The New Jersey State Parole Board is committed to promoting public safety and fostering the successful rehabilitation of offenders by implementing policies that result in effective parole case management for the 15,639 offenders, including 6,928 sex offenders under supervision. With responsible parole decision making and the successful and sustainable reintegration of offenders into society by utilizing evidence based practices, the State Parole Board continues to seek improvement in the lives of our offenders, their families, their communities, as well as decrease recidivism. We strive to develop and maintain partnerships with local, state and federal law enforcement, as well as, community based organizations, in furtherance of our joint missions of promoting public safety and successful and sustainable offender reentry into the communities we serve. The State Parole Board continues to implement evidence-based practices in the supervision of offenders. In recognition of this practice, in Fall 2015, the National Institute of Corrections and the Association of Paroling Authorities International selected the New Jersey State Parole Board to be the first parole board in the nation to participate in a complete evaluation of agency operations, under a grant to “develop and validate a measuring tool to assess the performance of state paroling authorities through an evaluation of evidence-based practices”. New Jersey is setting the standard against which the performance of paroling authorities will be measured.

As part of last year’s testimony, I spoke of the review conducted by members of the Office of Legislative Services Audit team and their findings that the corrective measures taken by the State Parole Board rendered our agency in compliance with previous concerns. In January 2016, the Office of Legislative Services Audit team conducted a follow up compliance review and once again concluded the New Jersey State Parole Board was in full compliance of all recommendations and findings found within the January 21, 2014 report.

The State Parole Board’s Veterans Reentry Initiative, now in its fifth year, continues to partner with multiple local, state and federal agencies to meet the service needs of veterans who have served our Country and have become involved in the criminal justice system. The Veterans Reentry Initiative focuses on providing diversion alternatives in collaboration with County Prosecutor’s Offices, as well as post incarceration services for veteran offenders in the treatment of mental health, substance abuse, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and traumatic brain injuries.

In an effort to reduce the number of homeless veterans in our communities, this initiative provides housing resources for veterans through our statewide network of collaborative partners. Approximately 1,600 offenders presently under NJ parole supervision have previous military
service, however not all are eligible for direct US Veteran's Administration assistance. The State Parole Board would like to specifically thank the NJ Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA) for providing eligible veteran offenders access to their residential Veterans Haven North and Veterans Haven South programs. In addition, the State Parole Board’s Veteran Offender Reentry Hotline has received and processed over 285 service assistance requests for Veterans involved in the criminal justice system.

The State Parole Board has continued our partnership with the NJ American Legion and the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development in hosting “Hiring Our Heroes” employment fairs and “Regional Veteran Resource and Opportunity” events, including the grand opening of the Sansone Auto Mall Military Training Center in Avenel in October 2015. The State Parole Board has also partnered with the NJ Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve to coordinate “Show of Strength” ceremonies. These ceremonies serve to recognize several Sheriff Departments that support veterans receiving military deployments. The County Sheriff’s Departments of Atlantic, Cape May, Somerset, Salem, Mercer and, most recently, Monmouth County have been recognized as employers that support our veterans. We are coordinating the recognition of Bergen and Burlington County Sheriff’s Departments and look forward to working with the remaining County Sheriff’s Departments.

Through the collective efforts with the NJ Department of Corrections, New Jersey is widely recognized as a national leader in the reduction of recidivism and reducing its prison population. Since 1999 the State’s recidivism rate has dropped from 48% to approximately 31%. While New Jersey’s prison population has declined more than 31% during the same time frame. A recent publication issued by The Sentencing Project, entitled U.S. Prison Population Trends 1999-2014, which stated “Twelve states have produced double-digit declines within this period. Four states have reduced their prison population by over 20%. Of those four states mentioned, New Jersey produced the highest decline at 31%, followed by New York (28%), Rhode Island (25%) and California (22%). We would like to thank the Legislature for supporting our efforts which have led to these results.

The “Second Chance Act Adult Offender Reentry Program for Planning and Demonstration Projects” grant operating within Union County, which I spoke about last year, is an example of a successful partnership with County Social Services and the Faith Based entities and community partners in providing aid to offenders returning to their home communities. It is my pleasure to inform this committee that the State Parole Board received a second consecutive round of funding from the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance to fund the program within Union County through September 2018. This program will serve to strengthen the current model of reentry and continue to build strategic partnerships to facilitate intensive case management while providing needed assistance to offenders with supportive housing, employment and mental health services.

The State Parole Board and the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development continues its partnership, through the Parolee Employment Placement Program (PEPP) in providing offenders needed resources and assistance for a successful transition into the job market with the goal of ensuring long term employment. Since its inception in FY 2012, Parolee Employment Placement Program (PEPP) providers have obtained employment for 1,154 supervised offenders. I spoke last year about a 3 year longitudinal recidivism study that would
be conducted by the end of 2015. The study has been completed and the recidivism rate for those participating in the Parolee Employment Placement Program (PEPP) is 24.4%.

The State Parole Board received grant funding administered through the Division of Criminal Justice in 2014 and 2015. Working collaboratively with the New Jersey State Police, this funding was utilized to automate the real-time population of the FBI’s National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Supervised Release File with data for the greater than 15,000 offenders currently under supervision within the State Parole Board’s case management system.

The system has been fully operational since September 17, 2015. As of this date, any law enforcement contact within the United States with any parolee under State Parole Board supervision resulting in an NCIC inquiry returns to the inquiring law enforcement officer the supervision status of the parolee, as well as, other identifying details. Simultaneously, an automatic real-time alert is sent to the Division of Parole supervising parole officer regarding the law enforcement inquiry. Of special significance, on March 14, 2016 the Public Technology Institute (PTI) announced that the State of New Jersey had won a 2016 Technology Solutions Award in the category of Public Safety for this project.

The State Parole Board has also submitted a grant application through the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Program for funding of a Smart Supervision for Reduction of Violence Initiative (SSRVI). This effort would focus upon increasing the successful reintegration of those offenders who are convicted of violent offenses and are statutorily-required to serve a period of mandatory supervision. The State Parole Board recognizes that offenders convicted of violent offenses not only face the same re-integration hurdles as the general offender re-entry population, but pose a higher risk of threat to the communities to which they return.

In closing, the State Parole Board will continue to collaborate with partnering law enforcement and state agencies, as well as to maximize technologies in its implementation of evidence based best practices in the field of community supervision. These innovative efforts further promote public safety and seek to improve the quality of community based programs to provide every available opportunity for successful offender reintegation.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions at this time.