



Corrections and Community Supervision

Testimony of Anthony J. Annucci
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Community Supervision
Before the NYS Senate Standing Committee on Crime Victims,
Crime and Corrections
NYS Senate Standing Committee on Health
COVID-19 Impact on Prisons and Jails

September 22, 2020

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COVID-19 Impact on Prisons and Jail
Tuesday, September 22, 2020

Verbal Testimony

Chairman Sepulveda and Chairman Rivera, and other distinguished members of the Senate, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Standing Committees on Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections and Health, on the very important topic of the impact of COVID-19 on prisons in New York State. This testimony will pertain to the impact of COVID-19 in state facilities operated by the Department.

Preparedness

DOCCS has taken immediate and appropriate actions from the outset of this public health emergency to contain the spread of COVID-19 among staff and incarcerated individuals. DOCCS has worked closely with public health officials from the Department of Health, who have provided recommendations based on facts and emerging science.

The Department has developed a comprehensive Pandemic Flu protocol that has been modified for COVID-19. We maintain supplies, equipment and other resources, that are being made available, as needed, for impacted correctional facilities during the spread of this infectious disease. We continuously review our protocols and emergency supply inventories, to ensure that the Department's policies and procedures are as up-to-date as possible. The Department also has negative air flow isolation rooms, Regional Medical Units, access to a network of hospitals, and emergency control plans for each facility.

DOCCS has conducted table-top exercises to prepare for additional positive cases. The Department employs medical staff specially trained in infection control in facilities across the state and has contingency plans for each facility in the event of significant staff absences.

In addition, a COVID-19 Task Force has been created and meets regularly to monitor and assess all actions and potential actions in response to this public health crisis. The Department's executive team has been in regular communication with all Facility Superintendents, as a means of monitoring in real time all COVID-19 related issues that arise within the system.

Ongoing communication is delivered to staff, and incarcerated individuals on preventative measures to stay healthy, including recommendations by the CDC and DOH, as well as cleaning guidelines issued by the Office of General Services.

DOCCS has taken a number of actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in order to protect staff and the incarcerated population, including, removing non-essential staff from the workplace, the

difficult decision of suspending visitation and programs, deploying masks to staff and the incarcerated population and making hand sanitizer available.

Testing

We continue to comply with CDC guidance, and in consultation with DOH, evaluate all options for additional testing as part of our multi-faceted response. The Department has continually expanded the pool of incarcerated individuals being tested, which include those incarcerated individuals who are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, all incarcerated individuals who are quarantined as a result of a contact trace, as well as a variety of targeted testing cohorts.

To date, we have offered over 13,000 COVID tests to the incarcerated population. The results were 773 positive cases and 11,201 negative cases. Also, the Department has had 1,329 positive staff cases, of which 98% have recovered and returned to work. Our test results are regularly updated on the Department webpage.

Population

Throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Department has implemented early release opportunities for individuals that are based on individualized reviews that ensure each person is connected to the services and support that they need to succeed in the community, such as housing and health care. These actions have resulted in the early release of 2,850 incarcerated individuals. As of yesterday, the total DOCCS incarcerated population was 36,704. This represents both a total reduction in excess of 7,500 individuals since January 1st and the lowest total incarcerated population since 1986.

Re-Opening

As New York State continues to implement NY FORWARD, the Department's greatest concern remains the health, safety and well-being of our employees, as well as the incarcerated population, particularly during this public health emergency. Toward that end, DOCCS has developed and is presently implementing a comprehensive and gradual re-opening plan that continues many prior initiatives, but also layers in new ones, in an effort to minimize any unreasonable risks. As a result of this plan, DOCCS has gradually returned non-essential staff, reintroduced a variety of specialized, academic and vocational programming, resumed visitation and reactivated intake from county facilities.

As we move forward, it is critical that we continue to follow the science and remind staff, visitors, and incarcerated individuals to wear a mask and to social distance where possible. We will continue to stress that these are simple steps that should be followed to stop the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses.

Thank you and I will be happy to answer any questions.