



**Medals of Honor/Merit Ceremony
Wednesday, September 15, 2021 | 1 p.m.
Albany Training Academy
Albany, New York**

Good afternoon.

It is an honor for me to gather here once again with all of you today.

Let me begin by stating that I am extremely proud of the hard work and daunting challenges overcome by staff with the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, in the face of COVID-19. The virus prevented us from gathering here last year, so I am thankful that today is a new day, although we were at least able to virtually celebrate the actions of several of our co-workers in December of 2020.

I don't know if I will ever get used to the limitations the pandemic has brought to our lives, but it is our current reality. Thus, we must make sure that we protect

ourselves, our families and our co-workers. So thank you for wearing your masks and socially distancing today.

As we gather to remember the lives lost in the line of duty at DOCCS, as well as celebrate those selfless and courageous DOCCS employees who put their lives on the line to confront danger outside of our prison walls to save others, we must keep in mind where the Department is today.

Two days ago, on September 13th, in two different ceremonies, we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Attica riot.

During my remarks before the Forgotten Victims of Attica, in the first ceremony, I recalled the compelling, heart-wrenching testimony and written submissions that were provided to the Attica Task Force in 2002. I told them that for me personally, their words would haunt me for the rest of my life.

Though it is sometimes painful to confront our past, it is also necessary if we wish to build a better and brighter future. And as I stand before you today, I will confidently assert that we have the finest corrections and community supervision agency in the entire country.

One of the many important reasons for this is, our ability to grasp the need for change, to embrace it, and then to design and implement a carefully crafted plan, regardless of whether the need for change arises from federal or state legislation, a judicial ruling, executive direction, shifting societal attitudes, or changing demographics. As is our tradition, we will do whatever it takes to get the job done.

I would be remiss if I did not also mention the major improvements and additions here on the grounds of the Albany Training Academy. I hope you have an opportunity to quickly tour the campus, while you are here today.

I also want to recognize the approximately 23,000 men and women of DOCCS who directly supervise and interact with incarcerated individuals and parolees each

day. Your jobs can be dangerous and difficult, but your dedication is rock solid and unwavering. Thank you as well to the families for their support day in and day out.

Let me turn now to one of the main reasons why we are gathered here today, and that is, to honor three individuals who, with no regard for their own safety, put the welfare of others above their own. A fourth medal recipient could not be here today, so we will present his medal to him at a separate event.

A fundamental tenet of the Department's mission is to protect public safety. So, it is no surprise that our people carry out that mission outside their work environment to the benefit of their communities. Using their training, their instincts and their natural inclinations to help others in need, they stand out as examples of what we all should aspire to be.

Since 1984, we have highlighted numerous co-workers, who have risked their own lives to help others in distress. Though the actions of these brave and unselfish staff

rarely make the news, we are pleased to be able to recognize them here at the Training Academy, for their courage and their valor. Today we add their names to the list of more than 200 Department employees, since our first ceremony. You make us all proud.

And finally, we will once again, quietly and solemnly, remember our fallen. I always say I hope we never have to add another name to the wall of 43. It is especially poignant today, with the 50th anniversary of Attica having been remembered just two days ago.

To the families of our fallen colleagues, we understand that your lives were changed forever and that you too, sacrificed greatly.

So today, together with Governor Kathy Hochul and Deputy Secretary for Public Safety Jeremy Shockett, I offer my sincerest appreciation, not just to those honored here today, but to all DOCCS dedicated employees statewide, who day in and day out, come to work in an

oftentimes dangerous environment, perform their jobs in an exemplary manner, and help keep all New Yorkers safe.

Thank you.