

New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Fiscal Year 2023-24 Budget Hearing

February 7, 2023

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, and I am joined by Executive Deputy Commissioner Dan Martuscello. It is my honor to discuss some of the highlights of Governor Hochul's Executive Budget plan, and various key initiatives.

Last year, the Department experienced a multitude of structural changes as a result of shifting demographics and legislative initiatives. The number of incarcerated people has decreased over the last decade and resulted in the closure of six facilities last March. Our population has now stabilized at approximately 31,300, and the proposed budget does not contemplate further closures.

The Department continues to implement several programs included in the Governor's Jails to Jobs initiative from last year. In October, we held a ribbon cutting event at Edgecombe Transitional Housing – a program for undomiciled individuals returning to New York City to receive transitional housing, as they seek a permanent residence and employment. We have hired Employment Parole Officers for each of our community supervision regions, who will receive Workforce Development Specialist training, to assist releasees with obtaining employment. The Department has also partnered with DMV to issue non-Driver IDs to incarcerated individuals.

The safety of staff and the population continues to be an issue of overriding concern. There were 1,469 assaults on staff in 2022, a 25% increase from 2021. Similarly, in 2022, there were 1,486 incarcerated on incarcerated assaults, a 34% increase from 2021. The rates for both categories of assault were the highest ever recorded.

In response to this increase in violence, in December of 2021, I created a Prison Violence Task Force to study the root causes of violence and institute measures to

enhance overall safety. The ongoing work of the Task Force has resulted in positive changes that we believe, over time, will reduce violence.

To limit the introduction of drugs, weapons, and other dangerous contraband fueling violence within our facilities, we have instituted a vendor package program and increased our utilization of canine teams, both of which have led to reductions in drugs and other contraband, as well as reductions in overdose deaths and Narcan use.

We will continue to leverage new technology such as body scanners, to enhance our ability to discover contraband that cannot be identified by metal detectors, such as ceramic blades. Additional actions recommended by the Task Force include enhanced de-escalation training for staff, and the launch of a new Moderate Aggression Program to provide the appropriate level of treatment based on an individual's risk, needs, and underlying propensity for violence. We will continue to work with our unions, interested stakeholders and members of the Legislature to explore policy solutions to reduce violence and increase overall safety.

In the coming year, we will expand our existing Auto Tech and Commercial Truck Drivers Programs, as well as launch a new Computer Coding program, which will better align the skill sets of our releasing population with the demands of today's job market.

Under the recently enacted Medication Assisted Treatment law, the Department is offering all forms of MAT to the population. The Department consulted with OASAS in the development of this program and now partners with Opioid Treatment Providers to administer MAT medications. As of February 2, 1,730 incarcerated individuals were receiving MAT services.

For many years the Department has focused on the prevention of all forms of sexual victimization in prison. The National PREA Standards established minimum requirements for the prevention, detection and response to sexual abuse and harassment. The Department has achieved full compliance with PREA and has enacted robust policies that exceed the national standards.

Among our Community Supervision operations, the implementation of the "Less is More" act required many fundamental changes, including the earned time credit provision, which resulted in the discharge of over 17,000 parolees from supervision. We will continue to work with the Board of Parole, Office of Court Administration and our

workforce to identify additional ways to streamline operations and further safety in the community.

The Governor has also advanced a bold agenda to reduce gun violence and violent crime. To support these efforts, DOCCS will provide a full-time, senior parole officer to serve as a data coordinator for each of the DCJS GIVE jurisdictions; deploy a full-time senior investigator to work with the State Police on their gun violence task forces; and launch a new initiative called SAVE, Supervision Against Violent Engagement, in Buffalo, Syracuse, and Albany. SAVE will identify individuals under parole supervision who are at the highest risk of recidivating in a violent manner. The Department will utilize advanced supervision tactics, electronic monitoring, and intelligence sharing with local partners to enhance public safety, similar to what is done for the highest-level sex offenders.

It will also be crucial for us to focus on our recruitment efforts for both civilian and security staff. These efforts will be greatly assisted by the Governor's proposals to lower the age for new correction officer hires to 19 and the Expanding Nurses for our Future Scholarship program. Staff wellness and staff retention initiatives will also be prioritized, as we are only as good as the workforce we are able to recruit and retain.

In conclusion, although many challenges lie ahead for the Department, as has been the case throughout my entire career, the Department will successfully meet these challenges because of its greatest resource, which is the dedicated men and women who heroically perform their responsibilities with pride, dedication, and professionalism.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you here today. I would be happy to address any questions you may have.