IMPACT STUDY REPORT: DELAWARE DOC INMATE MAIL SYSTEM

Recommendation for a Lower-Cost, Delaware-Based Processing System

To: Commissioner Terra Taylor, Delaware Department of Correction
From: Legal Advocacy Network of Delaware
Date: July 10, 2026
Subject: Reducing delay, cost, and risk by processing non-legal inmate mail within Delaware

Executive Finding

Delaware should replace the Nevada-based, third-party route for ordinary inmate mail with a Delaware-operated central mail-processing unit, while continuing to send privileged legal mail directly to each facility. The current system requires ordinary letters mailed within Delaware—even by a sender living only a few miles from a prison—to travel to Las Vegas, Nevada, be opened and scanned by Pigeonly Corrections, reviewed electronically, printed, and shipped back to Delaware. DOC states that Pigeonly should process mail within 48 hours and return printed mail by Priority Mail; however, community reports indicate that some correspondence has taken up to a month. The long interstate chain creates avoidable handoffs, delay points, postage/shipping expense, vendor dependence, and quality-control problems. [1]

Current System and Measurable Impacts

- **Distance and delay:** All general non-legal mail for BWCI, HRYCI, JTVCC, and SCI is addressed to a Las Vegas post-office box. It is scanned, transmitted to DOC for screening, printed in Nevada, and then physically shipped back to the prison. Every added transfer increases the chance of batching delays, misrouting, poor reproduction, or loss.
- **Financial impact:** Even without a publicly verified per-piece contract price, the system necessarily includes vendor administration, out-of-state processing, printing, and Priority Mail shipment back to Delaware. A state-operated unit would replace recurring vendor and interstate-shipping costs with local staffing, equipment, supplies, and short in-state delivery routes. A competitive cost study should compare total cost per delivered page—not merely the vendor invoice.
- **Family and rehabilitation impact:** Delayed mail weakens timely family contact, frustrates children and caregivers, and can cause people to miss time-sensitive personal, educational, treatment, reentry, and administrative information. The contradiction is especially severe when the sender lives near the institution but the letter is routed thousands of miles away.
- **Accountability and privacy:** A private intermediary temporarily possesses and digitizes personal correspondence. In-state processing would give DOC direct custody, clearer records, faster complaint resolution, and stronger control over retention, destruction, data access, and audit practices.
- **Security:** The security objective should be preserved. Delaware reports that mail scanning was adopted to prevent drug-soaked paper and other contraband and that the JTVCC pilot reduced contraband. The proposed change concerns who performs the scanning and where—not abandonment of screening. [1][2]

Recommended Delaware-Based Model

1. **Establish one DOC central mail-processing center in Delaware.** Locate it at an existing secure DOC or state facility with controlled access, cameras, chain-of-custody procedures, ventilation, mail-opening stations, high-speed color scanners, printers, and secure destruction. A Dover-area location would provide practical statewide distribution.
2. **Retain direct facility delivery for protected and official mail.** Privileged attorney mail should continue to go directly to the institution and be handled under constitutional and DOC safeguards. Courts, government correspondence, identity documents, publications, educational materials, and other categories already accepted directly should remain clearly exempt.
3. **Set enforceable service standards.** Require date/time scans at receipt, screening, approval, printing, dispatch, and facility delivery. Target: scan within one business day; deliver to the facility within two business days; distribute to the recipient within one additional business day. Automatically flag anything older than three business days.
4. **Pilot before statewide conversion.** Run a 90-day pilot for one facility, compare it with the Nevada route, then phase in all prisons. Measure median and 95th-percentile delivery time, cost per mailing/page, rejection rate, reprint rate, complaints, lost items, staff hours, and detected contraband.

5. **Use transparent procurement and oversight.** Publish the current contract, invoices, volume data, performance reports, and complaint statistics. Require an independent cost comparison of: (A) current Pigeonly service; (B) DOC-operated center; and (C) Delaware-based vendor. Include liquidated damages or service credits for delays, inaccurate copies, missing pages, and data-security failures.
6. **Create a tracking and appeal system.** Provide the sender and incarcerated recipient a tracking number or receipt date, a clear rejection notice stating the exact reason, a rapid appeal/review process, and a dedicated contact for mail older than five business days.

Utah as the Practical Model

Utah provides the most relevant current example. In June 2025, the Utah Department of Corrections publicly stated that Pigeonly had not corrected listed contract-performance deficiencies and that users reported problems with "delivery times, accuracy and quality." Utah then replaced the third-party service effective January 5, 2026. Personal non-legal mail is now processed directly by Utah DOC mail-processing centers; staff scan and print color copies for delivery, while legal and specified official correspondence go directly to the facilities. [3][4][5]

Utah resource link: Utah DOC — New Mailing System Coming January 5 (official description, addresses, processing rules, and video link).

Requested Action

Within 30 days, appoint a small implementation team from the Bureau of Prisons, Administrative Services/procurement, information technology, facility mailrooms, security, and family/community relations. Direct it to obtain the current full cost and performance data, contact Utah DOC regarding staffing and equipment, design a 90-day Delaware pilot, and issue a public recommendation. The central policy test should be simple: Delaware mail should not routinely have to cross the country twice when the same security function can be performed faster, more transparently, and potentially less expensively within Delaware.

Sources

[1] Delaware DOC, "New Postal Mail Delivery System at Delaware Prison Facilities," updated March 2025. Link

[2] Delaware DOC, JTVCC mail-scanning pilot information (2022), including stated 1–3 day return-shipping expectation. Link

[3] Utah DOC, "UDC To Pursue Alternatives For Mail Service," June 19, 2025. Link

[4] Utah DOC, "New Mailing System Coming January 5," December 21, 2025. Link

[5] Utah DOC, "Communication" (current mail and legal/official-correspondence guidance). Link

[6] Prison Policy Initiative, "Mail Scanning Policies by State, 2026" (Delaware listed as Nevada/Pigeonly; several states use internal processing). Link