

**As prepared for delivery**

**Acting First Deputy Commissioner Cynthia Brann**

**Graduation Remarks**

**May 22, 2017**

- Good morning recruits, DOC staff, family, friends and distinguished guests.
- I am honored to welcome everyone to this very, very special day of celebration.
- To our Recruit Academy Warden, Pennye Jones – you and your outstanding staff have achieved the unimaginable and successfully trained 902 recruits, the largest class in NYC Correction history!
- This training occurred under challenging circumstances.
- Due to limited space, the class had to be divided in half, placed in separate locations, and scheduled over several tours.
- Yet you all rose to the challenge and made it look easy.
- I am so pleased to tell everyone that change is coming our way.
- The Mayor’s capital budget includes \$100 million dollars for a *new, state of the art correction academy*.
- In our more than 120-year history, we have never had a state of the art training facility, and we look forward to this new chapter.
- Congratulations on achieving this monumental goal and thank you to all for a job well done!

- To our new recruits, after months of rigorous classroom and on the job training as well as the daily testing of your mind and body, you made it through and now join our DOC family.
- In a few short moments, you will begin the official transformation from citizen to law-enforcement officer.
- Your job begins as you swear an oath – the same oath sworn by those who have come before you; who have had the courage and commitment to do a challenging and dangerous job that most people, do not understand and either *could not* or *would not do*.
- The academy staff have honed your skills in order for you to perform your duties well.
- The career path you take, how high you rise and what greatness you might achieve, is now in *your* hands.
- Winston Churchill once said, ***“THE PRICE OF GREATNESS, IS RESPONSIBILITY”***
- Two recent events demonstrate what it means to carry the weight of that responsibility.
- Officers Ubaldo Olivencia of AMKC may not always be the largest person in the room, but he has the courage of many.
- A short time ago, two other officers were being assaulted by a very large and powerful inmate.

- Officer Olivencia took his responsibility seriously and displayed bravery in coming to those officers' aid by stepping right into the middle of the fray to help bring the situation under control.
- Officer Mohammed Rahman of OBCC, while performing his duties with due diligence, likely saved a life or prevented serious injury, when during a random search found a 6-inch sharp metal object on an inmate.
- Others of you are unsung and unseen heroes and place responsibility above all else.
- Take new Officer Gatha Ballard, who is also a volunteer firefighter.
- Officer Ballard was out driving one Sunday morning in March when he saw a house with its kitchen on fire.
- He stopped his vehicle, forced his way into that house and got four people, including two children, outside, before the flames spread.
- *He saved their lives.*
- Or consider the quiet bravery of Officer Cleon Wiley.
- Officer Wiley is an only child, whose mother encouraged him to go into corrections.
- He showed great emotional strength during his time at the Academy.
- His mother died the night before his final exam... but Officer Wiley kept it inside. He showed up, took and passed that exam.
- Only after he finished did he let out his grief.
- In honor and memory of his mother, he is dedicating his career to her.

- The entire DOC family suffered great loss last year as well.
- I would like to take this moment to recognize Kirk and Shawana McDonald, who are here in the theater with us today. They are brother and sister-in-law of Alastasia Bryan, our officer who was tragically murdered last year.
- Mr. and Mrs. McDonald, could you please stand and be recognized?  
[PAUSE].
- Please know that we all feel your loss deeply.
- We pray that you and your family will find justice and eventually, peace.
- Your sister will always be a member of the DOC family and we will carry her with us in our hearts forever.
- I also want to recognize and send my condolences to Officer William Simmons and his family.
- Officer Simmons, please stand up. [Pause]
- Service to others and country runs deep in the Simmons family.
- CO William Simmons served in Vietnam, and joined our department in 2007 at the age of 55.
- His father, Clarke James Simmons, a highly decorated WWII and Vietnam Veteran, passed away last month.
- Clarke Simmons received a Purple Heart for surviving the Pearl Harbor attack, and he traveled the world sharing his story of heroism in articles and films.

- Last week, there were memorial services for him aboard the Intrepid Air, Sea and Space Museum.
- Officer Simmons, we thank you and your father for your service, and offer our prayers and appreciation during this difficult time. [Pause]
- For the past three years we have put in place some of the changes necessary to return DOC to its rightful place as America's leading correctional agency.
- We have come a long way with steady improvement, but we have much more hard work ahead of us.
- Each and every one of you is a change agent and the future leaders of this agency.
- You have become a part of the mission and are key players at a time of challenging, but worthwhile transformation.
- Great expectations will be placed on you.
- You add energy, strength, and purpose to your responsibility.
- We believe in you and are here to support you.
- You may have heard the recent announcement of a plan to close Rikers Island.
- For anyone concerned about their future, any plan to close and replace Riker's will take many years.
- Any reduction in our workforce will occur through natural attrition.
- There will be no lay-offs, and each and every one of you can be assured of a meaningful career in Correction for years to come.

- To the families and friends of our recruits, congratulations on the accomplishment of your loved one. You have much to be proud of.
- I ask for your help as soon as we leave here today.
- As much as your lives will be affected by the responsibilities of their new position, so will theirs.
- They need your support and understanding more than ever.
- Their job is tough. It is both mentally and physically demanding.
- They will see things and deal with events that can shake their foundation of faith in humanity.
- They will make personal sacrifices to be on post, unable to be present at family events and celebrations.
- Duty will call upon them to do the work that protect our communities against those who wish to do harm to others.
- And they will answer that call, with pride and professionalism.
- Therefore, I urge you to help them engage in interests and activities during off duty hours that bring them joy, relieve stress and keep them healthy.
- I am sure that you share our desire to have them around to enjoy long lives and long, successful careers.

In closing, I ask this of all of our staff here today:

- Resist the temptation to become cynical and judgmental.

- You, your career and your reputation will never be compromised if you stay true to your oath and treat those in our custody with dignity and respect.
- Remember to *Keep your head and your standards high for God gave his hardest battles to his strongest soldiers.*
- Finally, in the words of the philosopher *Horace*:
- **“BEGIN” “BE BOLD” and “ VENTURE TO BE WISE”**
- Congratulations Recruit Class # 01-FY-2017!
- On behalf of Commissioner Ponte and the rest of the members of the dais, we salute you!