

New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Fiscal Year 2018-19 Budget Hearing

January 30, 2018

Testimony of Anthony J. Annucci, Acting Commissioner

Good Morning. Chairwoman Young, 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 Cuomo's Executive Budget plan.

Last year, New York appropriately raised the age of criminal responsibility in stages to 18. Since then, we have worked in coordination with our State and local partners, and this year we will transition Hudson and Adirondack into Adolescent Offender Facilities, to become operational by October 1st. In 2019, we will convert the previously closed Groveland Annex to a standalone Adolescent Offender Facility.

Also, we will continue to reform the use and conditions of solitary confinement through the multi-year, comprehensive settlement with the New York Civil Liberties Union. Since implementation in 2016, there has been an impressive 29 percent reduction in the number of inmates serving sanctions in a Special Housing Unit (SHU) cell and a 25 percent decrease in the average length of stay of an inmate in a SHU cell. During this same period, assaults on staff were reduced approximately 11 percent.

To continue building on this success, Governor Cuomo has directed DOCCS to consolidate SHU beds by closing one housing unit at Cayuga, Upstate and Southport Correctional Facilities. Upon completion of these consolidations, and throughout the

implementation of this historic agreement, New York will have removed more than 1,200 SHU Beds.

Safety and security will again remain a top priority. Working with the unions, we have implemented and will expand upon a variety of technological enhancements, training improvements, and policy changes. The Department will continue installing a number of fixed camera systems. After initially piloting the use of body cameras at Clinton and Bedford Hills, we will also expand their use to other facilities and our Office of Special Investigations. Lastly, since the Department has successfully piloted the use of pepper spray, this year, we will operationalize it statewide. Thus far, among the results of the pilot at the four test facilities is an 11 percent reduction in the number of reported staff injuries associated with staff assaults.

As we continue to use technology to make our prisons safer, we will also leverage it to improve operations and interactions with family and friends by expanding services to our population. The Department plans to move to an electronic Inmate Trust Account Services system, which will allow family and friends to more easily deposit money, as well as provide quicker access to the funds for the population. Through this platform, releasees will be issued debit cards, that can be transitioned to a bank account in the community. In a groundbreaking move, the Department will provide each incarcerated individual a tablet at no cost, with the ability to access free educational material and eBooks, and to file grievances. Individuals will also have the option to purchase music and additional eBooks, and to use a secure email system to communicate with family and friends. We have also awarded a new inmate telephone system contract, resulting in a reduction in the per minute call rate to be one of the lowest in the nation, while also

securing the ability to make permanent our SHU pilot tablet program, to provide easier access to the telephone and pre-loaded educational materials.

The budget will also build upon proven re-entry initiatives with an expansion of the Merit Time and Limited Credit Time Allowance statutes, as well as a pilot to place up to 100 LCTA eligible inmates into educational release and work release. Also, geriatric parole will be authorized for inmates over 55 with debilitating age related conditions; the parole supervision fee, which inhibits re-entry, will be repealed; and the Board of Parole, in conjunction with Community Supervision staff, are engaging with the Governor's Re-Entry Council for a comprehensive review of parole revocation guidelines and practices. Appropriate alternatives to incarceration for those technical violators who pose little risk to reoffend, will be prioritized.

This year we will also expand our Veterans Residential Therapeutic Program to a maximum-security prison. This program provides treatment services in a therapeutic community setting to the veteran population, to heal and restore them to a pro-social state.

For Community Supervision, we have implemented a strategic plan to improve outcomes for parolees to include monitoring enrollment in substance abuse treatment, anger management, sex offender counseling, domestic violence programs, mental health services, and employment and vocational training programs. Additionally, we continue to study our RESET initiative, which focuses on case plan driven techniques that concentrate on criminogenic risks and needs to enhance public safety. This evidence based approach continues to show indications of better outcomes by taking swift, certain

and fair actions toward new delinquent behavior, while also acknowledging and rewarding positive achievements.

In conclusion, this year we will embark on many exciting initiatives that will have a positive impact throughout the entire Agency. We will rely on new technologies to deliver transformative programs and initiatives, while our professional, well-trained, and dedicated work force will continue performing their daily and oftentimes dangerous responsibilities in an exemplary manner. The Governor's proposed budget will build on criminal justice reform and place DOCCS in an ideal position to fulfill its expectations. Thank you and I will be happy to answer any questions.