



New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

2025 State of the Judiciary

February 10, 2025

Remarks of Daniel F. Martuscello III, Commissioner

Good afternoon, I am Daniel Martuscello, Commissioner of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. I would like to thank Chief Judge Wilson for having me here today to highlight our partnership and discuss some of the work being done in the correctional and judicial systems. It is truly an honor to speak at this momentous occasion and hear about the state and future of New York's judiciary.

The judiciary and DOCCS are important pillars of the state's criminal justice system. As a department, we strive to fulfill our responsibility with respect and humanity, while ensuring the individuals under our care have access to opportunities to better themselves and prepare for their eventual return to the community. Despite these efforts, we make mistakes, and no mistake is more tragic than the recent murder of Robert Brooks, who sadly lost his life following an assault by staff at Marcy Correctional Facility. As I'm sure many of you have seen in the videos, the actions of those staff members were repugnant and do not represent our values as an agency. I have always said that individuals go to prison as punishment, not for punishment, and I will not normalize violence within our facilities. The Department is moving forward by working closely with prosecutors to hold those involved accountable and embarking on a cultural transformation focused on accountability, transparency, and integrity.

Upon assuming my role as Commissioner, I wrote to staff and the incarcerated population to outline my vision for the agency. I told those under our care that I believe in rehabilitation and redemption, and that I believe in them. I committed to find new and innovative ways to harness their lived experiences so that we may tell their story. Their voices and experiences can help educate and shape the future of youth who live in the same neighborhoods, walk the same paths, and have the same struggles as those who become entangled in the criminal justice system, so that they may avoid making those same mistakes. I also challenged those who have found the path to redemption to spread

the message amongst their peers. At every graduation ceremony I attend, I challenge each of the graduates to pull their peers from the yard to the classroom so that they may engage in rehabilitative programming and transform themselves. Only together can we reach enough people to achieve systemic change and improve people's lives.

We as a department must recognize that we cannot do this work alone. We are fortunate to have a robust network of service providers and volunteers dedicated to providing programming in our facilities. I have committed myself to engage with these organizations and the formerly incarcerated to not only enhance programming, but also offer a message of hope to show that life does not end with incarceration. We have a renewed focus on breaking down barriers for formerly incarcerated to come back to our facilities and engage the population as credible messengers so that they may see that transformation is possible and attainable.

There are countless individuals under our care who are doing extraordinary things to transform themselves and their peers every day, whether they are obtaining their GED, receiving certification in a vocational trade, mentoring younger individuals, or achieving a college degree. It is important that these people are seen and heard so that they may share their journey with those who have walked a similar path and have the same lived experiences. Through this lens, we can begin to change the narrative so that those impacted by the criminal justice system may be defined by the person they are today and the totality of their experiences, rather than the worst mistake of their lives.

The Department is taking critical steps with the support of the Governor, legislature, and our partners to provide positive incentives to those willing to do the hard work of self-transformation. Governor Hochul's Executive Budget seeks to grant DOCCS authority to make additional programs eligible for earned time benefits – such as Merit Time and Limited Credit Time Allowance – and adds funding to establish job training programs in green energy. These new initiatives will supplement our efforts to expand educational and vocational offerings. Following the restoration of TAP for incarcerated students, college programming continues to expand to additional facilities and students. I have witnessed the power of education firsthand. At one of our college graduations, the valedictorian of the class, who is serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole, delivered a message of hope that his son, who was sitting in the audience, may follow the path he is currently leading, rather than the one that resulted in his incarceration. These stories have an impact you cannot measure, one that break the cycles of incarceration that have impacted far too many communities for far too long.

The Department is also focusing heavily on vocational training. We have launched new CDL Driver, Auto Technician, and Heavy Equipment Operator programs, which are in high demand in the community, and are collaborating with the Department of Labor and trade unions to provide industry-

recognized credentials and college credits for completion of vocational programming. We hired Employment Parole Officers who are focused on workforce development and connecting releasees with employment. This year, we achieved a recidivism rate of 19 percent, which is the lowest rate on record, although I prefer to think of this in a more positive light, that over 80 percent of releasees were successful in the community. Better reentry outcomes mean safer streets, less victimization, and reduced incarceration.

The Department is facing numerous challenges, including learning and growing from our own mistakes, and we shall meet these challenges and the broader challenges that face the criminal justice system and the State of New York. I hope and expect we can count on the continued support of our partners in the judiciary and Chief Judge Wilson as we move forward and work together to create a fairer and more equitable system and state.

[INTRODUCE FIRST INCARCERATED SPEAKER]

It is now my honor to introduce our next speaker, Mr. Christopher Martinez, an incarcerated person currently assigned to the Shawangunk Correctional Facility, a maximum-security facility in Ulster County. Mr. Martinez is serving a sentence for a crime he committed at the age of 17, but Chris is so much more than his crime and sentence. He is a college graduate, and a fellow SUNY alum I might add, he is a husband, a father, and a role model to his children and his peers. He represents everything I have described here today about the power of redemption and transformation, and I am grateful for his work to better himself and our system. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Christopher Martinez.

[INTRODUCE SECOND INCARCERATED SPEAKER]

I again have the distinct honor to introduce our next speaker, Ms. Tami Eldrige, an incarcerated woman currently assigned to the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a maximum-security facility in Westchester County. Again, Ms. Eldrige is currently serving a sentence of incarceration within our system, but she too is so much more than her worst mistake. She is a person that has found the path to programs, earning multiple college degrees, launching innovative programs that have a positive impact on her peers, she is a mother, and continues to support her children regardless of where she lives. Ladies and gentlemen, Ms. Tami Eldrige.