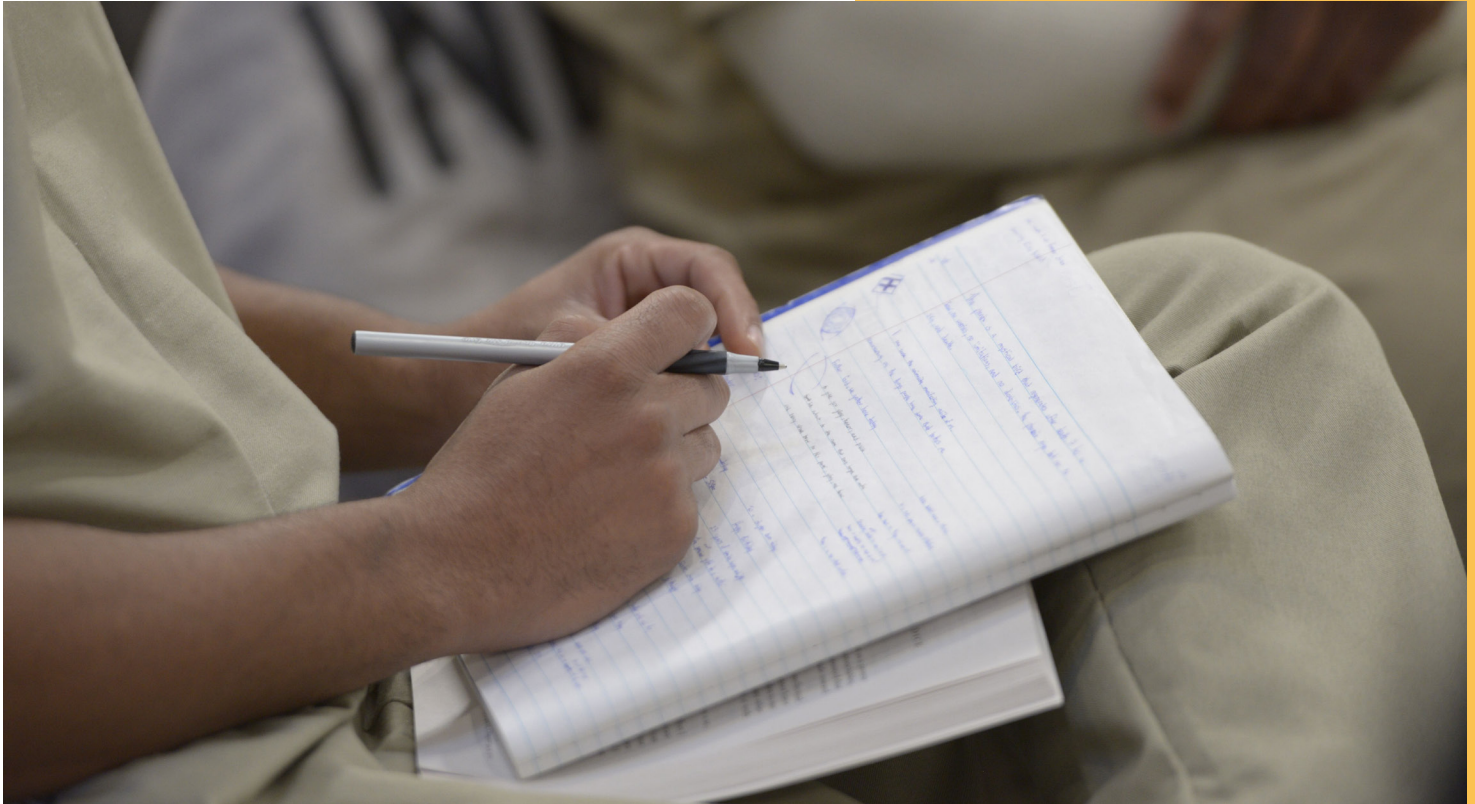


# INSIDE CORRECTIONS

NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



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## FIVE QUESTIONS

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FEBRUARY 2020



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*Cover photo: Incarceration is an educational experience for this  
offender.* Photo by Nick Donnoli



# INSIDE WORD

with Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.

This month, we celebrate Black History. As I think about the future of African American leadership, I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the number of young black men and women currently incarcerated in New Jersey -- a state among the most disproportionate levels of African American incarceration in the nation.

To address the issues of systematic racial disparities in our judicial system, Governor Murphy reconvened the Criminal Sentencing and Disposition Commission, a significant step toward addressing the lack of proportionality in the state's sentencing laws.

The New Jersey Department of Corrections is proud to be part of this bipartisan Commission, led by Former Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court Deborah Poritz, with support from the Attorney General's Office, Senate President Steve Sweeney, Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, Senator Sandra Cunningham, Senator Nellie Pou, former President of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives Jiles Ship and others.

In Nov. 2019, the Commission issued a series of recommendations targeted at understanding and addressing the systematic barriers impacting incarceration levels, among them, the elimination of mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses, to be applied retroactively. Retroactive provisions allow inmates currently serving sentences on such crimes to seek early release upon parole eligibility. The nine recommendations also included a resentencing mechanism for juveniles sentenced as adults to long prison terms and a compassionate release for terminally ill inmates.

Cost-savings from anticipated reductions in the prison population arising from these reforms are intended to support recidivism reduction and community crime prevention programs, aiming to break the cycle of incarceration and build stronger communities in the state where people of color comprise 76.5% of the prison population.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Marcus O. Hicks". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.



*Dr. Mark Edwards of Princeton University interacts with a student at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility.*

# EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM

## *New Jersey's Incarcerated Can Earn Time Off Sentences through New Education Incentive Initiative*

By Liz Velez

The New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) has introduced a new educational incentive initiative through which individuals now have the opportunity to earn time off their sentences for the successful completion of credit-bearing courses.

remission from time of sentence for achievements in education and workforce training and dovetails with the Department's pre-release employment navigation efforts to build partnerships with employers as incarcerated individuals prepare to return to the workforce.

Select credit-bearing courses provide

“Education is a powerful tool to reduce

recidivism and support successful reentry,” said Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq. “By incentivizing education, we are able to foster personal development and job-readiness. We are confident that this new initiative will encourage more individuals to enroll in educational and workforce programming that can give them the skills needed for success after release.”

Eligible courses include high school equivalency, post-secondary degrees and vocational certifications, such as plumbing, drywall, small engine repair, heating and ventilation, electrical, carpentry, welding, culinary arts, weatherization, alternative energy and green technology, among others. Each class intends to develop an individual’s skill-set to help those nearing release smoothly transition into a modern employment market.

Courses range from 0.2 to 20 credits,

depending on the duration of the course. For example, completing a course in green technology and small engine repair would earn one credit, while obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree would earn 20 credits.

One credit amounts to one day of remission time, and there are no limits to how many credits an individual can earn.

In accordance with state law, remission credits apply to the maximum release date only and not the parole eligibility date.

Anyone who completes a course by or participates in the initiative after the effective date of January 21, 2020, is eligible, provided he or she is not within 210 days of the maximum release date.

In 2019, more than 3,800 individuals earned a vocational certificate or post-secondary degree while incarcerated, and more than 7,000 certificates of completion were awarded for Career Technical Education programs. During that time, 484 individuals received a high school equivalency diploma, and 600 individuals enrolled in post-secondary courses.



Photo by Nick Donnoli

*A Garden State Youth Correctional Facility student highlights a key excerpt during a lecture.*

# ABOVE AND BEYOND

## *Corrections USA Honors NJDOC Staff Members*

By Matt Schuman

When Corrections USA (CUSA), a non-profit advocacy organization representing thousands of correctional professionals nationwide, presented 14 individuals with the CUSA Valor Award for saving lives and protecting the public, the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) was well represented.

Four members of the NJDOC staff were recognized at the annual CUSA Awards Gala, which was held February 5 at Harrah's Las Vegas Hotel and Casino. The honorees were Senior Correctional Police Officers Adrienne Campen and Michael Ambrozaitis, both of Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, who while off duty responded to the scene of an accident, where they provided first aid and redirected traffic; and Correctional Police Sergeants Nicholas Stanicki and Donald McGee, both of East Jersey State Prison, who assisted a state trooper in arresting the driver of a tractor trailer after the driver had fled the scene of an accident.

“We congratulate these individuals for their displays of heroism.” said NJDOC Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq. “It’s an honor to have those who demonstrate selflessness and service to others represented on our front lines.”



*Officers Adrienne Campen and Michael Ambrozaitis, both of Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, were among those recognized by Corrections USA.*

While on Route 206 in January 2019, in the pitch-dark hours of the morning, Campen drove by a two-car accident without any police presence or emergency responders and stopped without hesitation. Ambrozaitis was headed to work on the same road and also stopped to help.

Campen, a former emergency medical technician who has served as a first responder training instructor for the NJDOC, provided first aid to a badly injured driver – who coincidentally also was an NJDOC employee. Meanwhile, Ambrozaitis checked on the other driver, then used a flashlight to redirect traffic from the chaotic intersection until an ambulance arrived.

That same month, Stanicki and Donald

McGee were driving on the New Jersey Turnpike when they came upon a tractor trailer engulfed in flames. As the duo approached the scene, they quickly noticed something even more bizarre: a shirtless man running from the accident scene with a state trooper behind him in pursuit.

With the shirtless man headed in the direction of oncoming traffic, Stanicki and McGee left their vehicle to assist the state trooper. Fortunately, the three law enforcement officers were able to subdue the man before an already-volatile situation worsened.

Also among those honored for their heroism were Correctional Police Sergeant Marco Fernandes and Senior Correctional Police Officer Frederick Warren of the New Jersey

Juvenile Justice Commission.

“The valor displayed by this year’s outstanding honorees serves as a shining example of the noble service and sacrifices of correction officers,”

said CUSA Chairman Jimmy Baiardi. “They will never get the real recognition they deserve for their role in keeping our communities safe, which makes events like our annual awards gala all that more important.”



*“It’s an honor to have those who demonstrate selflessness and service to others represented on our front lines.”*



**DOES YOUR UNIT HAVE CONTENT YOU’D LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT ON SOCIAL MEDIA?  
CONTACT: JOHN.COKOS@DOC.NJ.GOV**

# FIVE QUESTIONS

*with Deputy Chief of Staff Victoria Kuhn, Esq.*

By Matt Schuman

Victoria Kuhn's connection to the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) dates back to her junior year of high school, when she found a part-time job at Cumberland County Jail and regularly interacted with classification officers from Bayside State Prison.

Her senior thesis at Drew University examined the social aspects of correctional facilities. While attending the Seton Hall University School of Law, she immersed herself in the school's Prison Reform Clinic.

In fact, after landing a job at a high-powered Manhattan law firm after graduating – a position that had nothing to do with the world of corrections – Kuhn quickly became bored and took a significant pay cut to become an assistant prosecutor in Cumberland County. So began her career in law enforcement. She moved on to the Office of the Attorney General, where she worked closely with NJDOC staff in several capacities. Then, in 2007, Kuhn accepted a position with the Department as Director of the Equal Employment Division (EED), which ensures that employees are provided with a work environment free from discrimination or harassment. In 2015, she transitioned



*Victoria Kuhn is the newly appointed Deputy Chief of Staff.*

to Director of the Office of Employee Relations (OER), which is responsible for hearing grievances as well as disciplinary appeals. On January 13, 2020, she was appointed to the position of Deputy Chief of Staff.

Kuhn, the mother of two preteens, recently reflected on her journey and her new responsibilities during a discussion with Matt Schuman of the Public Information Office.

***By the time you became an NJDOC***



***employee, your involvement with the Department already was extensive. Was that by design?***

I was driven to be a prosecutor, and I found that I liked working in and around law enforcement. In Cumberland County, I was a Megan's Law prosecutor, among other things. At the time, various sexually violent predator bills were being passed, and a facility to house sexually violent predators – a collaboration between the Department of Corrections and Human Services – was being planned. So the Attorney General's Office was canvassing prosecutors' offices to see if anyone out there was handling that kind of work. I was, and they asked if I'd join the AG's Office.

I was able to come in on the ground floor and have input on how this would be implemented. What should such a facility look like? What are the responsibilities of the Department of Corrections versus the responsibilities of Human Services? What are the legal responsibilities for the AG's Office? What are the due process implications for somebody who is committed?

That's how my work with the AG's Office started, but things quickly expanded. I began working on excessive force cases, and through that, I spent time at New Jersey State Prison. And that is when I was hooked. I was so struck by the camaraderie. Not only did the officers know their jobs and understand their responsibilities,

but they genuinely liked each other and supported each other. You're together eight hours a day in a situation where someone could be harmed at any time. So you're watching your own back and the backs of your co-workers, and they're watching your back. I'm not suggesting there wasn't camaraderie at other places I've been, but it's different in the NJDOC.

***How did your move to the NJDOC come about?***

There were two openings in the Department: EED and OER. I'd been doing some labor law, so EED seemed like a natural fit. As it turned out, I eventually moved over to the OER as well.

***Did you have any apprehension about possibly being viewed as the Department's disciplinarian?***

Absolutely. I was going from a position where I was defending custody staff in court to a position where I was reviewing whether or not staff had engaged in misconduct – and if they did, I had to impose whatever discipline was appropriate.

There were conversations I had with the unions in the beginning where I'd assure them that they'd get a fair shake. I'd say, 'Present what you have, and we'll evaluate everything.' We had no vested interest in the outcome. Our job was to find out to the best of our ability exactly what happened. If there was a policy

violation, then we had no option but to bring discipline.

Were there cases that I'd wake up thinking about at 2 o'clock in the morning? Yes, but at the end of the day, I'm a firm believer in due process.

### ***Can you talk about your recent promotion?***

When the Commissioner (Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.) asked me if I'd be interested in the position, it was a surprise, and it was an honor.

The Chief of Staff's Office handles a lot of work involving unions, and fortunately, I've been able to forge some strong working relationships with the unions. There are times when we agree to disagree, but I respect them, and I hope they respect me. They're honest and direct, and I feel fortunate that I have an opportunity to continue working with them.

Another reason I'm so excited about my new position is the staff wellness component. As a Department, we do the safety and security aspect very well and inmate programming, education/vocational services, social services and reentry quite well. Yet, in terms of staff wellness, we have some work to do. I couldn't be happier about the prospect of getting out into the facilities, meeting with staff and getting recommendations from them on what we can do to make their lives a little better while they're here.

### ***What is your advice to a young man or woman who is considering a career path similar to yours?***

A couple of my colleagues now have kids who are old enough to be in law school, and they'll reach out to me to ask about internships. I let them know that if you feel motivated by the good work we do, and if public service is important to you, then I encourage you to consider the Department of Corrections.



## **Stop the Spread of Germs**

With cold and flu season in high gear and growing concerns about the Coronavirus, we want to remind all visitors of a few helpful tips to stop the transmission of germs:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Cover your cough or sneeze
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Stay home when you are sick, except to seek medical attention
- Wash your hands often with soap and water at least for 20 seconds



Representatives of Newark-based Forem Facility Management, LLC, host a pre-employment screening event at Northern State Prison.

# A WAY FORWARD

## *NJDOC Provides Employment Pathways for Ex-Offenders*

By Liz Velez

In a grand gymnasium, retrofitted as a meeting space, nine men seeking their next employment opportunity gathered to learn about job openings with Forem Facility Management, LLC (FFM). However, this wasn't a traditional job fair. It was a pre-employment event that included interviews with FFM representatives at Northern State Prison for individuals processing out of the prison system within the next 30 days.

FFM is a Newark, New Jersey-based third-party warehouse management and distribution facility contracted to manage a full line of perishable products for major grocery chains across the East Coast.

This event is part of the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) Providing Access to Community Employment (PACE) initiative designed to eliminate socio-economic inequalities often encountered by those released from custody, as part of the Department's efforts in support of reentry.

PACE seeks to connect the incarcerated with the tools and resources for successful reintegration into society, reducing recidivism and establishing a pipeline of trained, job-ready candidates, ready for the modern job-market, benefiting the local economy. Program support includes

resume writing, job searching, application submission, interviewing skills and, in partnership with the NJDOC's Department of Social Services, assistance with obtaining necessary pre-employment documentation, such as birth certificates, Social Security cards and state identification.

"For most individuals attending today's event, this is their first interview experience and an opportunity to put the skills they learned here to work," said Markim Shakur-Purvis, NJDOC PACE program coordinator. "Not only do we try to prepare them for the job market, but we seek to build relationships with open-minded employers, like FFM, who understand the value in giving eager individuals willing to put in the work a second chance."

FFM has a history of extending employment to the incarcerated; in fact, more than 100 of their 500 employees are currently residing in a halfway house.

"At FFM, we don't care about your past, just your future," said Operation Manager Roberto Hernandez. Some of the most dedicated employees are from halfway houses and progress rapidly into management positions."

FFM currently has the bandwidth to hire 80 second-shift employees to serve as "order-pickers" in their facility, tasked with collecting the items ordered by their grocer customers and prepping those items -- comprised of meat, produce and flowers -- for distribution.

Through FFM, PACE attendees have the opportunity to earn a full-time position with a comprehensive union benefits package. Selected individuals will also undergo extensive training that includes the safe operation of a Power Jack and Hi-Lo equipment.

***"Not only do we try to prepare them for the job market, but we seek to build relationships with open-minded employers."***

"This is my first interview, and thanks to PACE, I have the skills I need and the practice to land a job," said Almuta Thomas. "I'm grateful FFM came here. This opportunity is a big step and lets me leave a positive legacy for the others to follow."

PACE launched last spring as a pilot program at Northern State Prison, Bayside State Prison, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility, Southern State Correctional Facility and South Woods State Prison. The initiative also includes job fairs at the pilot facilities, and most recently, Amazon hired 11 individuals at NSP as part of the first-ever PACE hiring event.

For more information about the PACE program, email, [PACE@doc.nj.gov](mailto:PACE@doc.nj.gov).

