



For Immediate Release: August 22, 2016

Contact:

Thomas Mailey | Thomas.Mailey@doccs.ny.gov |
DOCCS Press Office | (518) 457-8182

**NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPERVISION &
PUPPIES BEHIND BARS CELEBRATE TRAINING GRADUATION AT OTISVILLE
CORRECTIONAL FACILITY**

*DOCCS Acting Commissioner attends 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 five Labrador retriever puppies at Otisville 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 Board of Directors member 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 arrive at Otisville Correctional Facility at eight weeks old and remain residents until they are approximately 24 months old, living with and attending 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 five veteran recipients of today's graduating class of puppies included wounded men and women who have served a total of 18 tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. The five men and women traveled to Otisville Correctional Facility from North Carolina, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, and have served with the Marine Corps, Army, Air Force and Navy.

The five veterans arrived in New York on August 7 and have spent the past several weeks being paired with their service dog learning how to work with them 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 Otisville 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 46 puppies in training as service dogs and 38 puppies in Explosive Detection Canine (EDC) training. With this graduation, 92 dogs will have been placed with veterans from around the country.

Kyra Maillard, a retired U.S. Navy veteran who has completed two tours in Iraq and three in Afghanistan said, "Puppies Behind Bars has tremendously and positively impacted my life. This is the most confidence I've had in myself in a long time, thanks to my service dog and life partner, Stella, and the puppy raisers who raised her."

###