

## **RE: Reinvestment of DOCCS Savings into State Programs**

Dear Legislator:

As a constituent and a state employee represented by the Public Employees Federation (PEF), I write to urge additional funding for the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), especially as it relates to services for incarcerated and previously incarcerated individuals.

**Reinvest Savings in Services:** The Governor's Executive budget notes a savings of \$112 million and 1,096 fewer positions at DOCCS due to the rightsizing of the number of correctional facilities. This savings should be reinvested into programs and services that will help individuals who are currently or have been incarcerated in the past.

- (1) **Jails to Jobs Program:** This is a good start. Part of this program would train Parole Officers for career planning and job placement. Other components of the initiative include transitional housing and vocational training. The Governor's Executive budget sets aside a small sum of \$4 million for the "Jails to Jobs" program. This amount should be expanded.
- (2) **Support Staff and Transitional Services:** Inside of correctional facilities there is a need for additional services related to mental health, wellness, education and job training so that incarcerated individuals have a better transition upon release. Post release, the state needs to invest in ensuring these services are available in communities statewide. In New York City and several other communities, there are robust public and private services for the formerly incarcerated. In upstate New York, the state needs to supplement these services by investing in state-operated mental health, addiction, wellness and other services to build a path to success.

**Increase Number of Parole Officers:** We need at least 500 more parole officers to make the movement to limit incarceration in New York state work. The current caseload for parole officers can exceed 40:1. As the number of parolees increases, there are also new requirements regarding the use of alternative hearing sites, which requires the transportation of parolees for hearings. In order to deal with the increase in the parolee population, address new legal requirements for processing parolees and assist parolees in accessing needed services, we need funding for 500 new parole officers in this year's final budget.

**Adjust 'Less is More' Law:** We are fast approaching the effective date of the "Less is More" law on March 1, 2022. We need to amend this law so that our parole officers can actually help the formerly incarcerated while also protecting local communities. While all parolees should have every opportunity and support needed for success, we believe strongly that parolees who abscond from custody or who are serving sentences for sex offenses -- failing to register as a sex offender; promotion of prostitution or sex trafficking; kidnapping and domestic violence -- should be subject to possible immediate reincarceration for any violation subject to a determination and sentence by an Administrative Law Judge. We need to amend the mandatory sentencing laws to provide parole officers the ability to reduce oversight of parolees who are working towards success and to dedicate additional time to those who need more guidance and oversight.

As my elected representative, I kindly ask that you work with the leadership in your house to expand services both in and outside of correctional facilities and to increase the number of Parole Officers and other state employees who provide the needed services to incarcerated individuals. Thank you for your time, attention and consideration of this very important issue.

Sincerely,

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