

Introductory Remarks of:

**Commissioner James E. Dzurenda**

Connecticut Department of Correction

Good afternoon Chairman Looney, Chairwoman Janowski, and honorable members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee.

I am James E. Dzurenda, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Correction. It is indeed an immense honor for me to appear before you today as Governor Dannel P. Malloy's nominee as our State's Commissioner of the Department of Correction. It is only appropriate for me to first acknowledge my sincere appreciation to Governor Malloy and his executive team with oversight over criminal justice matters for their continued support. I am humbled by this opportunity and know that this position will present exciting challenges coupled with immense responsibility.

On a personal note, I am accompanied here today by my wife of 24 years, Bonnie. With her love and support throughout these years, I have

pursued my career through the ranks of the Corrections Department while raising our three young children. While my career has always been very important to me, my two most valued titles are that of husband and father. It is because of their steadfast love and support that I am here before you today able to offer my dedication to the Department of Correction and the State of Connecticut.

My career in Corrections began in 1987 at the age of twenty-one where I became a frontline Correction Officer at the Bridgeport Community Correctional Center. Prior to and during my employment, I achieved a Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry from Southern Connecticut State University followed by a Masters Degree in Business Administration from the University of New Haven.

In 1991, I began an upward ascent into the supervisory ranks of our agency and was promoted to Correctional Lieutenant, as a result of my experiences as an Officer, which included voluntary membership to one of the first established Correctional Emergency Response Teams in the agency. This team was implemented to respond to active statewide

correctional emergencies that required critical response to maintain or establish order within a prison environment. During my tenure as a Lieutenant, I was responsible for first responder supervisory response to various emergent situations, staff supervision and oversight of gang activities and investigations.

Within two years, I was promoted to Correctional Captain at one of the existing district offices where I continued to conduct investigations, oversaw the inmate grievance and internal disciplinary adjudication process. I was also temporarily assigned to our agency's Security Division, which again required exposure to more comprehensive investigations that at times included formal interactions with various law enforcement entities. I also assisted preparing emergency response plans and frequently conducted annual facility-based security audits.

In 2002, I was appointed to the position of Correctional Warden at the now closed Webster Correctional Institution in Cheshire. This was my first direct exposure to a sentenced offender population versus an accused population which is somewhat in contrast to my previous jail

experience. This facility was designated for a minimum-security male population which allowed me to delve into and gain essential experience in some of the more treatment related aspects of our field. Typically, and under optimal circumstances, this type of facility is the last stop before potential and preferably managed release back into the community occurs. The responsibilities of being a Warden are immense and the best and most appropriate manner to describe this position would be to equate it to managing all aspects of a controlled physical environment.

In 2005, I was assigned as Warden of the Garner Correctional Institution in Newtown. This facility was faced with an ongoing transition to implement a consolidation of mental health services for all adult male offenders with the agency who were determined to require significant or acute mental health related treatment services. The objective at hand was mission critical and involved active litigation, which ultimately led to a court-imposed settlement agreement. Our staff, in collaboration with UCONN – Correctional Managed Health Care, was tasked with

developing and implementing a methodology for treating mental health offenders. Through reliance of staff, a substantial long term effort to influence a unique cultural shift evolved. Under the strict audit mandates of the Office of Protection and Advocacy, we surpassed all expectations and further litigation was averted. Because of this success, Connecticut's Department of Correction has established itself as the national model and has been relied upon to provide assistance and/or expertise to several states throughout the country. Connecticut's Department of Correction is now a hallmark for the custody and treatment of mental health offenders throughout the country.

In 2009, I was promoted to the rank of District Administrator which encompassed oversight of eight facilities. In addition, during my tenure in this position, I was appointed by the Governor as a Board Member of the Retirement and Benefits Services Division of the Office of the State Comptroller. I currently remain an active member of this Board, which has allowed me to interact and experience a more global perspective of

government affairs. I also serve as a Board Member of the State's Sentencing Commission.

From 2010 to April of 2013, I served the agency as Deputy Commissioner of Operations. This position required oversight of all operational aspects of our sixteen facilities to include the Programs and Treatment Division. As you may be aware, the Connecticut system is one of only six agencies in the country that manage both accused and sentenced populations. Our facilities are composed of various levels of security from minimum, community release, to our highest maximum, Northern Correctional Institution. Other areas of responsibility included oversight of all inmate offender transportation, canine and tactical operations. It was a daunting task, but thanks to the competencies and commitment of our staff, it continued to be a rewarding experience.

In the role of Deputy Commissioner, I also took a lead roll in influencing and/or motivating the Department in a positive direction. These measures of success are evidenced by a reduction in the number of individuals incarcerated and impacted the rate of recidivism through

successful programming and community reintegration efforts. These markers have been accomplished with fewer staff members, in fewer facilities experiencing fewer incidents, and on a reduced budget. As a Department, we have worked to streamline operations and remain fiscally responsible and accountable to the citizens of Connecticut.

Upon the retirement of Commissioner Leo Arnone on April 1, 2013, I became the Interim Commissioner of the Department of Correction.

I have worked to expand the role of Corrections in concert with other law enforcement agencies and social services. I am a member of the Governor's Roundtable at the State's Emergency Operations Center. The Department of Correction is fortunate to employ many talented, skilled and trained staff members who have volunteered to assist in the restoration of public safety in the event of emergencies.

As Commissioner, I will increase the Department's efforts toward sustaining community safety. A 'Best Practices Unit' has been established to examine programming results throughout the country and establish Research Based Accountability on which to focus our efforts.

A challenge that faces the Department of Correction is successful re-entry of the offenders upon return to the community.

This challenge does not all fall on this Department alone. National research tells us that successful re-entry depends upon full collaboration between the Department of Correction, Department of Criminal Justice, and all the human service resources.

For this reason, I just recently met with the Connecticut State Police, Court Support Services Division, Social Services, Developmental Services, DMHAS, Board of Pardons & Paroles, community non-profits, and community faith-based services to work together to develop the first multi-agency collaborative mission statement for the Connecticut Department of Correction. Since all these agencies impact our success, it is that import for them to have input on our mission and goals.

My vision as Commissioner includes:

Bridging and enhancing relationships with community based and non-profit organizations.

Assist with addressing the stigma attached to individuals with a history of incarceration and the impact on meaningful employment.

Recognize that the burden of accountability remains on the offender or ex-offender to demonstrate consistent law-abiding behavior.

I would be happy to take any questions you may have.