

## **Times Union Editorial- Corrections agency committed to better accountability**

By Anthony J. Annucci

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The state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision recognizes the need to constantly adapt, innovate and improve to meet the challenges facing our organization. Over the past two years, DOCCS has done just that, and we are determined to continue making real progress that will bring about greater accountability and professionalism in our department.

The most significant of these changes began two years ago when DOCCS completely overhauled its Inspector General's office. This decision was prompted in the wake of an investigation that led to criminal charges against a former staff member within that office. We quickly established a new unit — the Office of Special Investigations — staffed with new leadership from outside the department to ensure internal investigations are handled aggressively and appropriately.

Since its creation, OSI has bolstered its ranks with highly qualified investigators and analysts with decades of experience at places like the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, and the state Attorney General's office. OSI also parted ways with more than a dozen former investigators, who failed to meet the standards we expect. The result has been more effectiveness, accountability and integrity. OSI is relentlessly investigating allegations of employee misconduct, and it will continue to refer those cases for disciplinary action or prosecution when it is warranted.

DOCCS understands maintaining public safety requires teamwork, and the department has established strong working relationships with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's offices.

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Just last week, DOCCS and OSI were recognized by the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's office in Manhattan for their work in apprehending an employee allegedly involved in criminal wrongdoing.

In the office, OSI is better managing and reviewing the thousands of inmate, staff and citizen complaints filed on an annual basis through an intake and case management unit. A new analysis unit, headed by an analyst from the Office of the State Inspector General, will also examine DOCCS trends, emerging issues, investigative statistics and pro-active solutions. Both of these units are integral to our future success.

The vast majority of our staff members do the right thing when they come to work each day. The actions of a few bad apples does not reflect the culture of our department, nor should we let those rogue actions serve as the lens for which we judge our entire staff. Tens of thousands of hardworking DOCCS employees do a tough job with commitment and integrity, and we thank them for their service.

To maintain our forward momentum, we are continuously reviewing and improving our processes and protocols to ensure the safety of staff, inmates and the community. While no one is satisfied yet, these reforms are having a positive impact and moving us in the right direction.