



Corrections and Community Supervision

GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY PLAN

October 20, 2021

I. Review of Current Public Engagement

In response to the September 20, 2021, memorandum issued by the Secretary to the Governor and Counsel to the Governor entitled “Government Transparency Initiative,” the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision solicited input from all agency program areas to review existing policies, procedures, and practices and make recommendations to further the Department’s transparency goals. This review included, but was not limited to, an evaluation of information frequently requested by the public, information that is currently available or unavailable to the public, and information that would provide a public service if made publicly available.

II. Proposed Plan to Expand Transparency and Expected Timeline

The Department is advancing the following proposals to support Governor Kathy Hochul’s pledge to usher in an era of greater transparency and accountability in New York State government.

Annual Tour of Correctional Facilities by Private Citizens (*Timeline: Annually; first tour in Summer 2022*) – Correction Law Section 146 lists those officials who are authorized to visit correctional facilities at will, such as members of the Legislature and their aides, the State Commission of Correction, judges, district attorneys, and the Correctional Association of New York, etc. No person not otherwise authorized by law may be permitted to enter a correctional facility, except by authority of the Commissioner. Many members of the public mistakenly believe that made-for-television prison dramas, with their graphic scenes of homicide, sexual assault, gang violence, and corrupt staff, are accurate portrayals of what routinely happens behind prison walls. Nothing could be further from the truth. To better educate the public about day-to-day prison existence, on an annual basis, each Department correctional facility will schedule a general tour to include up to 30 interested private citizens from the surrounding community. Each facility will work with its Community Advisory Board to generate the list of attendees for the tour, as well as the logistics of the tour itself. The facility may also work with the Governor’s Regional Representative and state and local elected officials to identify prospective participants for the tour. The Superintendent, together with members of his or her executive team, shall first meet with the tour group, and provide current, as well as historical information, about the facility. As the tour progresses through the different areas of the facility, the concerned staff will explain their responsibilities. Some interactions with the population may be permitted, if, in the judgment of the Superintendent, it can be accomplished without compromising safety and security. At the conclusion of the tour, the Superintendent, and his or her executive teams, will again briefly meet with the tour group to answer any questions.

Annual Parole Friends and Family Days (*Timeline: Annually; start date pending COVID restrictions*) – Several years ago, the Department’s Community Supervision branch began to pioneer the concept of a Parole Friends & Family Open House at selected area offices, where parolees normally report. The invitees included the parolees, their family members, and their friends. A typical event included presentations on topics of interest,

such as, Certificates of Relief, Certificates of Good Conduct, Voter Registration and Voter Rights, and Combating the Opioid Epidemic. Presenters included outside speakers, as well as successful parolees. Refreshments would also be made available. One of the main objectives was to establish buy-in, not just from the parolees, but by their family and friends, that the overall goal was a successful outcome for each parolee, and that relationships and trust can be fundamental in this regard. These events were postponed due to COVID, but the Department will arrange for one such event to be conducted annually within each of the seven Community Supervision regions in the state once it is deemed safe to do so.

DOCCS Website Redesign (*Timeline: TBD pending engagement with web developers*) – The current version of the DOCCS webpage is not user friendly and was not designed to meet the needs of the agency. DOCCS proposes to work with the WebNY team to update and redesign the DOCCS website to make it more user friendly, easier to navigate, and adaptable to accommodate the below proposals. DOCCS frequently receives complaints from the public about the difficulties of finding information on our web page, which results in an increase in FOIL and media requests.

Frequently Requested Information (*Timeline: 2-3 months*) – DOCCS Counsel’s Office will conduct a review of FOIL requests in order to publish frequently requested information online, to better meet stakeholder needs and reduce staff workload. The FOIL and PIO offices will produce and periodically update a list of informational items that are frequently requested for publication, in consultation with other units as applicable.

Staff Disciplinary Records (*Timeline: 6 months to interview and onboard staff, posting TBD pending engagement with web developers*) – DOCCS is proposing to create a new tab on the DOCCS website that contains information on staff discipline. If approved, effective January of 2022, DOCCS will publish substantiated discipline online, to include the Notice of Discipline and all underlying redacted documents. This proposal will have a fiscal impact since additional staff will be added to our Central Office FOIL unit and our Office of Public Information (three Grade 13 program aides to handle the collecting, redacting, and posting of Bureau of Labor Relations and Office of Special Investigations documents).

Board of Parole Business Meetings (*Timeline: 1-2 months*) – In addition to posting links to video or audio recordings of Board of Parole Business Meetings, the agendas and minutes will also be available on the DOCCS website. Public Notice is given on the DOCCS website to inform the public how to attend in person or virtually.

Board of Parole Decision Notices Online (*Timeline: 1-2 months*) – By law, Board of Parole Administrative Appeal Findings and Recommendations are posted on the DOCCS website. The Board will now also post the Administrative Appeal Decision Notices on the DOCCS website.

Monthly Incarcerated Individual Profile (*Timeline: Immediately, pending engagement with web developers*) – DOCCS proposes to post the monthly profile of incarcerated

individuals on the DOCCS webpage which will answer a number of questions routinely asked of the agency. This data set is a comprehensive representation of the under custody population broken down by facility and includes demographic information, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, marital status, and education level of the population, and also contains data on the crime of commitment, minimum and maximum sentence, county of commitment, and length of stay of the population. The publication of the incarcerated individual profile on the DOCCS website will represent a valuable resource for the public, researchers, and interested stakeholders.

Office of Special Investigations (*Timeline: Descriptions can be updated in two weeks, other TBD pending engagement with web developers*) – DOCCS proposes to increase information about our internal investigative unit on the DOCCS website by expanding the OSI overview to include descriptions of each division and the more prominent display of instructions for reporting misconduct and filing a complaint to obtain greater public input and feedback.

Publish Program Services Policies Online (*Timeline: 2-3 months*) – DOCCS proposes to further review program services policies and procedures and publish them on the webpage to better showcase the breadth and quality of programs offered by the Department.

Research Reports (*Timeline: Varies, multiple statutory deadlines*) – DOCCS publishes a number of annual legislative reports and some discretionary reports on our webpage. DOCCS proposes to streamline the annual report review to ensure their publication in a timely manner. In particular, for routine reports that have previously been approved, DOCCS will publish them once they have been approved by senior leadership in consultation with the Executive Chamber. This will allow for more up-to-date information to be posted on the webpage.

Expand Use of Social Media (*Timeline: Continuous, rolling basis*) – There are numerous examples of positive stories and actions by the Department on a daily basis (e.g. saving of lives from attempted suicide, DMV call center employees assisting New Yorkers, and success stories from program services and community reentry, etc.). Highlighting these actions can improve the public image and narrative about DOCCS and its staff.

Project Sunlight (*Timeline: 1-3 months*) – DOCCS will conduct a review of Project Sunlight requirements to identify any compliance deficiencies and institute appropriate corrective measures. Additionally, DOCCS will reissue the associated guidance on use and requirements for reporting in the Project Sunlight database, including the available FAQ, and User Guide documents.

Open Data NY (*Timeline: 2 months*) – DOCCS is proposing to add an additional data set on Open Data NY that represents releases from DOCCS' custody to the community. With the additional data, DOCCS will have data publicly available regarding admissions to DOCCS facilities, releases to the community, the under-custody population, Parole Board

decisions, the population for releasees under Community Supervision, and recidivism. The DOCCS webpage will also be updated to reference and link to Open Data NY.

III. Measures of Success and Long-Term Monitoring

The Department is fully committed to the Governor's vision of a more transparent and accountable New York State government. DOCCS believes that by adopting the above proposals we will be well positioned to continue to shine a light on the important work we do, as well as address the criticism that prisons are often places that are not transparent. Measures of success will include the successful implementation of the above proposals, a reduced amount of FOIL and media inquiries for frequently requested information, a lowered workload for staff required to review, redact, and produce documents, and positive feedback from the public and stakeholders on these initiatives and their impact on increasing transparency. Compliance with this plan will be evaluated annually by the DOCCS Internal Audit Unit and the Special Counsel for Ethics, Risk, and Compliance.