

PRESS
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The New York City Department of Correction

For Immediate Release

February 13, 2015

Mayor De Blasio Attends DOC Correction Academy Graduation Ceremony at Lehman College

Recruit Officer Class Studied Revised Curriculum as Part of New Emphasis on Staff Recruitment, Training and Retention

The Bronx, New York – Mayor Bill de Blasio provided the keynote address at the New York City Department of Correction graduation and promotion ceremony today at Lehman College. One hundred forty-four recruit officers took the oath of office, along with 23 new and recently promoted civilian and uniform members of staff. This is the second Correction Academy class to graduate under Commissioner Joe Ponte, who has made improving staff recruitment, training and retention an important part of his agenda of meaningful reform.

"Under Commissioner Ponte's leadership, this graduating class has gone through a more rigorous screening and training process and is emerging better prepared, equipped with the right skills to keep our jails safe and work with specialized populations, including adolescents and the mentally ill," said Mayor de Blasio. "This administration is working hard to make our city's jails more humane institutions by reducing violence and enhancing safety—and that begins with a better trained workforce. Patrolling city jails takes place out of sight for most, and our correction officers don't always get the credit they deserve, so I'd like to thank the uniformed staff at the Department of Correction for answering the call to service."

Since Joe Ponte joined the Department last April, the Academy has undergone significant changes to emphasize acquisition of skills needed to keep inmates and staff safe. These changes include new leadership for the staff recruiting and training operations, additional mental health training for recruit officers, and the introduction of scenario-based training to familiarize recruits with common jail based activities and situations.

"We all have one mission, one goal, one thing that we all have to do: we have to make our jails safe and humane for our staff and our inmates. There is no wavering from that," Commissioner Ponte said in his remarks. "Then we can begin to deliver the treatment and the programs that are so beneficial for those that come into our jails."

The diverse graduating class of 101 men and 43 women comes from a wide range of backgrounds. Seventy-nine of the new officers have college degrees, including four who have a master's degree. Thirty-two have a bachelor's degree, and 43 have an associate's degree. The average age of the class is 31.

The class valedictorian is Michelle Williams, from Queens. The salutatorian is Brian Sokolowski, of Suffolk County. Both had a grade point average of 91.7; the tie was broken by their scores on the firing range.

Many members of the class of February 2015 have family members already on the job. These include five fathers, three mothers, one brother, one sister, three uncles, one aunt, one niece and five cousins. This class comes from across the region, with the Borough of Brooklyn contributing 42 members, the largest number. Thirty hail from Queens; 23 from the Bronx; nine from Manhattan; 11 from Staten Island; 12 from Nassau County; nine from Suffolk County; five from Westchester County; one from Putnam County, and one from Orange County.

Contact: Jack Ryan, (718) 546-0921, jack.ryan@doc.nyc.gov
Robin Campbell, (718) 546-0635, robin.campbell@doc.nyc.gov

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