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DOCS-Parole merger saving more than expected

by Jordan Lipschik

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The heads of the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and the Division of Parole say the merging of their agencies has led to increased efficiency and has the potential to save millions more than originally projected.

"The decision to combine our departments was the right thing to do at the right time," said Brian Fischer, the commissioner of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision during an Assembly hearing in Albany last Thursday.

"We are responsible for the same client," Fischer continued. "We can create efficiency ... while actually enhancing the services for offenders."

"At every step taken, the commissioner and I have worked closely together," said Andrea Evans, the chairwoman of the New York state Division of Parole. "We are continually looking for new efficiencies."

Chairman of the Committee on Correction, Assemblyman Jeffrion L. Aubry, D-Queens, pointed out that when the departments were first consolidated, the executive branch projected that \$6.5 million would be saved between 2011 and 2012. According to written testimony provided to the committee, the savings could be as high as \$17 million for the fiscal year.

"What has been the driving factor of this additional savings and what cuts were taken from programs or program staff?" asked Aubry.

"The goal was set at \$6.5 million," explained Fischer. "Over time, we can, in fact, achieve the savings ... out of the overall budget of the two agencies combined. It's going to take a while, I can't tell you how much we've saved so far ... but the reality is that we're saving money by combining services ... we are saving money by basically controlling staff items."

"The savings will come ... We have not cut back on staff," Fischer firmly added.

In the fiscal year 2011-2012 enacted budget, DOCCS and the Board of Parole were combined, with the hopes that the new agency would streamline departmental functions, eliminate duplication of work, achieve better outcomes for more offenders and enhance public safety, while simultaneously reducing expenditures and saving taxpayer dollars.

"The Board of Parole has done a good job over the years in a difficult position, but they were never quite funded the way they should have been," said Fischer, expressing his own, personal

observation.

With the merger, Fischer reports that DOCCS, which has about 30,000 employees, is now responsible for approximately 95,000 inmates and people under community supervision.

"We're now a rather large agency ... savings are coming, and will continue to come this year," Fischer promised.