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New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

DOCCS

Fiscal Year 2016-17 Budget Hearing

February 4, 2016

Testimony of Anthony J. Annucci, Acting Commissioner

Good Morning. Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell, and other distinguished Chairs and members of the Legislature, I am Anthony J. Annucci, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. It is my honor to discuss some of the highlights of Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget plan.

The Governor's policies are moving Corrections in the right direction. Last year New York State's inmate population continued to decline, and there are now over twenty thousand fewer inmates than there were in 1999. Still, New York State continues to be the safest large state with the lowest incarceration rate. To continue this trend of reduced incarcerations coupled with increased public safety, the Department's proposed Executive Budget contains a number of important new initiatives. These include groundbreaking Special Housing Unit reforms; the increased use of technology and updated policies to better supervise and secure our facilities; and several re-entry initiatives designed to further reduce recidivism by upgrading educational opportunities and vocational training. Within our \$310 million capital budget, we are also moving forward with plans to transform Hudson into a hybrid Youth Facility for 16 and 17 year olds. Despite the reduction in inmate population, the Executive Budget does not recommend any prison closures this year.

Prison discipline is vital to the safety of correction officers and inmates alike. We will undertake historical reforms in our approach to solitary confinement, which will modernize prison discipline. These reforms will improve conditions within our segregation units, and revise our disciplinary

guidelines, while preserving safety and security. As we did for the Seriously Mentally Ill, we will develop specialized programs to safely provide out-of-cell programming and treatment to inmates.

Inmate re-entry programming, including education and vocational training, is a vital part of the reform process. DOCCS will continue its expansion of college programming through \$7.5 million in funding from the Manhattan DA's Office. This expansion will not cost taxpayer dollars. College programming has been shown to significantly lower recidivism and increase the likelihood of a successful transition back into society. It also creates positive role models for other inmates to follow, ultimately leading to safer prisons. Further, in an effort to increase the issuance of high school diplomas, we will hire psychologists to diagnose adult inmates with learning disabilities, and update our Thinking for a Change program with a new version issued by the National Institute of Corrections, or "NIC". In an effort to modernize vocational training, we will also upgrade several vocational print shops and expand our computer vocational shops to include computer coding.

The Department is focused on creating the safest environment possible. In partnership with the unions, we will continue to develop strategies to reduce violence within prisons and to conduct security staffing reviews as outlined in the fiscal year 14-15 budget. Last year we hired 103 correction officers. Also, we have either begun, or will pursue, technological enhancements, training improvements, and policy changes that will enhance overall safety and security within DOCCS facilities. These initiatives include installation of fixed cameras, the deployment of thermal imaging and heartbeat detection devices, the installation of the rounds tracker system, the procurement of portable metal detectors, and the piloted use of body cameras to be worn by staff. The Department will also be refining training in the areas of use of force and interpersonal communications to provide our staff with additional avenues to de-escalate situations, before force becomes necessary. In the upcoming year, we will also be pursuing many policy changes such as a new rule designation for synthetic marijuana, the expanded use of K-9 Units, the elimination of metal containers from our

commissaries, the use of secure vendors for packages, the piloting of pepper spray, and enhancement of tool control practices.

Our internal investigations unit has been completely overhauled and is now called the Office of Special Investigations, or OSI. A new Chief and a new Director of Operations have been appointed. The Chief now reports directly to me and we meet regularly. The new leaders are both attorneys with significant law enforcement backgrounds. Under their leadership, a number of new initiatives have been implemented to foster an atmosphere of ethical behavior and thorough investigations. OSI has also bolstered its ranks with highly qualified investigators and analysts with decades of experience from outside law enforcement agencies.

Most importantly, DOCCS will be working with our federal partners to establish best practices. In 2015, the NIC conducted comprehensive security audits at several facilities and in 2016, they will audit several more. The NIC will also review our Training Academy, and train select staff members on how to conduct security audits. To build upon these best practices, DOCCS will be instituting a process for unannounced security audits and risk assessments in line with NIC's suggestions.

DOCCS is also responsible for approximately 36,000 parolees. In 2014, we issued a recidivism report showing that just nine percent of ex-offenders released in 2010 were sent back to prison within three years, based upon a new felony conviction. This figure was the lowest since 1985, and for those released in 2011, the figure has been lowered further to 8.6%. We are making an impact.

Despite this positive trend, we know there is still work to do. We have undertaken an enhanced supervision project in Monroe County that focuses on our highest risk parolees with GPS monitors and a lower caseload ratio. We also launched combined operations involving Community Supervision and our Office of Special Investigations, to apprehend parole violators in careful coordination with our Federal, State and Local law enforcement partners. We also implemented last year's law ensuring

next day reporting, and we arranged for inmates to be released from facilities in closer proximity to their home communities.

Opioid abuse is a serious concern when it comes to recently released individuals. To address this, DOCCS has started an opioid overdose prevention program, in collaboration with DOH and the Harm Reduction Coalition. We now issue Naloxone, the opioid antidote, to inmates scheduled for release and provide training on how to use it. To help prevent relapse, DOCCS will also be using Vivtrol paired with traditional drug treatment counseling.

In conclusion, there again will be many challenges and expectations for DOCCS and the thousands of hardworking employees who perform their responsibilities in an exemplary manner, often under dangerous and difficult circumstances. The Governor's proposed budget will place DOCCS in an advantageous position to fulfill these expectations. Thank you and I will be happy to answer any questions.

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