



BROOME COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Frederick J. Akshar II

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BROOME COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE PRESS RELEASE

Sheriff Akshar Delivers 2023 Corrections Progress Report

(TOWN OF DICKINSON) Joined by members of the Corrections Reentry Reform Advisory Group and the Broome County Sheriff's Corrections Division, Sheriff Fred Akshar delivered the 2023 Corrections Progress Report, outlining over a dozen positive changes, reforms and improvements made at the Correctional Facility over the past year.

"We hit through ground running in our first year and never looked back," said Sheriff Fred Akshar. "These positive changes only happened because of the tireless work of our Advisory Group and the dedicated men and women working in the Correctional Facility every single day to make a safer, healthier environment for everyone in the facility. We still have more work to do, but I can say unequivocally that the Broome County Correctional Facility is in a much better place and headed in a much better direction today than one year ago."

Highlights of the 2023 Progress Report include:

Reentry Reform Advisory Group

First Convened in December 2022, before Sheriff officially sworn into office, the Reentry Reform Advisory Group is comprised of local healthcare, workforce and social service professionals, advocates and previously incarcerated individuals. The group has met monthly to discuss Correctional Facilities issues and improvements.

Correctional Facility Staffing Crisis and Solutions

The Correctional Facility started 2023 with a shortage of 38 open positions in January. With the help of Director of Community Engagement and Recruitment, Charles Woody, the BCSO was able to recruit, train and retain 31 new Corrections Officers. The largest and most diverse class of recruits in the history of the Broome County Sheriff's Office.

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Expanded Visitation Hours

January 2023 began with 15 hours of visitation available per week. By September 2023, the BCSO more than tripled visitation to 47 hours available per week to loved ones of incarcerated individuals. The BCSO also removed old requirements on visitors to allow for more flexibility to accommodate visitors with work or other schedule restrictions.

New Leadership and Significant Policy Changes

Major Robert Charpinsky hired as Jail Administrator of the Broome County Correctional Facility and oversaw a comprehensive review and update of policies for Use of Force, De-escalation and Duty to Intervene.

Expanded Support and Education Programs

Starting with Zero Correctional Facility Programming in January 2023, the BCSO restored and added over 30 hours of weekly programming and services available to incarcerated individuals, including a new Facility Garden, through partnerships with community organizations like the Broome County Council of Churches, Mothers and Babies Perinatal Network, the Addiction Center of Broome County, Rise Domestic Violence Services, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County, Inside Out Network, League of Women Voters and more.

New Corrections Criminal Investigations Team

The BCSO added 2 full-time investigators, an investigations supervisor and a Corrections K-9 Unit to help ensure the safety and security of those living and working in the facility. With the added focus on investigations, the team was able to double the number of felony and misdemeanor charges in 2023 vs. 2022.

Introduced New Digital Learning Initiative

L.E.A.R.N. (Life Skills, Education and Accountability for Reentry Navigation) provides over 60 hrs of education, self improvement and workforce development training on each inmate's tablet. Inmates have access to courses during daytime hours and throughout the night. Since November 2023, over 400 inmates have completed over 4,800 individual training courses.

Improving Food Quality

The BCSO worked to address longstanding issue of food quality provided at the Correctional Facility by renegotiating Broome County's contract with the Correctional Facility food service provider. The new contract substantially improves the quality of food for both incarcerated individuals and corrections staff while remaining consistent with the NYS Commission on

Corrections Nutritional Standards.

Holding Medical, Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Treatment Providers Accountable

A Comprehensive Audit initiated by the BCSO and conducted by the Broome County Department of Audit and Control found over \$257,874 in overpayments and contracted service disparities. Provider agreed to meet the staffing and service requirements listed in the contract and repay the overpayments via credited deductions in its monthly invoices in 2024.

Ensuring Incarcerated Individuals Receive the Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) They Need

In early 2023, we commissioned an Audit of Medical Services to assess and analyze the needs of the inmate population, requirements of state regulations and compare them to services currently provided by contracted medical providers. We also Instituted weekly medical treatment meetings with Command Staff and Medical, Mental Health and SUD treatment providers to review cases and resolve issues and added a new Forensic Services Program Coordinator to examine workflows, barriers to treatment both during incarceration and at time of release, identifying highest needs and where resources must be allocated.

Any inmate entering the facility seeking MAT can receive it. After incarceration, inmates are reassessed to ensure those who initially refused treatment have another chance to enter the program. Our provider is working to hire additional staff to perform regular assessments for inmates for changes to current prescription or late entry into the MAT program. Before every discharge, scheduled or not, all inmates are assessed and connected to the appropriate continuity of MAT care before leaving the facility.

Total inmate participation in the MAT more than doubled in 2023 compared to 2022.

Reforming the Inmate Request and Grievance System

The BCSO added three levels of oversight to incarcerated individual Requests and Grievances, along with a new position of Grievance Supervisor. All requests are now reviewed by Receiving Officer, Supervisor and Command Staff to ensure accountability.

Refocusing on Successful Reentry Navigation

All discharged inmates are now provided with Sheriff IDs as needed to help with access to healthcare and social services. Our new full time Discharge Planner's sole responsibility is connecting each soon-to-be released inmate with the services and support they need before they exit our facility so they can make a more successful transition as they reenter the community. The BCSO Forensic Services Program Coordinator is completing a comprehensive assessment

on critical times and essential needs for discharged inmates along with assisting the Discharge Planner by coordinating with outside agencies to ensure access to housing, transportation and healthcare for formerly incarcerated upon release. The team is also ensuring that unscheduled releases have access to food, clothes and other immediate needs.

Other First Year Improvements at the Correctional Facility

Sheriff Akshar also included several quality-of-life improvements, including policy changes that enabled better access to hygiene products and clean underwear for incarcerated individuals, a pull-up bars added to pods for fitness and recreation, and the replacement of dilapidated office chairs that were literally held together with towels, duct tape and old footwear in January 2023.

Continuing to Make Improvements in 2024

In the coming year, the BCSO is partnering with the Addiction Center of Broome County to assist with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment at the Correctional Facility and expanding our partnership with the Southern Tier AIDS Program, utilizing Opioid Settlement Funds to hire an additional Discharge Planner. The new positions will be instrumental in tracking success and recidivism connected to the Reentry Program in 2024.

The BCSO will also be adding Commissary Vending Machines to every housing unit to make popular commissary items regularly available.

To increase safety security and accountability for both the incarcerated and corrections staff, the BCSO is completing a facility-wide security camera upgrade and tripling the number of new body cameras in use at the facility.

The BCSO will also be implementing a new Gang Intelligence Unit to monitor gang activity within the facility, share intelligence and coordinate with regional law enforcement partners.

“One thing you cannot measure is the palpable change in culture, atmosphere and attitude throughout the Correctional Facility,” said Sheriff Fred Akshar. “None of these changes could have been possible without the support and investment from our community and the hard work and dedication of our corrections staff. We are all committed to the success of everyone who lives and works at the Correctional Facility, and we will continue working every day to ensure that time spent within those walls is productive, leads to better outcomes and a stronger, safer community for our families. It’s a new day.”

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