



**Written Testimony of Lucy Lang
New York State Inspector General**

**Before the Senate Standing Committee on Crime Victims, Crime & Correction
and the Assembly Standing Committee on Correction
May 14, 2025**

Introduction

Chairperson Salazar, Chairperson Dilan, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Committees, thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony regarding the conditions, operations, and oversight of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS).

As the New York State Inspector General, I lead an independent agency – the Offices of the Inspector General (OIG) – whose mission is to foster confidence in New York State government by promoting integrity and transparency through oversight of covered agencies, their employees, and those doing business with the State. To that end, my staff of lawyers, investigators, auditors, forensic analysts, and administrative professionals at regional offices throughout New York State are responsible for investigating allegations of corruption, fraud, criminal activity, conflicts of interest, and abuse in state agencies, including DOCCS. Our work is grounded in the principles of integrity, transparency, and accountability, and I submit this testimony on behalf of my office and in service of those values.

There can be no doubt that the murders of Robert Brooks at Marcy Correctional Facility in December 2024 and Messiah Nantwi at Mid-State Correctional Facility in March 2025 highlight a system under extraordinary stress and underscore the critical need for continued and enhanced oversight of our State's correctional system. Having personally visited every State prison in New York and spoken with incarcerated New Yorkers and correctional staff at each one, I have seen firsthand the stark challenges facing these institutions which house many of our most vulnerable community members. Having also spent several years as an educator in New York State prisons, I am deeply aware of the humanity of the more than 30,000 New Yorkers who live in these facilities. My colleagues and I are committed to continuing to provide independent oversight of DOCCS mindful of the dignity of every New Yorker who works or lives behind bars, and to enhancing that oversight in the years to come.

The Offices of the New York State Inspector General: Fostering confidence in New York State government by promoting integrity and transparency through oversight of covered agencies, their employees, and those doing business with the State. To report wrongdoing, call 1-800-DO-RIGHT (367-4448) or visit ig.ny.gov. Follow the office's work on social media at [@NewYorkStateIG](https://twitter.com/NewYorkStateIG).

Oversight and Review of Allegations

Pursuant to New York State Executive Law Article 4-A, OIG serves as the oversight body for DOCCS and other covered State agencies. OIG has the authority to investigate allegations of various forms of misconduct, which we receive from a wide variety of sources, and to audit the activities of state agencies, including their procedures, programs, and financial operations to, among other things, identify and make recommendations regarding systemic failures. To that end, OIG is empowered to compel production of documents and testimony and to subpoena records and witnesses.

Notably, DOCCS also has an internal investigations unit, the Office of Special Investigations (OSI), which operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and has approximately 250 staff members assigned across each of the State's correctional facilities and DOCCS's central office. In most instances, OSI serves as the first and primary investigative body for allegations of misconduct within DOCCS, as they are able to respond immediately, direct corrections staff, utilize all DOCCS resources, and take other preliminary investigatory steps to collect and preserve evidence.

OIG receives complaints related to DOCCS through direct communications such as regular mail, our public hotline, and an online complaint portal, through quarterly meetings with the Correctional Association of New York (CANY) and periodic meetings with advocacy organizations, as well as referrals from partner agencies and review of DOCCS internal materials including the DOCCS Central Command Center's Unusual Incident Reports and weekly lists of complaints received by OSI. Recognizing that more than half of the allegations we receive annually – which encompass those related to more than one hundred agencies, the welfare system, and the workers' compensation system – are related to DOCCS, in my first year as Inspector General I designated a specialized Attorney-in-Charge of DOCCS matters. This senior investigative attorney assesses every single complaint we receive related to DOCCS, and then works with our statewide interdisciplinary teams to conduct investigations, identify systemic risks, and offer policy-driven recommendations. We continue to work with our limited resources – approximately 120 staff members with oversight responsibilities for more than 100 covered agencies *in addition to DOCCS* – to build a sustainable and expert infrastructure to most effectively and impactfully carry out this vital portion of our mission.

In this vein, since the escape from Clinton Correctional Facility and ensuing manhunt a decade ago, which exemplified the potential risks to public safety that can arise from staff illegality, our office has regularly worked in conjunction with OSI in conducting unannounced facility-wide searches of DOCCS facilities. These surprise spot investigations include searching all on-site DOCCS staff and staff areas, including locker rooms, offices, and other locations that might contain evidence of staff misconduct or criminal activity. Members of my staff and I have also visited the residential, medical, and dining facilities at every prison, in addition to the residential rehabilitation housing units (RRUs) and segregated housing units (SHUs) at facilities that have

The Offices of the New York State Inspector General: Fostering confidence in New York State government by promoting integrity and transparency through oversight of covered agencies, their employees, and those doing business with the State. To report wrongdoing, call 1-800-DO-RIGHT (367-4448) or visit ig.ny.gov. Follow the office's work on social media at [@NewYorkStateIG](https://twitter.com/NewYorkStateIG).

them, as well as the cook-chill production facility in Rome that prepares and provides the food served across the DOCCS system.

DOCCS-related allegations fall into several categories, including allegations of staff-on-incarcerated person assaults, sexual abuse or inappropriate relationships, retaliatory disciplinary action, mail tampering, contraband, threats, and denial of medical care. Upon receipt, every allegation is logged into our case management system, and those that meet threshold criteria are reviewed weekly by a multidisciplinary Case Review Process (CRP) team, including the Attorney-in-Charge of DOCCS matters.

Depending on the nature of the allegation, we then open a preliminary investigation which we handle internally, refer the case to DOCCS with a 45-day response request, or forward the matter to another appropriate agency. We notify the person who made the allegation, and we track outstanding matters in coordination with DOCCS in an effort to ensure that follow-through is completed and documented. When an investigation reveals criminal wrongdoing, we prepare the case for law enforcement intervention and partner with the appropriate federal, state, or local prosecutorial and police agencies to bring criminal charges and secure an appropriate disposition, whether it includes a disciplinary, remedial, financial, or incarceratory sanction. When an investigation instead reveals gaps in DOCCS policies or other systemic failures, OIG may issue a public report or letter to raise awareness and make recommendations for change.

Findings from Recent OIG Oversight Reports

Several recent reports published by my office have illuminated deep-rooted challenges within DOCCS, all of which can be found at ig.ny.gov/doccsreports:

- Our [2024 Review of the First Two Years of HALT Implementation](#) found that DOCCS routinely failed to track and report segregated confinement placements in accordance with the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement (HALT) Act. We identified critical gaps in recordkeeping and reporting, raising serious concerns about compliance and transparency.
- Our [2023 Investigation of the DOCCS Drug Testing Program](#) revealed that incarcerated individuals were subjected to false-positive drug tests due to defective Microgenics testing systems. These erroneous results led to wrongful disciplinary actions, extended confinement, and delayed parole. Despite early warnings, DOCCS failed to suspend or scrutinize the tests, resulting in avoidable harm and injustice.
- Our [2023 Review of the Lost Wage Benefit Provided to Security Services Unit Employees Within the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision](#), and multiple annual reports to the Workers' Compensation Board detailed how our repeated investigations into workers' compensation misuse at DOCCS revealed patterns of abuse and overuse by some DOCCS

The Offices of the New York State Inspector General: Fostering confidence in New York State government by promoting integrity and transparency through oversight of covered agencies, their employees, and those doing business with the State. To report wrongdoing, call 1-800-DO-RIGHT (367-4448) or visit ig.ny.gov. Follow the office's work on social media at [@NewYorkStateIG](#).

employees. These findings reinforce the need for tighter oversight and integrity measures within the workers' compensation system as it relates to DOCCS staff.

- Our [2022 Report on Racial Disparities in the Administration of Discipline in New York State Prisons](#) documented stark racial and ethnic disparities in DOCCS disciplinary practices, housing placements, and access to programming. Black and Latino incarcerated New Yorkers were disproportionately affected by punitive measures and underrepresented in opportunities for education and rehabilitation—trends that must be addressed if we are to ensure equity in our justice system.

Staffing, Training, and Programming

Correctional facilities cannot function safely or humanely without sufficient and properly trained staff. My office has consistently observed the impact of chronic staffing shortages, particularly in areas that are essential to institutional well-being such as mental health care, education, and unit supervision. These gaps endanger both staff and incarcerated individuals and erode the foundation of safety and rehabilitation.

Recognizing the power of prevention, OIG participates directly in the training of every new class of correction officers. A confidential investigator who reports directly to me conducts these trainings, which includes instruction on the Public Officers Law and related ethics statutes and emphasizes the responsibilities of state employees to act with integrity and transparency. We train every incoming officer on their legal and ethical duty to report misconduct, reinforcing that complicity through silence is unacceptable in a just system. We also educate recruits about proper use and accountability around workers' compensation, an area that has been the focus of ongoing investigations by my office. These trainings are not one-offs. They are part of a sustained strategy to instill a culture of lawful conduct and personal responsibility from day one of a correction officer's career.

At the same time, incarcerated individuals must have access to rehabilitative programming—vocational training, education, mental health treatment, and cognitive-behavioral therapy. These services are proven to reduce recidivism and support successful reentry. When staff are unavailable to administer or support these programs, the rehabilitative mission of our correctional system is significantly compromised.

Need for Increased Transparency and Accountability

Transparency is a prerequisite for effective government. Without accurate and accessible data on incidents, investigations, and outcomes, neither my office nor the public can assess the performance of our correctional system.

The Offices of the New York State Inspector General: Fostering confidence in New York State government by promoting integrity and transparency through oversight of covered agencies, their employees, and those doing business with the State. To report wrongdoing, call 1-800-DO-RIGHT (367-4448) or visit ig.ny.gov. Follow the office's work on social media at [@NewYorkStateIG](https://twitter.com/NewYorkStateIG).

Our investigations regularly face the challenges that arise from lack of consolidated electronic record-keeping. By way of example, to assess DOCCS's compliance or non-compliance with the HALT Act, my staff had to resort to reviewing individual paper logbooks entries to determine whether incarcerated people were being granted the required out of cell time daily. This is simply not a tenable system of oversight in a department that includes 42 facilities and houses 30,000 people. Data collection on use-of-force incidents, medical emergencies, staffing levels, and program participation must be consistent, comprehensive, and electronically maintained.

Where transparency is lacking, accountability cannot be sustained. For this reason, OIG continues to pursue direct access to DOCCS systems so that requests for information and documents need not be routed through OSI. Moreover, OIG would welcome the embedding of a member of OSI staff within OIG to provide instant systems access and increase transparency.

Need for Increased Infrastructure and Human Connection

Facility infrastructure also requires sustained investment. Many prisons in New York suffer from deteriorating conditions and outdated systems. Investments in safety technology, communication tools, and sanitation are necessary to protect both staff and the incarcerated population.

Notably, the investigation into Mr. Brooks' tragic murder highlighted the incredible utility of body-worn cameras in conducting investigations into prison violence, and the need for improved storage capacity and regulation of the footage derived from this important investigative and deterrent tool. OIG is currently monitoring emerging technology and the relevant policies to ensure that body-worn cameras fulfill their potential in improving conditions for incarcerated New Yorkers.

Equally vital is ensuring that incarcerated individuals maintain connection to family and community. Visitation and access to communication support rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and promote public safety. Policies that facilitate meaningful contact must be upheld and expanded, especially in remote facilities.

Conclusion

Our work at the Offices of the Inspector General to provide oversight of DOCCS has revealed a system in need of reform, investment, and sustained oversight. My office remains committed to ensuring that DOCCS operates in accordance with the law, with respect for human dignity, and with full public accountability.

I thank the committees for your attention to this critical matter and for your partnership in working toward a correctional system that reflects the values of safety, justice, and integrity for all New Yorkers.

The Offices of the New York State Inspector General: Fostering confidence in New York State government by promoting integrity and transparency through oversight of covered agencies, their employees, and those doing business with the State. To report wrongdoing, call 1-800-DO-RIGHT (367-4448) or visit ig.ny.gov. Follow the office's work on social media at [@NewYorkStateIG](https://twitter.com/NewYorkStateIG).