



Transition Statement

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Commissioner

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Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Our prisons here in New Jersey face enormous challenges in the battle to contain and control an incessant tide of inmates linked to violent criminal street gangs. Of course, to some extent, gangs have always been a problem in the correctional system; but the sheer scope of what we're dealing with behind bars now – the ruthless new face of organized crime itself – amounts to nothing less than a crisis.

This morning, we heard about the ease with which incarcerated gang members and leaders can exploit operational vulnerabilities in the prison system.

The fact that they can communicate on a regular basis with cohorts both inside and outside these institutions was disturbing enough. But then we learned that they can actually manipulate the inmate financial account system to bankroll ongoing criminal enterprises.

This afternoon, you will hear testimony detailing the illicit commerce in contraband behind prison walls: Drugs, cellphones and other banned materials – how they are smuggled inside and how they fall into the hands of gang members and other inmates.

We will also focus on key systemic weaknesses identified in this investigation – weaknesses that can have the effect of undermining the safe and effective operation of these institutions amid this exploding gang crisis. In that context, we will hear testimony in part reflecting limited steps that have been taken during this inquiry by the State Department of Corrections to address some of these pressing issues. Going forward, the department's input will be essential as we formulate recommendations to reform and improve this system for everyone involved.

Please call the first witness.