Good Afternoon, Chairman Sarlo and members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. I appear before you for the third time since becoming Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Corrections, and as always, the challenge is enhancing the security and programming within our institutions while maintaining fiscal responsibility and accountability.

One of the tools we employ to meet that challenge is CHANGE. In the New Jersey Department of Corrections, CHANGE is an acronym for Challenge Historic Assumptions Nobly Generating Efficiencies. The CHANGE process is modeled after the successful CompStat program and enhances management transparency within the New Jersey Department of Corrections. CHANGE is a system designed to measure and manage the performance of all DOC institutions in four general areas: security, administration, programs and medical/mental health services. Meetings are held monthly and facility administrators are called on to discuss their overall performance and share best practices. Programming and security improvements, as well as overtime reductions, can be clearly attributed to the CHANGE process. Last year, overtime was reduced by 333,000 hours, for a savings of $13.3 million.

As I have indicated previously, state-sentenced inmates belong in state prisons and working closely with our partners at the Administrative Office of the Courts and the State
Parole Board we have made significant improvements in that area. The average count of state-sentenced inmates housed in county jails has dropped from 1,552 inmates in November 2009 when Governor Christie was elected to 251 inmates in January 2012, an 84 percent reduction for a cumulative savings of $34.2 million.

While expediting the movement of state-sentenced inmates from the county to our facilities, the department simultaneously maintained a 97.3 percent occupancy rate for general population beds. Maximizing the efficiency of inmate housing has allowed us to renovate aging housing units using consolidated areas for “swing space.”

The fiscal 2013 budget also reflects a decrease of an additional 135 positions for a savings of $15.4 million. These reductions will be sustained through normal attrition and will not affect operational efficiencies or result in any layoffs.

Successful reentry back into society makes good sense. It results in fewer victims and promotes public safety, and reduces recidivism and costs of incarceration. Programming is an important element of successful reentry, and the department offers a number of programs ranging from drug treatment and education to responsible parenting and anger management. In the interest of time, an appendix more fully outlining our programming is attached.

However, I would like to make special note of our “Engaging the Family” program, which helps to strengthen the bonds of family with the offender who “maxes” or completes his
sentence in prison. We are particularly proud that the American Correctional Association awarded the department national recognition for this innovative program.

Perhaps the most critical component to successful reentry and recidivism reduction is inmate education. There are four primary groups of inmates within our educational programs. First there are approximately 400 inmates under the age of 21 who do not have a high school diploma or GED and are required to attend classes. In 2011, the department awarded 95 high school diplomas for this group.

The second group consists of those inmates over the age of 21 who we encourage to achieve a General Education Diploma. In 2011, I’m proud to announce that of the 1,028 GED tests administered, 707 inmates passed, resulting in a passing rate of 69 percent.

The third group is our Basic Literacy group as mandated by legislation which required the department to develop a process to bring inmates up to a ninth grade reading level. A total of 5,302 inmates in 2011 fell within this category. For those we were able to test on two occasions, the results indicated that there was an increase of one full grade level from 5 to 6. While this is most encouraging, there is still much work to be done.

The final group includes inmates who voluntarily enroll in vocational programming. These programs provide the inmates with the skills and competencies required for a competitive labor market. Many of our programs lead to industry-based certificates in areas such as printing, food safety, and pesticide application. Others such as plumbing and
small engine repair are fully aligned with industry-skills standards. The department awarded more than 3,500 vocational certificates in the calendar year 2011.

Given the wide range of educational needs, our successes in this area are attributed to a dedicated staff and volunteers. In fact, the department has been able to double the number of volunteers contributing their time to inmate education in 2011.

Yet another component to successful reentry is drug treatment. It is estimated that 43 percent of the offenders in DOC facilities have a severe drug and/or alcohol problem. Currently the department contracts with the Gateway Foundation for 1,376 Therapeutic Community beds, located in six (6) different correctional facilities, for minimum and medium security inmates. As non-violent drug offenders are diverted through Drug Court, the department will be able to focus on higher security inmates who require addiction treatment.

The evidence-based Therapeutic Community in-prison treatment model is the principal treatment modality we use to address offender substance use disorders. Additionally, in cooperation with the Department of Human Services, severely addicted offenders are placed in licensed, secure residential drug treatment facilities under the Mutual Agreement Program.

Another crucial step in the continuum of care and successful inmate reintegration into society is placement in the Residential Community Release Programs. Eligible inmates must have full minimum security status; be within 24 months of a parole eligibility or
completion of sentence; have a positive psychological and medical evaluation within the past year; and have a good institutional record. The inmate must also be screened and approved by the Institutional Classification Committee and the Office of Community Programs. There are currently 19 contracted programs, with 2,657 beds. These programs provide a variety of assessment, counseling, education and employment services to facilitate the inmate’s gradual reintegration back into the community. Specialized halfway houses service those offenders with special needs, addiction issues and those who are ready for work release. Placement is based upon each inmate’s risk and treatment needs.

Since 1999, the department has experienced an offender population drop in excess of 20 per cent. This decrease was the result of many factors. I believe that the Governor's recent initiative to allow judges to deny bail to the most serious offenders while mandating drug treatment for non-violent drug offenders will allow this declining population trend to continue, while enhancing public safety. Based on the many efficiencies realized over the past two years, the department is in a better position to meet the challenges that are ahead. Our management team stands ready to partner with our sister agencies in the State, with the full support of our Governor, to implement clear and cohesive criminal justice strategies that will ensure that we are expending taxpayer’s dollars efficiently and effectively.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I’ll be happy to answer any questions you may have.