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THE DAILY GAZETTE

## EDITORIAL

# Contraband policies must be reasonable

Gov. Kathy Hochul and New York prison officials have to make sure that their new policy severely restricting contraband in prisons is entirely about security and not about dehumanizing and humiliating prisoners.

For the past few months, the state has been phasing in new rules for visitors bringing in items to prisons hoping to cut down on the influx of drug smuggling and other related issues.

Some visitors have gotten extremely creative in how they disguise drugs.

For example, a common effort involves dissolving paper in heroin, synthetic marijuana, methamphetamine and other drugs and sending it in the form of a letter or in a book. Prison officials have also found weapons and unauthorized electronics hidden in packages.

Security measures can only be so effective, so New York has reasonably joined other states in limiting what visitors and family members can send into prisons.

To stop the drug-soaked paper, for instance, officials are now requiring that all paper materials be scanned and delivered electronically. That's reasonable, except that it does raise privacy issues.

To keep other contraband out, the state is only allowing goods sent prepackaged by verified vendors and stores like Walmart.

That, too, sounds reasonable.

But there are two issues with that. One is that a lot of the materials being sent were fruit and vegetables, which a lot of inmates rely on to supplement the relatively poor nutrition they get from prison meals. Family members who want to ensure their incarcerated family members are getting proper nutrition are limited in their choices.

While relying on verified vendors makes sense, those products are expensive and often have high markups. That means fruit and vegetables sent from the outside are available only to inmates whose families can afford it, creating an unfair system that unduly punishes impoverished and minority inmates.

Opponents of the new restrictions say they're unduly harsh and harmful to inmates, and they say officials are using security as an excuse to dehumanize and isolate inmates.

One advocate said that during the covid crisis, similar packages were restricted, yet contraband still got through.

If the families weren't bringing it in, who was? Guards? Prison vendors?

The state has every right to impose necessary security measures. But it also has an obligation to ensure that inmates are getting proper access to fruits and vegetables, and that their families still have the ability to provide gifts.

That might mean expanding prison storage facilities and procurement efforts to include more nutritional food. And if contraband continues to slip into prisons despite these restrictions, they need to step up security in other parts of the prisons.

We know not a lot of people have sympathy for people who commit crimes. But they are still human beings and they still have families that care about them.

And the state needs to treat them as such.

# Mental health hotline having its own crisis

*The following editorial appeared in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch:*

The newly established 988 national hotline, a 911-style emergency call system for people contemplating suicide or other mental health crises, has hit a pretty major acceptance snag.

The system is barely a month old, yet there's already a movement afoot to boycott it.

Some users say it can make existing mental trauma even worse.

Despite being advertised as a way for people in crisis to call and talk to a professional, users warn that 988 counselors could wind up alerting police, who have the power to track down callers and take them to mental health facilities where they are involuntarily committed.

That's a significant potential flaw that should have been anticipated long before the 988 system went live on July 16.

The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act was enacted in 2020 to address a growing problem with people in crisis who have

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ven't been able to get the help they need.

Easy access to guns by people contemplating suicide has made it even more urgent to establish a quick way for people to get help by phone.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness says one in four fatal police shootings between 2015 and 2020 involved people with a mental illness.

Millions of people a year show up in hospital emergency rooms seeking help for mental health crises, overwhelming hospitals and very often leading to delays or the neglect of people needing help.

That's what made a 988 system seem like a popular alternative.

## YOUR VOICE

*Letters to the Editor*

### Be critical of new political commercials

In case you are a reader of The Daily Gazette who does not watch TV, I can inform you that election season is upon us.

My cable stations are flooded with election ads during prime time, and I have made some observations about them.

The two parties have fairly different ideas on convincing you how to vote. Let's look at them both.

The Democrats are all in bright colors like a Toyota ad and they are labeled as Democrats left and right. They feature whatever policy the candidate feels is important to him or her, and in most cases mention their local roots.

The policies they highlight are usually climate, healthcare and economy related. There is not much mention of their opponent.

The Republicans feature violence and name calling, and they seldom mention their own party, or their own candidate in some cases.

They just tell you who to vote against. They show all the Democrats in black and white then like in The Wizard of Oz switch to color for their own candidate.

The policies they talk about are law-and-order related, mostly about how we should be afraid of riots all the time from the videos

they show. But they offer no solutions other than handcuffs. And taxes, they hate taxes.

The most amusing one by far shows the former president playing tennis in an unforgiving pose and mentions a certain politician being a Trump kiss-ass. I'll leave it to you to judge that one.

**PAUL DONAHUE**  
Niskayuna

### Kids need to get HPV vaccinations

The Cancer Prevention in Action (CPiA) Program has good news.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccination rates in New York state among 13-17 year olds significantly improved from 57% in 2019 to 68% in 2020.

While this is promising, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted preventive care for children, including the HPV vaccine.

There is still work to be done. The goal of the NYS Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan goal is to get 80% of 13-17 year olds vaccinated against HPV.

Parents need to be educated to dispel the myths they hear about the HPV vaccine.

Strong health care provider recommendations are needed to move parents to vaccinate. Reminding parents to get their



children caught up on HPV vaccination is crucial. Here's why:

HPV is a virus and there is no treatment/cure for an infection.

There aren't symptoms to know you have the virus. The virus can cause many types of cancer.

The HPV vaccine prevents children from getting certain cancers as they get older. The virus can cause cervical, vaginal, vulvar, penile, anal, and cancers of the mouth and throat.

The younger the vaccine is given, the better it works to prevent cancer for boys and girls beginning at age 9.

CPiA works to increase HPV vaccination rates by educating our communities. The CPiA Program collaborates with the NYS Cancer Consortium and

The [system] calls the police on approximately 20% of callers," with geotracking technology revealing where the caller is located.

Police are not necessarily equipped to de-escalate such crisis situations and can make it worse by barking orders and even drawing their firearms if the person in crisis is holding a weapon.

Some 988 users complain of getting an unhelpful or unempathetic reception.

The prospect of involuntary commitment — plus a substantial medical bill — is adding to the public skepticism.

Starting in the fall, system administrators say they'll begin requiring a supervisor to concur before a crisis counselor can notify the police.

That should help, but social media sites are filling up now with warnings to stay away.

That suggests that further delays could cause a system established with the best of intentions to fail for lack of public acceptance.

# Dr. Fauci waged war on the foolish refusals of facts

*The following editorial appeared in The Kansas City Star:*

Anthony Fauci is calling it a career.

And the 81-year-old infectious disease expert — one of the most visible health officials in the federal government's response to the coronavirus outbreak — deserves America's heartfelt thanks.

Without Fauci's steady leadership, the COVID-19 pandemic would have created more havoc on our country than we could possibly imagine.

After 38 years leading the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Fauci will retire by year's end, he announced Monday.

Fauci's retirement is well earned. For nearly four decades, he worked to keep Americans safe from contagious diseases such as Ebola, Zika and other life-threatening zika.

He took the job in 1984 in part, he recalled later, because he was frustrated by the federal government's inadequate response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and over time earned deep respect from activists within the gay community who had initially doubted his sincerity.

Despite that already stormy history, most of us knew little about Fauci's work before 2020.

His tenure as the face of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic — the most serious public health emergency in a century — was marked by controversy, a few missteps, and frequent battles with former President Donald Trump.

But he deserves profound praise

**As Trump turned more and more against reality, Fauci became the voice of science and reason. We're thankful that he did.**

for the way he presided over America's response to the pandemic, whose grip around the nation's neck appears to at last be loosening.

Fauci sparred with Trump, who routinely downplayed the seriousness of the pandemic, calling criticism of his response a hoax perpetrated by Democrats and other opponents.

But the pandemic was no laughing matter.

More than 1 million Americans died and countless others were hospitalized.

Despite enormous, bipartisan economic aid packages, many others will never fully recover from painful but necessary lockdowns that isolated individuals, separated families and pushed businesses to the brink of ruin.

Fauci did not set out to be a lightning rod. He was turned into one by Trump, who desperately wanted the pandemic to be over before the November 2020 election.

As Trump turned more and more against reality, Fauci became the voice of science and reason. We're thankful that he did.

In the early stages of the pandemic, we were told to stay home.

Local shutdown orders were expected to last about two weeks.

Soon, it became apparent more time was needed to limit the damage inflicted by the highly conta-

gious airborne virus. Months went by before society reopened.

During the unprecedented lockdown, nursing home residents were cut off from loved ones.

The economy tanked. Small businesses closed. Schoolchildren were left behind.

And, over the course of the last two years, the number of folks with mental health issues increased.

Republicans, especially after Democrat Joe Biden defeated Trump in 2020, blamed Fauci for most of those ills.

That wasn't fair, or honest.

Meanwhile, new words and ideas crept into our lives, and we have Fauci to thank for that.

Wearing masks in public and social distancing became the norm. Virtual learning and remote meetings were essential to school children and their parents.

These safety measures and other precautions, pushed by Fauci and experts at the the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, undoubtedly saved lives.

In March 2020, Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly, a Democrat, became the first governor in the country to close all schools for the remainder of the year.

Meanwhile, in neighboring Missouri, Gov. Mike Parson, mimicking his counterparts in red states like Texas and Florida, was slow to act.



Under Parson, a Republican from Bolivar, Missouri was one of the last states to declare an emergency to address the coronavirus threat.

In December 2021, at the height of the super-infectious omicron surge, Parson prematurely ended the emergency declaration.

Parson, like most Republican leaders who refused to order commonsense restrictions, took his cue from Trump, who made a mockery of the virus and put Asian Americans in danger of physical attacks by calling it the "Chinese virus."

All along, Fauci did his level best to counter these foolish refusals to heed the facts.

He stepped in to become the face of a responsible public servant and a welcome antidote to the poor examples set by Trump and many Republican governors.

He also famously clashed with GOP Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky over booster shots and, in a dustup over Fauci's yearly salary, referred to Kansas Sen. Roger Marshall, also a Republican, as "a moron."

Fauci, like the CDC itself, is not without faults.

He probably regretted his intemperate words.

And the messaging about masks was sloppy and inconsistent at the start — giving ammunition to those looking for any reason to push back against pandemic protections and protocols.

But Fauci's mistakes were small compared to his successes.

With the disease in retreat — but far from gone — he's announcing he's stepping down.

He'll head into retirement with our gratitude.