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The New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison (NY-CHEP), a coalition of providers working to bring higher education to men and women during and after incarceration, will provide protective face masks to the entire incarcerated population in New York State. In the spirit of partnership with the New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (NY-DOCCS), the prison education community has come together to create the safest possible environment for incarcerated individuals, prison staff, and officers we work with.

Rob Scott, Executive Director of the Cornell Prison Education Program, explained that this was not an initiative of any single program. "Leadership from the college programs wanted to see more protective equipment for the incarcerated population. We knew that we had the resources to make an impact so we approached NY-DOCCS, and we are grateful they agreed to team up and move quickly."

Asked for a comment, Acting Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci said,

"I firmly believe that higher education is transformative, in that incarcerated individuals come to recognize and appreciate the collective humanity we all share. College programming behind the walls is made possible through the generosity of so many. For that I am truly grateful, but I am also extremely grateful for the generous contribution by NYCHEP of a different kind; namely, the cloth masks that will be available for the entire under-custody population. While the population has the option to fashion their own state-issued handkerchiefs into masks, there is no question that the availability of these new cloth masks, which have been designed as masks and can be readily washed and reused, will be a much more attractive option for the population. On behalf of the entire Department, I extend our deepest appreciation to NYCHEP and its many generous supporters, for their thoughtfulness in helping to make the correctional environment a safer one, for all who live and work there."

This first purchase of reusable masks for the 43,000 incarcerated men and women in the state is an important step forward to help protect those behind bars. A local manufacturer in Waterloo, NY, is filling the order, and we are glad to be supporting local workers during this crisis. We will continue to work together at this critical moment to do all we can to make our communities safer.

Sean Pica, Executive Director of Hudson Link, said "As the director of a prison college program who has also lived through difficult times in prison, I know it takes a whole community coming together to take care of one another. I am grateful for this opportunity to collaborate with the DOCCS and our college partners in order to help protect our students and all incarcerated individuals in New York State."

For more information on NYCHEP visit www.nycheper.org