

Remarks by Acting Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci
DOCCS Annual Memorial Service & Medals Ceremony
Albany Training Academy
June 13, 2013

Good afternoon. Thank you Joe, and thank you retired Commissioner Brian Fischer for your heartfelt remarks. I know that this event has always held special meaning for you, and all of us are grateful for your presence here today and your continued support of this occasion.

For me personally, it has always been a great honor to annually witness this solemn event, when we come together at this site, first, to recognize and honor those employees who have performed heroically, and second, to acknowledge and remember those employees who have paid the ultimate price -- losing their lives in the line of duty. Although I have been here for all thirteen prior events, this will mark the first occasion that I am here in my current role as Acting Commissioner.

As I have stated on many different occasions, I firmly believe that our agency is the finest corrections and community supervision department in the entire country. The reason I believe this is not because of the equipment we purchase, or the buildings we design, or the programs we create, or the innovations we craft, although all of these things are very important. Rather, the reason we are the best is because we recognize that our most valuable resource is all of the people who are employed with this agency -- people, who day in and day out, come to work in an oftentimes difficult and dangerous environment, perform their jobs to the best of their ability, and in the process, foster a safer environment for inmates, parolees, visitors and staff, while also enhancing public protection, and furthering the safety and well-being of all New Yorkers.

On this solemn day, it is the people of our Department -- past and present -- that we honor and salute. In this agency, though each of us is a distinct individual, we are all joined together as one, by a special bond that will last, even beyond death. The fact that so many people are here today to pay tribute to our honorees, and to show reverence for those employees who have lost their lives in the line of duty, is living proof of that special bond.

In many respects, it is as if our agency is one, very large family. While we may not share a common ancestry, what we do share is a common experience that is forged from the risks we confront on a daily basis and the mutual respect, support, understanding and appreciation we deliver to one another.

Very shortly, the names of the 42 men and women who lost their lives in the line of duty, will be read aloud. While we may not personally know the people whose names will be read aloud, nevertheless, what we do know is that they were and will forever continue to be a part of our large and very special, corrections and community supervision family. It is the reason why we are here today. Their sacrifice and the sacrifice of their families, are what compelled us to gather together. We share with them the drive, the passion, and the commitment, that come with a career in corrections and community supervision. And when we hear their names in memoriam, we too feel a profound sense of loss.

An example of the strength of this familial bond, and one that I will carry with me for the rest of my life, occurred at the wake of Mid-State Correction Officer Michael Renshaw, who, while off-duty, was killed by a crazed gunman. In a separate incident, retired Mohawk correction officer, Michael Rensear, was also killed by this same crazed gunman.

A significant number of DOCCS security staff and civilians came in person to pay their final respects to their fallen comrades. At the wake of Officer Renshaw, in single file procession, I witnessed several hundred uniformed security staff, and then civilians, walk slowly and respectfully past his casket. These employees came from a number of different correctional facilities, and many of them did not personally know either officer. But what they did know was that both these officers would forever be a part of the DOCCS family and therefore, they, and their immediate families, were deserving of a broad display of compassion and consideration.

That is what the DOCCS family does for its fallen comrades. We show up, we offer comfort, we mourn and we let people know that we will always be there for them. These are the same reasons why we are present today.

At the wake of Officer Renshaw, when the last DOCCS employee had paid his respects, and we were preparing to leave, the father of Officer Renshaw, with tears in eyes, profusely thanked Commissioner Fisher and me for the display of respect by so many DOCCS employees, and in a choked up voice, he said, he would never forget this – never.

It's a shame that oftentimes, in a cynical world, some people might find such a unified act of compassion so unusual, but not at the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. For 14 years now, we have met at this place to honor those who have lost their lives in the line of duty, and to honor those who have helped others in desperate need, to live and appreciate another day. For us, respect, compassion and caring aren't so unusual. It's simply what supportive families do.

And in this our 14th year, let us again come together as one family, and to our fallen comrades again say as one family: 'we will never forget – never.'

Thank you.