

# Visitor Notification Letters

## Testing visitor notification as a means to reduce misbehaviors and contraband

**Agency:** Pennsylvania Department of Corrections State Correctional Institution (SCI) Camp Hill

**Trial Duration:** 10/24/16–02/28/17

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### Context

Visitation serves as a means of support and connection to society for an incarcerated person. However, it also introduces security concerns due to contraband smuggling.

### Key Finding

The use of notification letters outlining visitation and contraband rules did not reduce contraband-related misconducts.

\*BetaGov trains agency personnel to become research-savvy “Pracademics” who lead trials.

### Background

Prison residents who receive visitors have better behavior and greater reentry success. Although yielding positive results, visitation also results in contraband being brought into the facility, risking staff and resident safety. SCI-Camp Hill used notification letters to discourage attempts to bring contraband into the prison. The letters encouraged visitation and clarified visitation rules, including distribution of contraband and associated consequences. Camp Hill is the state’s diagnostic and classification center for men entering the state prison system.

### Trial Design

The study enrolled 305 men entering SCI-Camp Hill in September and October 2016. Those with short sentences or serving parole revocations were excluded. Participants were randomly assigned to study conditions. The list of approved visitors of residents in the intervention group received the detailed notification letter listing visitation and contraband rules. Approved visitors of residents in the control group were simply notified that a family member/friend was housed at SCI-Camp Hill.

### Results

The numbers of visits and contraband-related misconducts were collected for four months, starting one month after letters were mailed. A total of 969 eligible visitors received letters (intervention=523, control=446). Outcomes are shown in the table below. There was not a statistically significant difference in the average number of visits per resident. The number of contraband-related misconducts was higher in the intervention group, but this difference was not statistically significant. Overall, the rate of misconduct was low, making it difficult to detect change. A replication study of an equivalent strategy also showed that it did not achieve the goal of reducing contraband-related misconducts.

Visitor Notification Trial Results

	Intervention	Control
# of enrolled residents	157	148
% of visited residents	53%	62%
# of visitations	634	630
Mean visits by resident	4.04	4.26
# of contraband-related misconducts (# of drug-involved)	4 (1)	2 (1)

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