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**DOCCS & Puppies Behind Bars Celebrate Training Graduation
at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility**

DOCCS Acting Commissioner and Major General Patrick Murphy, the Adjutant General of New York, attend Puppies Behind Bars Graduation Ceremony for returning overseas veterans

ALBANY – The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) and Puppies Behind Bars (PBB) today celebrated the training graduation of six Labrador retriever puppies at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. PBB trains inmates to become puppy-raisers to raise service dogs for wounded veterans and explosive detection canines for law enforcement.

"Anything we can do to thank our veterans and show them our support and gratitude should be done," said Acting DOCCS Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci. "I am extremely proud of not only our staff and the inmate puppy handlers, but also the Puppies Behind Bars staff, volunteers and financial supporters, for the work they put into the program, which is a unique way to show our appreciation for the sacrifices veterans have made by providing healing companions to those who sustained injuries protecting our freedoms."

Puppies Behind Bars instructor Peggy Vance said, "It is amazing to witness the transformation of the veterans in just sixteen days with their service dogs. They are leaving New York with a sense of hope and optimism for their future and a new-found sense of independence."

PBB, a nationally recognized privately funded non-profit organization, pays all puppy training and veteran's expenses. The organization began operations in July of 1997 at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and the program has expanded to include male inmates at Otisville, Fishkill and Downstate Correctional Facilities.

The puppies arrived at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility at eight weeks old and remain residents until they are approximately 24 months old and live and attend programs with the puppy-raiser during the duration of the training. Puppies are taught over 90 commands, including commands specifically designed by PBB to help mitigate PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury), the two signature injuries of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Puppies identified as candidates to be Explosive Detection Canines (EDC) are taught specific commands and skills necessary for their assignment.

As the end of training approaches, PBB pairs the dogs with returning overseas veterans from across the United States. The six veteran recipients of today's graduating class of puppies included wounded men who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The six men traveled to Bedford Hills Correctional Facility from Upstate New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Alabama, and California. Between the six men they have nine deployments overseas.

The three Marines and three Army veterans arrived in New York on December 6 and have spent the past several weeks being paired with their service dog learning how to work with their dog in order to lessen the impact of their PTSD and TBI.

During this two-phase training period, the veterans live with the puppies in the community while working closely with two PBB instructors and returning to Bedford Hills for training. The training in the prison consists of the puppy raisers teaching the veterans over 90 commands, how to read the dog's body language, basic medical care and what their rights are to enter public places. Today, there are 53 puppies in training as service dogs and 11 puppies in Explosive Detection Canine (EDC) training. Since the programs inception, 942 dogs have graduated from the program nationwide (673 in New York State) to become service dogs, Explosive Detection Canine (EDC), companion dogs, and therapy dogs.

Major General Patrick Murphy, the Adjutant General of New York, said "Puppies Behind Bars is an excellent program which benefits those who have served this nation in war, as well as the inmates who work to raise and train these dogs. I'm proud to be part of this event."

Krag Lambert, a Marine who came home to East Aurora, New York from Afghanistan in 2012, said "I realized I needed help to defeat my PTSD. I researched service dog schools and found PBB. During these past two weeks of training, I have felt more emotion than I thought I had. It will be a long road back, but with Gunny (his PBB service dog) by my side, I know I can beat my PTSD."

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