



By  
Correction  
History  
webmaster:  
  
Setting  
the  
Record  
Straight

## Making an exception in order to take exception

Usually this website avoids involvement in current political or public policy controversies that have not yet passed into “history.” But we make an exception today in order to take exception to particular remarks voiced recently about the appointment of the new DOC Commissioner.



**Then Acting Commissioner Cynthia Brann addresses the NYC Board of Correction at its Sept. 12, 2017 public meeting.**

The statements, coming from ever vocal quarters, were to the effect that Commissioner Brann “has no real track record of reform.” In the interest of putting the matter into historical balance (*aka*, setting the record straight), we need to note that, at DOC, the list of her accomplishments include (but are not limited to):

- Rolling out the new, federal monitor-approved use-of-force policy.
- Ensuring officers are provided the required Special Tactics And Responsible Techniques (START) training.
- Instituting the rollout of 5 hours of programming relative to these matters of concern.
- Starting a new in-jail mentoring and training program for uniform staff.
- Initiating plans to enter into Prison Rape Elimination Act compliance.
- Establishing new, facility-based security auditing efforts.
- Helping establish and implement processes, across all facilities, to track compliance with the Nunez Consent Degree for reducing violence and use of force.

Additionally, her reform record extends well back into her decades of Correction service in Maine. There she effectively restructured the state's adult probation services resulting in operational efficiencies, the reduction of caseloads, and increased positive offender outcomes. She is credited with reforming its juvenile detention decision processes and risk assessment tools, thereby reducing secure detention admissions without increased public safety risk.

We also need to recognize that “reform,” like beauty, often resides in the eye of the beholder. If the criticism had been phrased that she accomplished “no real reform,” then at least the issue would be more clearly seen as one of contesting the value of those reforms which fill her long track record.

But by claiming she “has no real track record of reform,” the criticism (whether intentionally or not) subtly shifts to hitting character. The assertion seems to imply she has shown no interest in reforming the system which desperately needs it; thus is floated the thinly-veiled innuendo that apparently she doesn't care. Speaking from a historical perspective, such a characterization is demonstratively untrue.

On the contrary, the new Commissioner's lengthy track record of reform evidences constant interest, concern and activity to change the system for the better.

Let the debate be on the merits or demerits of the reforms; not about whether the Commissioner has a track record of reform interest, aims and activity. That record she has established many times over.

Let the ever vocal critics argue over the efficacy of the correction reforms which have engaged Cynthia Brann's considerable energies through her three decades of dealing with the system. That's fair game for pro and con civic discourse. But let none dismiss as non-existent the historical fact of her actual track record as a committed agent of change *vis a vis* the system.

-- Tom McCarthy, *CorrectionHistory* webmaster 10/10/17



Above: An August 2017 screen image of DOC staffers, including then Acting Commissioner Cynthia Brann (center), attending a Dominican Heritage celebration at Gracie Mansion; the parade took place the following Sunday, Aug.13<sup>th</sup> with Mrs. Brann and other DOCers marching as a group (below left). Five days later at the DOC staff BBQ on Rikers she waited her turn on the "Splash" ball toss line (below right).



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