 Washington Ave.  
Albany, NY 12226

Dear Acting Commissioner Annucci,

Following your testimony regarding this year's budget, I was, and remain, concerned about one of your more contentious initiatives that would provide free tablets to the inmates at New York State prisons. I also am interested in learning more about how this initiative evolved and what led you and your department to make this decision.

This proposal raises many questions. The tablets will not have Internet access, but they will have e-mail capabilities. In understanding how resourceful inmates can be time and again, it is important to know what safeguards will be put into place to ensure that inmates aren't abusing these tablets so as to gain Internet access.

If inmates are to have tablets, it is imperative that the tablets are, and should always be, monitored by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision or another entity to make sure this technology isn't being misused or mishandled. My concern is that these devices could make it easier to order and/or bring contraband into the state's prisons, make it easier to order hits on other inmates and could make it easier to coordinate uprisings within facilities. This could greatly impact the safety of the personnel working within these facilities.

These tablets also are being provided to all inmates as a tool for reintegration into society. But there are inmates who are serving life sentences and have no possibility of being released. We should more closely examine how these tablets are being distributed because

we don't need to worry about tools to eliminate recidivism among inmates who will never be released.

Many families and residents throughout my district - as well as the state - cannot afford luxuries such as tablets, laptops and other personal electronic equipment. If we can provide this technology for free to inmates, it would be better for the state to provide the same to students in schools and colleges throughout the state. I feel that it is imperative that we examine ways that we can help schools, libraries and other organizations receive the same treatment.

Further, it also is concerning to me to learn that the state already has two contracts with JPay Inc, the company that will be providing the tablets. One contract for \$8.8 million is for inmate kiosks and related services, according to reports, while another contract from 2015 is for the supervision of fees collection and accounting system for parolees. That contract is reportedly for more than \$216,000. I believe it is important to learn what role, if any, these previous contracts may have played in making the decision to provide these tablets.

I feel that it is important to note that, while I understand that these tablets are intended to provide educational opportunities to inmates in an effort to avoid recidivism, many of the state's correctional facilities already offer libraries and other resources that provide inmates with the opportunity to grow and to hopefully better themselves. There have been many success stories where inmates have been able to turn their lives around and have gone on to lead productive lives once they are out of prison.

I thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Joseph Griffo

State Senator, 47th District