

## **COMMISSIONER LANIGAN TESTIMONY**

**SPRING, 2014**

Chairman Schaer, Vice Chairman Burzichelli, Committee members, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the fiscal year 2015 budget. In a nutshell, The Department of Corrections' FY15 State budget totals \$981 million and supports 7,654 FTE. This represents an \$8 million net decrease from the FY14 budget and a decrease of 269 FTE.

Once again, during this past fiscal year, our department was successful in reducing custody and civilian overtime by an additional 5% from 672,000 hours in 2012, to 637,000 hours in 2013. As a point of comparison, DOC overtime exceeded one million hours in 2009. The 637,000 hours in 2013 represents a decrease of approximately 49%. In addition, our proposed FY15 appropriation of \$981 million is \$107 million or 10% lower than our 2009 appropriation and our staffing has dropped by 1,240 positions or 14% over that same time frame.

The last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by significant growth in the inmate population. An unavoidable by-product of this growth was overcrowding in our prisons which resulted in deferred maintenance and renovations. Today, with the change in this trend, we have taken advantage of the declining population by consolidating housing units and initiating repairs on smaller modular structures throughout the state.

By fixing these smaller units and reopening them, we are now able to temporarily close the 696 bed Mid-State Correctional Facility and transfer the inmates to other secure facilities throughout the State. This temporary closure will allow us to fund the necessary renovations and still save \$10 million in the FY2015 budget. There will be no layoffs associated with this renovation and we will work with the unions to minimize the impact on the staff while maintaining operational effectiveness.

Mid-State will reopen when all repairs have been effectuated. Our long term goal is to bring all of our facilities to a state of good repair.

In addition to providing safe, secure housing for the offender population we need to prepare them for reentry into the community. To help achieve this, the department provides them with educational opportunities, drug treatment, medical care, job skills, and proper identification. This preparation commences as soon as an offender enters our system. At that time, each inmate is assessed to evaluate educational, medical, mental health and substance use needs.

The information gathered from these assessments is used to make decisions about the offenders' classification and institutional programming.

Education is an essential component in the preparation of the inmate for successful reentry.

Last fiscal year, we issued 52 High School Diplomas and 611 GEDs and our department continues to be a leader in the State for GED preparation and with 3596 inmates currently enrolled in Educational programs our system is comparative in size to some New Jersey school districts. This includes 897 inmates in 23 vocational education trades such as culinary arts, building trades, and communications training. Our enrollment numbers reflect the dedication of our staff to achieving the goals set forth in the mandatory education legislation.

The department has entered Stage IV of the legislation in January 2014, this stage targets all inmates with less than 10 years on their sentence and below the 12<sup>th</sup> grade reading level.

In addition to Education, I believe that you can be proud of the programming offered by the State which has been tailored to address the needs of the offender returning to society.

Some of our most successful programs include Cage Your Rage, Thinking for a Change and S.T.A.R.S.

It should be noted that more than 4,500 inmates completed these evidence-based programs last year. In addition, our Office of Transitional Services offered inmates assistance in obtaining critical identification documents including Motor Vehicle Identification Cards, Social Security cards and Birth Certificates.

With regard to substance abuse treatment, the Governor's proposed budget for 2015 includes funding in the Judiciary for the expansion of drug courts.

This program has successfully diverted many non-violent offenders from State Prison by providing services in the community. In order to treat violent offenders and those ineligible for diversion that are still in need of substance abuse treatment, the Department has dedicated 1332 drug treatment beds within our secured facilities.

It would be virtually impossible to offer our current level of educational, religious and substance abuse counseling to offenders without the assistance of our volunteers.

More than 1,500 volunteers give their free time to conduct educational classes, religious services and substance abuse support to the inmate population.

For example, Seton Hall, Princeton, Rutgers, The College of New Jersey and Rowan University all send us student volunteers through the Petey Greene Foundation.

Another part of the reentry process is the Residential Community Release Programs (RCRP) or halfway houses. Qualified inmates who are within 24 months of their parole eligibility date or release date and who meet certain criteria can spend the last portion of their sentence in one of these specialized houses.

Overall, RCRP programs have proven to be a successful means of transitioning the incarcerated population from prison to the community.

They provide a wide array of cost-effective treatments and services with a gradual, supervised transition back to society.

In closing, I would like to highlight some of the major initiatives that our Department has successfully implemented over the past couple of years. For example, we are proud that our Department is now completely smoke-free. Also, inmate telephone rates have been capped at a rate of \$.17 per minute.

Our Medical provider, Rutgers University Correctional Health Care (UCHC) has assisted us in expanding the use of telemedicine which improves inmate healthcare and reduces transportation costs. Additionally, the number of healthcare complaints has dropped by 50% since 2008 when UCHC assumed responsibility for the department's healthcare.

We are also in the process of implementing inmate kiosk services which will include electronic money transfer, an inmate system for filing grievances, debit cards, ordering commissary items and related electronic services.

Finally, the number of cell phones found in our facilities continues to decline. In calendar year 2009 there were 299 cell phones/paraphernalia found in New Jersey Prisons. In calendar year 2013, due to our aggressive efforts and zero tolerance, that number was reduced to 72 department wide. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the NJDOC staff because it is their determination and resourcefulness that has made the difference.

**I will be happy to answer your questions.**