

## PUPPIES BEHIND BARS GRADUATION SPEECH

### BEDFORD HILLS DOG TAGS GRADUATION

#### ACTING COMMISSIONER ANTHONY

August 4, 2015

Thank you and good morning. It is an absolute delight for me to be here with you today on this very solemn and uplifting occasion. Let me begin by first acknowledging our wounded warriors who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and who have travelled here from distant states. On behalf of this entire agency, with its 29,000 employees, its 53,000 inmates and its 35,000 parolees, I want to express our deepest appreciation and our utmost respect for the services you have rendered on behalf of our country, and the enormous personal sacrifices you have made, so that all of us can continue to enjoy the freedoms that have been handed down from generation to generation. There will never come a time in this nation when we can ever sufficiently thank you for everything that you have done, but this program, Puppies Behind Bars, and everything that it stands for, certainly is an enormous step in the right direction.

I know that a program like this could never enjoy the success that it does unless it has a dynamic, energetic and completely committed leader at the very top, and that of course, is Gloria Gilbert Stoga. Gloria, thank you for all that you do.

But there are so many others affiliated with this program, without whom, a day like today would not be possible. Certainly, I would like to acknowledge all of the many donors whose generous contributions help to support this program. I would like to credit my two predecessors, retired Commissioners Glenn Goord and Brian Fischer, who now serve on the Board of Directors of this wonderful organization and who were staunch supporters of the program during their respective tenures.

I would also like to acknowledge the many community volunteers who give of their time and labor to work with the dogs in the community, and get them acclimated to day-to-day life outside of the institution.

And last, but certainly not least, I want to acknowledge the efforts of all of the inmate dog handlers. One of my principal responsibilities as Acting Commissioner is to provide each inmate with a program of treatment that is designed to allow him or her to live as a law abiding citizen. And so many of the programs that we provide are meant to address an inmate's particular deficits, whether it is related to history of substance abuse or alcohol abuse, or a lack of a basic education, or a history of violence, or a need for a vocational skill. The programs we provide are meant to address the particular deficits.

However, a select few programs within this agency will not only address an inmate's specific deficit, but they will also allow the inmate to grow as a person, and in the process, to give something back to society that is truly meaningful. And right at the top of the list of those select few programs, is the Puppies Behind Bars Program.

I know that you not only invested so much time and effort to patiently train each dog so that it can learn and respond appropriately to all of the necessary commands to become an appropriate service dog, but I also know that in the process, you gave away a piece of your heart to the dog that you have raised. Today must be a bittersweet day for you. The animal that stayed by your side all of these months and learned how to respond to every necessary command, is now ready to graduate and be the helpful companion, and the loyal and loving protector, of a wounded warrior that is here with us today. I know that it will not be easy for you to say farewell, but you should be comforted by the knowledge that your gift can provide a measure of healing to a deserving veteran, far beyond what any physician or medication could ever hope to achieve. This is an accomplishment that you can be proud of for the rest of your lives.