

New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Fiscal Year 2022-23 Budget Hearing

January 25, 2022

Testimony of Anthony J. Annucci, Acting Commissioner

Good Afternoon. Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, and other distinguished Chairs and members of the Legislature, I am Anthony J. Annucci, Acting Commissioner for the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. It is my honor to discuss some of the highlights of Governor Hochul's Executive Budget plan and the various initiatives that will benefit public safety.

Over the past year, while COVID-19 has plagued our nation and state, the Department was not spared from its effects. Accordingly, at the start of the pandemic, I convened a multi-disciplinary COVID-19 Task Force to guide our comprehensive response. Throughout the pandemic, there have been many heroes along the way. Our essential workers, including corrections and community supervision staff, came to work every day and consistently carried out their professional duties in a superb manner, oftentimes going above and beyond their traditional responsibilities. I am very proud of the dedication and sacrifice staff have displayed throughout the duration of the pandemic, and I thank them for their tireless efforts and resoluteness, despite the obvious risks.

Similarly, incarcerated individuals have shown resiliency in the face of the many changes in policies to keep them safe. They too contributed to the response effort in a variety of ways, such as manufacturing millions of masks, gowns, and hand sanitizer, that significantly helped to support and protect fellow New Yorkers.

The dramatic reduction in the incarcerated population has assisted our ability to manage the system safely during this pandemic. Through the efforts of the Legislature

in enacting various laws, and the good work of DOCCS staff, New York leads the nation with the lowest imprisonment rate of any large state. Remarkably, the incarcerated population, now under 30,500, has decreased by more than 40,000 since 1999, marking the lowest total since 1983, and representing a 58% decline from its all-time high of 72,773. More significantly, the total population reduction since January 1, 2020, exceeds 13,700. Even with these drastic reductions in incarceration, New York proudly remains one of the safest large states in the country.

With this significant reduction in population, the State has safely eliminated excess capacity through the closing of correctional facilities and the removal of all double bunks in our medium security facilities. This year's closure process is underway with the transfer of staff to vacant positions at other facilities or offices, while the incarcerated population is transitioned into vacant beds elsewhere. There are no additional closures contemplated in the upcoming fiscal year.

Despite the pandemic, the Department has worked hard on last year's new laws that included: implementing voter registration for those being released from prison; moving individuals to facilities in close proximity to their children; preparing to enact the HALT and Less is More laws; and continuing to expand our Medication Assisted Treatment program. I look forward to seeing these bold new initiatives come to fruition and I believe that they will lead to better outcomes for both the incarcerated and releasee populations.

The Governor has set a vision for this State in the coming fiscal year and the Department is excited to pursue many new initiatives that will be more humane and better prepare individuals for reentry to their communities. In addition to Gender Affirming

Treatment for incarcerated individuals, the Governor's Jails to Jobs initiative prioritizes education by the restoration of Tuition Assistance Program funding for incarcerated students, and an expansion of eligibility for educational release. I have been a strong supporter of education throughout my tenure as Acting Commissioner, and I look forward to implementing the Governor's vision to elevate education behind the walls to a whole new level altogether. Additionally, the other initiatives include starting new programs that will align with today's workforce and conducting a comprehensive review of existing vocational programs to meet today's challenging job market. We will work with the Division of Criminal Justice Services to train re-entry managers and parole officers around the state on career planning and job placement and retention. We will also leverage one of our residential treatment facilities as a pilot for use as transitional housing for undomiciled parolees returning to New York City. Furthermore, we will offer stipends to the head of households that provide opportunities for those individuals to transition to stable housing, and we will eliminate the parole supervision fee. Lastly, the Governor has proposed a constitutional amendment to allow for public-private partnerships that would enable hybrid work-release programs within our facilities.

In conclusion, while we will continue to tackle the many challenges posed by COVID-19, under the Governor's vision, we will continue to move this Department forward in support of a more just criminal justice system that delivers necessary programs and services, while simultaneously advancing safety within our facilities and in the community. I look forward to furthering the Governor's agenda with the assistance of our professional, well-trained and dedicated workforce, that performs its responsibilities in an exemplary

manner, often under dangerous and difficult circumstances. Thank you and I will be happy to answer any questions.

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