

NEWS RELEASE

Delaware Department of Correction
Commissioner Terra Taylor



DOC marks *National Correctional Officers and Employees Week* with remembrance event, annual employee recognition awards

Dover, DE -- The Delaware Department of Correction proudly marks *National Correctional Officers and Employees Week*, May 4-10, by recognizing employees who have demonstrated exceptional service to others and by pausing to honor the life and legacy of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the first "National Correctional Officers' Week" and in 1996 Congress expanded the annual commemoration to all correctional employees to provide overdue recognition to the contributions and accomplishments of the men and women who work in all roles across prisons, jails, and community corrections to meet a broad and challenging mission. In Delaware, the Department of Correction is the state's largest law enforcement agency, employing more than 2,600 sworn officers and non-sworn employees who work together with several hundred contracted medical and behavioral healthcare professionals to meet the DOC's dual public safety and rehabilitation mission.

On Thursday, May 8, during a ceremony at the Department of Correction Central Administration Building in Dover, DOC leadership presented annual departmental awards to nine officers and staff members for providing service above and beyond the call of duty. Watch the [recorded livestream of today's awards ceremony by clicking HERE](#) and see the list of award recipients below.

"Every single day our dedicated and highly skilled officers and correctional employees make a difference in our communities and in the lives of the individuals we supervise," **Commissioner Terra Taylor said.** "I am incredibly proud of the "can do" attitude and results-driven culture of our entire team. Our annual awards give us the opportunity to lift up and celebrate some of the best among us - employees who have gone far above and beyond to drive positive change and to serve others. Our award winners' bravery, acts of lifesaving, collaboration, professionalism, compassion, and uncommon dedication to our core values are worthy of our special thanks."

Earlier this week, the DOC paused to honor and reflect on those within the Department who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. Governor Matt Meyer participated in the *Tribute to Fallen Officers*, joining DOC leadership, officers, professional staff, and loved ones to offer heartfelt remarks on the importance, sacrifice, and unwavering dedication of correctional officers and employees. This remembrance ceremony reaffirms DOC's solemn promise that these fallen officers' commitment and service above self will never be forgotten.



“Our correctional staff work in challenging environments that can put them in harm’s way,” said **Deputy Commissioner Shane Troxler**. “We want every one of our colleagues to return home safely to their loved ones every single day. Together, we continue to mourn the members of the DOC family who lost their lives while serving others. Their lives and legacies inspire us to carry on their work and keep them in our hearts. We will never forget.”

DOC Annual Recognition Award Winners:



Correctional Officer of the Year: Sergeant Dion Brown, Sussex Correctional Institution

Over his three decades of service, Sgt. Brown has continually made a lasting impact at Sussex Correctional Institution (SCI) through his dedication, leadership, and problem-solving skills. As the Officer in Charge of SCI's residential Substance Use Disorder treatment building (Stan Taylor Building) on the midnight to 8:00 am shift, he is widely respected by both staff and inmates for his professionalism and effectiveness. Sgt. Brown exhibits strong supervision skills and serves as a natural mentor, guiding scores of Officers toward successful correctional careers. His ability to identify challenges and present well thought out solutions has earned praise and recognition from his chain of command. As a member of the SCI Hostage Negotiation Team and a former Correctional Emergency Response Team operator and Drill Instructor, his service reflects DOC's ever-present commitment to safety and security, along with a commitment to our dual mission of rehabilitation and reentry. Sgt. Brown's unwavering commitment to the DOC's mission exemplifies excellence in corrections and serves as an inspiration to all.



Probation & Parole Officer of the Year: Senior Probation Officer Gavin Bethell, Cherry Lane Probation & Parole

In addition to being a dedicated and respected Officer and collaborative team member, this award recognizes Senior Probation Officer Bethell for playing a crucial role in preventing a potential crisis and protecting a vulnerable victim. After identifying inconsistencies in the whereabouts of an individual on community supervision with a history of grooming a victim, Officer Bethell leaned on his training and experience to take action. His vigilance led directly to the discovery of a missing child in the offender's residence, prompting his immediate arrest and the victim's safe recovery. SPO Bethell's quick thinking and commitment to public safety exemplify the DOC's core values and directly contributed to protecting the community and rescuing a child.



Employee of the Year: Correctional Counselor Supervisor Elizabeth Hopkins, Plummer Community Corrections Center

Counselor Supervisor Hopkins' leadership and unwavering commitment to innovation, rehabilitation, and staff support at Plummer Community Corrections Center (PCCC) has made a lasting positive impact on the lives of hundreds of individuals during their transition back to the community and has helped the facility achieve its dual public safety and reentry mission. She has been a driving force behind work release employment success at PCCC, establishing connections to secure short-term jobs and long-term career opportunities for the work release population, fostering second chances and brighter futures. Through strategic partnerships with organizations like Local 199, the Port of Wilmington, ShopRite, and more, she has helped drive expanded pathways to vocational training and reduced employment barriers. Her dedication has also played a key role in earning PCCC 100% American Correctional Association accreditation, including the development of a comprehensive guidebook outlining facility programs and leadership. Beyond her operational excellence, Supervisor Hopkins has championed employee recognition and support, ensuring a collaborative and motivated work environment.



Team of the Year: DOC Recruitment Team - Sergeant Jamie Bartlett, Sergeant Richard Bulson, Human Resources Manager Doris Tatman, Director of Recruitment, Retention, and Background Michael Nichols, Community Relations Officer Kate Weber, DOC Central Administration

These innovative hard-working colleagues have pulled together to leverage their talents and significantly reduce Correctional Officer vacancies from 330 in early 2024 to under 200 vacancies today, strengthening the DOC's ability to meet our facilities' operational needs. Recruitment Team members employed a variety of strategic outreach methods, including targeted regional job postings, use of electronic billboards, television advertisements, and creative social media engagement, while working tirelessly on a limited budget to attract top talent. Moreover, Sergeants Jamie Bartlett and Richard Bulson took DOC "on the road", attending over 100 hiring events across six states and helping to connect more than 900 applicants with potential career opportunities at the DOC. Simply put, the DOC could not meet its public safety and reentry mission without an effective team effort to recruit a professional workforce of capable men and women. Thanks to the continuing hard work and persistence of our Recruitment Team members, the Delaware Department of Correction is positioned to serve, and protect, well into the future!



Commissioner's Award for Heroism: Sergeant Chavonne Shepherd, Baylor Women's Correctional Institution

Last November while working a shift at Baylor Women's Correctional Institution, Sergeant Shepherd encountered an incarcerated resident who attempted an act of physical self-harm with an improvised sharp object. Encountering resistance and escalating threats from this individual, Sergeant Shepherd leaned on her correctional training to employ de-escalation techniques, establish effective communication, and build trust. Thanks to her poise and skilled response the individual voluntarily surrendered the object and complied with directives, resolving the incident without the use of force and keeping staff and the inmate safe and unharmed. Sergeant Shepherd's quick and skilled response exemplify DOC's highest standards of service.