



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 4, 2015

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO ATTENDS AND DELIVERS REMARKS AT
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION GRADUATION**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you very much, Deputy Commissioner, and good morning, graduates.

Audience: Good morning, sir.

Mayor: Come on, graduates. Good morning, graduates.

Audience: Good morning, sir.

Mayor: There we go. There we go. We are very, very proud of you today. But I think you need to, once again, understand what it means to your families that you have reached this point, that you have worked so hard – and we know you’ve worked so hard for this day. And I know you feel a lot of pride, and you deserve to feel a lot of pride but, I can tell you, I think your families are probably bursting with pride. So, families, let’s hear it one more time. Let’s really give them the love and the appreciation.

[Applause]

I was proud to address you in August, as you first answered the call to duty – as you embarked on this training. And everyone made clear, the training wasn’t easy – it was not for the timid. It was for the bold. It was for the strong. And I can say, today, I am even prouder to be with you now because you have run the race, and you have shown what you are made of. And there are now 592 new members of New York’s boldest, and that is a great thing for New York City. And I also want to comment on the 70 newly promoted civilian and uniform members. Congratulations on your hard work and your accomplishment today.

[Applause]

To all of you graduating today – to all of you about to take the oath – you comprise the largest academy class in this department’s entire history. And we need you. And you couldn’t be here a moment too soon. This is a historic moment, and you are making that history. Again, I know it was not easy. I know there was studying, there was exams, there was all the training, all the challenges, but that’s what it had to be to prepare you for the rigors of what you face up ahead. You are joining the ranks of a department – a department that is changing, a department that is reaching high – as the deputy commissioner said, a department that is in the process of making history, as it reaches the highest level it ever has attained. This will not be easy. This will take months and, in fact, years of work. But you are joining at a powerful moment, and you will be agents of positive change, and that is something to be very, very proud of.

I want to thank the leadership with us today, Commissioner Ponte and Chief of Department Murphy. I want to thank the Commanding Officer of the Academy, Warden Penny Jones. Of course, I want to thank, Bishop Eric Brown for his powerful words. The leaders of labor here today – Norman Seabrook of COBA; Deputy Warden

Helena Smith, representing the Assistant Deputy Warden's and Deputy Warden's Association; Joseph Fieramosca, representing the Correction's Captains Association; we thank all of you and all the other leaders of this agency present.

People are here today with excitement for what you will create and what you will do. It's an extraordinary class – 377 men, 215 women, hailing from every neighborhood of this city. You share some things in common. Despite all the different places you come from, there is a common thread – you're answering the call of duty. You understand that the work of correction requires grit, requires strength. You have to be tough at the same time – at the very same time – you have to be compassionate. You have to be patient. You have to be mindful. That is a very challenging balance to strike but it's one that great public servants can strike and will strike. And that's what we believe you will achieve.

Now, people in this class have come from lots of different career paths and educational paths. We have folks here with associate's degrees. We have folks with bachelor's degrees. We have folks with master's degrees. We even have a PhD in this class. Extraordinary backgrounds and extraordinary talent and skill that people are bringing. We have 57 – as you heard – 57 members of this class who served our nation in the military and we should thank them right now, one more time for all they have done.

[Applause]

We have 116 who have already served this city in other capacities, who are true public servants, now, elevating to this work. Let's thank all of those who have served the city before.

[Applause]

And here is a powerful fact – we have more than 120 members of this class who are following in the footsteps of family members who have been on the job. That's a great tradition and we thank you for that.

[Applause]

I want to give you one great example about to – officers about to be sworn in, Jamie Rosario, who grew up with correction's officers in her family. Her step-father, a retired correction's officer, shared with her the values it took to do this work – how important it was, how tough it was but also all the promise and possibility in a career in corrections. And her step-father said, "If you can change the life of one person while you're working on this job, you will have changed the lives of many." Think about that for a minute. One person, who you help to the right path – think of all – the multiplier effect – think of what happens after. Think of what it means for that family of that person who has now been redeemed – that you helped them get to the path – that affects everyone else in their family. That affects their community. That affects everything they can do in their future and it takes away something that could have been a negative. So, it's not just that you take someone from making mistakes and doing harm; you can turn them to the positive and the productive and then think of all the other people who benefit because you reach that one person. It's an extraordinary challenge but it's an extraordinary blessing too, to be able to have that level of impact. That's what you are embarking upon.

So, I mentioned Jamie. Jamie set herself on this noble course but she was not alone because Jamie was accompanied by her mother, Mildred Santiago, who is also graduating today.

[Applause]

Mother-daughter team – Officers Rosario and Santiago were at each other's side at every turn. They took the exam together. They entered the Academy together. They studied together. They motivated each other. And they dreamed of doing something big, and something bold, and in just a few minutes, when they take that oath,

they will be proud to call themselves amongst the boldest. So, that just one – one example, and there are so many of people who made this choice for all the right reasons and are going to do great things on this job.

Now, I'm very optimistic. I don't think we make change without optimism, but we have to be blunt, and we have to real about the past – and the past we have to move beyond because the past was not what it should have been. We know, for too many years, Riker's Island was a dehumanizing place for the people who worked there and for the inmates alike. We know, over years, there was too much violence. We know there's still violence to be contained. We know there's changes to be made. We know we need a culture change. And we know that these realities – the physical realities – have to change, but the physical reality can only change with a different mindset, a different culture, with a new set of dynamic members of this department. You will be the difference-makers. You will be the agents of that change. You will be the people who realize the possibilities that previously weren't reached. We're going to invest a lot in you. We already have – in this process – the way we recruited, selected you, screened you, trained you – all of the things you have experienced so far reflect a new era of investment in the Department of Correction. And we're going to be investing a lot more going forward, to ensure your safety; to ensure your effectiveness. We have to rewrite the story of Riker's Island. We simply have to. And you will be the authors of that new history. It must be a history in which we rehabilitate people, in which we create hope again for what can be on Riker's Island.

Now, you will have the support of this department. You will have the support of my entire administration. You will have my personal support as you do this work because we value you and we value the work you are doing. Those are not words – I want you to know that because sometimes when you hear someone in leadership talking about their values, their goals, you say, well, show me something – show me something to back that up. What have we done to back that up? We have invested \$200 million in additional staffing, in new equipment, new training, new technology, better repairs, and capital investments at Riker's Island – all of these investments to change the reality. That work's already begun and it's making a difference.

I'm very proud to tell you something – it's the first time, I think, we're talking about some of these new developments – I'm proud to announce that this year we've seen an 11 percent reduction in serious assaults on correction's staff and a six percent drop in assaults resulting in minor injuries. It's a beginning. We have a lot to do, but something is changing. In the past, only 20 percent of the facilities of this agency on Riker's Island had security camera coverage. By the end of next year, 100 percent security camera coverage will be available in all the facilities. These are fundamental changes. The training you received is different because it focuses on some of the things you'll deal with that didn't go addressed sufficiently in the past. We know almost 40 percent of the population at Riker's Island is folks with mental health issues. Now, we're doing a lot to try and change that at the root. We just announced a very aggressive mental health policy for this city, that over years, I think, will take a lot of people and keep them from every ending up on Riker's Island. But for those who do have these challenges, and become inmates – you will have the specialized training that previous generations didn't have, in how to deal with those realities – the techniques, the technical responses that can help to keep you safe and everyone safe. And we know it's making a difference. The training is already making officers and inmates safer because the most serious use of force is down 17 percent. And that shows something is beginning to take hold. \$51 million has been committed for additional staffing. Our goal – that we're well on the way to – is hiring 1,800 new officers over the next year – which includes this class. What does 1,800 new officers mean? It means a better ratio of officers to inmates. It's one of the most fundamental things that can be done to protect you – a better ratio of officers to inmates. That creates safer shifts and a safer environment overall – that's what we're investing in, that is a crucial part of the \$200 million.

So, we have your back. We will make the investments. We will continue to focus but we ask – in fact, we need something in return. We need you to be the best you can be. And I don't just mean that as an idle phrase. We need you take very, very seriously your generational role as change agents. We need you to honor that uniform. People are so proud of you today – that you have put on that uniform. We need you to honor it every day. We need you to be an example of all the good that can come from this work. We need you to make us proud every day and we will be by your side. You'll keep our jails secure. You'll help our city to be safer. You'll know that

you are role models – you’re role models to the people of this city, to the young people of this city looking for what their futures will be, and, honestly, you will be role models to a number of people who end up in correctional facilities because their life went wrong but you can often get their life back on the right track by your example. You will be a role model that changes people’s lives by your very example. And it’s going to mean so much to this city.

I remind you, before I issue the Oath of Office – something that we don’t think about enough – not long ago, the phrase was determined, the Department of Correction. It wasn’t something that was meant just to be a word. It was meant to be an idea to live by – to correct the mistakes, to redeem, to turn people back on the right path. You can and will achieve that the mission and you will make us proud.

It is now my honor to prepare to issue to you the Oath of Office. Please stand and raise your right hand.

[Mayor de Blasio administers the Oath of Office]

###