

## Our Mission

The Department of Correction shall strive to be a global leader in progressive correctional practices and partnered re-entry initiatives to support responsive evidence-based practices aligned to law-abiding and accountable behaviors. Safety and security shall be a priority component of this responsibility as it pertains to staff, victims, citizens, and offenders.

## Happy Thanksgiving

It is that time of year again, a time to give thanks for all the things we are grateful for. As I reflect on everything that has happened in my life, both professionally and personally, I realize that this should not be something that is taken for granted.

Given the demands of our work, we too often get caught up in the pace of everyday life, and do not take the time to appreciate just how fortunate we are. With that in mind, I want to stop for a second and take a moment to express my gratitude to you, the men and women of the Connecticut Department of Correction, who go above and beyond every day of the year (even on holidays) to ensure the safety of the citizens of our great state.

No matter what challenge came our way, you rose to the occasion and reminded everyone why the Connecticut Department of Correction is among the finest correctional agencies in the country. I am confident that when the next challenge comes, you will once again be there to meet it head-on.

I wish to also give special thanks to those who bravely protect our way of life by serving in the country's armed forces. The recent events across the world serve to remind us that "freedom is not free," and should never be taken for granted. For your willingness to protect our liberties and way of life, which we hold so dear, I am truly thankful.

If you are traveling to be with loved ones across town or across the country, I pray you make it there and back safely. I also encourage you to remember those less fortunate than us, and those who may be struggling – whether financially or emotionally – this holiday season.

Regardless of how you spend your holiday, please remember that we all have much to be thankful for and need to take more time out of our busy lives to focus on the positive things we often overlook while running around during our daily routines.

On behalf of myself and the entire Executive Team, thank you again for everything you do. I wish each of you a happy and healthy Thanksgiving.

With Gratitude,

Angel Quiros  
Commissioner

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through  
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# DoC Annual Awards Ceremony 2024

For the first time since before the pandemic, the extraordinary accomplishments of the staff of the Connecticut Department of Correction were recognized during the agency’s Annual Award Ceremony held on Friday, September 20, 2024 at the Maloney Center for Training and Staff Development.

“It’s been too long,” said Commissioner Angel Quiros to the gathered crowd of family and fellow staff. “We needed to get together to honor our outstanding employees, who went above and beyond the call of duty.”

In front of their peers and family members, award recipients were called to the stage as brief descriptions of their accomplishments were read.



Commissioner Quiros, Kristan Thibault, and K9 Semper Fi

Keeping with annual tradition, the ceremony culminated with the presentation of the Commissioner’s Award. As its name suggests, the winner of the Commissioner’s award is selected solely by the Commissioner – all of the other awards are selected by committee.

Before announcing his choice for the award, Commissioner Quiros shared with the audience the difficulty he had choosing just one recipient for the award. He noted that there were (and are) many deserving individuals that he could have chosen to receive the award. In the end, the Commissioner could not select just one

individual to win the award, opting to give it to a pair of recipients – a duo that works together as a team. Much to the delight of many in the audience, the Commissioner announced that K9 officer Kristen Thibault and her K9 partner (the department’s therapy dog) Semper Fi, were the recipients of the 2024 Department of Correction Commissioner’s Award. Typically, the winner of the Commissioner’s Award receives a commemorative plaque, as was the case this year. However, due to the fact that Semper Fi was also part of the winning team, the Commissioner presented him with a commemorative dog collar. As a way of showing his appreciation, Semper Fi gave a high-five (or high paw) to his partner K9 officer Thibault.

The smiles on the faces of all those present was proof positive that Commissioner Quiros had made the perfect selection for the award.

With the presentation of the Commissioner’s Award, the ceremony came to a close, once again having provided a great opportunity for the agency to join together to celebrate the accomplishments of the staff of one of the best correctional agencies in the nation.

<b>The Department of Correction 2024 Annual Award Recipients</b>	
<u><b>Award</b></u>	<u><b>Recipient</b></u>
Circle of Merit	<b>Paolo Santilli</b>
Innovator’s Award	<b>Michael Vitale</b>
Dist. Public Service	<b>York CI Special Olympics Comm.</b>
Dist. Service Medal	<b>Sean Ross</b>
Dist. Wellness Award	<b>EAU</b>
Officer of the Year	<b>Robert DiCosmo</b>
Employee of the Year	<b>Michael Capellaro</b>
Supervisor of the Year	<b>Michael Sepulveda</b>
Parole Officer of the Year	<b>Erica Richardson</b>
Health Services	
Employee of the Year	<b>Colleen Gallagher</b>
Teacher of the Year	<b>Stephanie Speziali</b>
Excellence in Correctional Training	<b>Oscar Zamora</b>
Volunteer of the Year	<b>Ashley Minihan</b>
Unit of the Year	<b>Plant Facilities &amp; Engineering</b>
Commissioner’s Award	<b>Kristen Thibault &amp; K9 Semper Fi</b>

# Top Dogs

*Connecticut Department of Correction K9 teams finished 1st and 2nd overall at this year's K9 Olympics*

More than two thousand spectators witnessed the Connecticut Department of Correction's K9 teams finish first and second overall at the 32nd Connecticut K9 Olympics. The annual event took place on September 21, 2024, on the grounds of Carl Robinson Correctional Institution's "Officers' Beach."

The competition, which is hosted by the Department of Correction K9 Unit, is more than a competition amongst Law Enforcement K9 teams from throughout New England, it is also an opportunity to showcase a positive side of law enforcement through the bond that the competitors have with their K9 partners.

Law enforcement across America struggle with negative perceptions in society. It is evident with the amount of support gained from the public during the 2024 K9 Olympics that relationships with our community continue to strengthen - putting Corrections, as well as other law enforcement agencies, in a positive light.

A total of 29 teams competed from state and municipal departments including the Connecticut Department of Correction K9 Unit, Connecticut State Police, Hampden County Massachusetts Sherriff's Office, alongside teams as from far away as the Branford and Charlton Massachusetts Police Departments.

A special team spot was reserved for K9 Roso, Zachary, Troy, and Domonique Pelletier, the family of fallen Trooper First Class Aaron Pelletier who was struck and killed in the line of duty by a hit-and-run driver. Trooper First Class Aaron Pelletier was not only a trooper, he was a K9 handler that worked amongst many of the



**K9 Olympic participants with the Pelletier family**

handlers that competed in the event. Trooper Pelletier was also a former Correctional Officer for our agency. There were some obvious improvements made to this year's event. Thanks to the hard work of the department's North District Maintenance Staff, this year's K9 Olympics looked better than ever. They jumped on the opportunity to get an early start preparing the competition field. All of the obstacles were repainted and repaired to ensure the canines could safely navigate the course, mitigating any risks of injury. They also replaced the safety fencing surrounding the competition field. There is a tremendous amount of hard work that goes into preparing for this event, from setting up tents and fencing, running power, to moving heavy equipment. The event would not be nearly as successful without the help from North District Maintenance staff members.

A special thank you to: Plant Facility Engineer 1 Robert Bell, Plant Facility Engineer 2 Gary Gerstenlauer, District Supervisor John Goodwin, General Maintenance Officer Matt Kelley, Locksmith Tony Bukowski, and General Maintenance Officers Adam DeBarge, Jeff Messenger, and George Kozikowski.

## Giving Aid and Comfort

While many of us witnessed the devastation caused by the recent hurricanes Helen and Milton via television or the internet, Correction Officer Timothy Castleman has witnessed the incredible damage caused by the storms firsthand. The American Red Cross called Officer



Correction Officer and Red Cross volunteer Timothy Castleman

Castleman (who is assigned to the York Correctional Institution) to duty on October 1, 2024 to assist with disaster relief in the aftermath of the two hurricanes. He is helping to provide critical support to communities ravaged by these historic storms, with efforts focused on supplying necessities for survival such as food, water, and shelter.

On September 26, hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida's Big Bend region before heading inland to cause unprecedented damage across the southeast of

the US. By the time the hurricane had dissipated, there were at least 250 fatalities, millions had been left without clean water or power, and a state of emergency had been declared in North Carolina.

Less than two weeks later, Hurricane Milton started forming in the south-west Gulf of Mexico. With a death toll of at least 33 lives, and preliminary estimates of the cost of damage of approximately \$50 billion. Whereas the damaging effects of Milton were mainly felt in Florida, the worst impacts of Helene were over the southern Appalachians, particularly in western North Carolina, hundreds of miles inland and far from areas you would expect to be hit by a tropical cyclone.

As of October 28, 2024, Officer Castleman's deployment was extended and his volunteer efforts are ongoing. As part of the American Red Cross Connecticut Chapter hurricane relief efforts, he has provided assistance in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and the Carolinas. Previously, he was also deployed to assist with the Maui wildfires in Hawaii.

"The people that are affected by these devastating weather events are in such dire straits, yet they are so appreciative of our help" said Officer Castleman.

On behalf of York Correctional Institution, Warden Sexton extends her sincere gratitude to Officer Castleman. His commitment to community and to supporting others in times of crisis is truly remarkable.

If you would like to learn about possibly becoming a Red Cross volunteer, please visit: [RedCross.org/volunteer](https://www.RedCross.org/volunteer).

## Around the Cell Block

**NORTH DAKOTA:** The state's DoC has implemented a prioritization plan for allowing new inmates into prisons and county jails the Department has contracts with, and that means a "waiting list." The agency can refuse to admit inmates if they would cause them to exceed its maximum holding space.

**OREGON:** The Oregon DoC is considering prohibiting inmates from receiving letters written with colored pencils or markers, while only permitting white envelopes and paper. Department officials say contraband is disguised by the use of crayons, colored pencils, and colored paper.

**WISCONSIN:** The Wisconsin Department of Corrections has agreed to provide more help to hearing-impaired inmates as part of a settlement with federal investigators. The agency must make reasonable modifications to its policies to accommodate hearing-impaired inmates, such as handcuffing them in front of their bodies so they can sign and allowing additional time for phone calls using an interpreter.

***Total CT DOC  
Supervised  
Population  
on  
November 27, 2024  
13,915  
On November 27, 2023  
the population was  
13,361***

# 32nd K9 Olympics - A Resounding Success from page 3

Comfort K9 Teams (a K9 and a handler that provide comfort and companionship to people and communities in times of need) joined this year's competition for the first time. Not surprisingly, the Comfort Teams were a huge hit amongst spectators, especially children. The Comfort K9 "meet and greets" not only provided a platform for some questions and answers from Officer Heidi (Yale PD), Officer Jules (Southern Police) and



**1st Place Overall: K9 Officer Sean Kelly and K9 Knauss**

Officer Chase (Groton PD), but there was plenty of snuggles and photo opportunities to go around.

Four-legged dogs were not the only dogs at the event, thanks to the food services staff members from the Carl Robinson Correctional Institution, more than 500 hotdogs and 500 hamburgers were served up to those in attendance. Thanks to the efforts of Food Service Manager Sara Osle, Food Service Supervisors Brandon Postl, Alexander Cardoso, Cesar Culling, and Joshua Giroux, all of the hot dogs and hamburgers sold out during the competition. Thank you also to Bozzutos of Cheshire, who donated approximately half of the total food costs.

Money raised through the sales of food and t-shirts is donated to various charities. This year, the competition raised more than \$14,000. Along with bragging rights and a trophy, the top three competitors each were able to select a charity of their choice to receive a donation.

## 32nd K9 Olympics Top Finishers

### 1st Place Overall

Officer Sean Kelly, K9 Knauss  
Connecticut Department of Correction

### 2nd Place Overall

Officer Jared Surprenant, K9 Grim  
Connecticut Department of Correction

### 3rd Place Overall (tie)

Trooper First Class Phil Soucy,  
K9 Argo Connecticut State Police  
and Sergeant Kiendzior, K9 Pyro  
Hampden County Sheriff's Office

## Riding to Remember

On September 7, 2024 over 490 cyclists rode together in a single peloton to support the families and loved ones of officers and firemen/women who went to work and didn't return home after their shift. This was the 12<sup>th</sup> time the Ride to Remember event was held, with the theme, "Fallen but not forgotten." The memory of Trooper First Class Aaron Pelletier was honored as part of the event, and a donation of \$10,000 was given to a fund in his honor.

Correctional Substance Abuse Counselor Edwin Rexach and State School Teacher Brian Armstrong accepted the challenge to complete the 70-mile bicycle ride which started in Springfield, Massachusetts, went down to Hartford, Connecticut, and then back to Springfield.

The experience was both physically and mentally challenging, but was well worth doing for a fantastic cause.



**Edwin Rexach (L), and Brian Armstrong**

# Parole & Community Service's Annual Awards Ceremony

The agency's Parole and Community Services (P&CS) Division held its Annual Awards Ceremony at Maloney Center for Training and Staff Development on Friday, November 1, 2024. The ceremony was opened by the department's Honor Guard posting the flags, followed by an excellent rendition of the National Anthem sung by parole's own, Michele Jones.



**Director Rhianna Gingras Congratulates Parole Supervisor Christopher Sullivan on winning the Leadership Award.**

Next, Parole Supervisor Christopher Sullivan, who served as the emcee for the event, took to the podium and started the ceremony by recognizing the distinguished members of the Executive Team. He then thanked the members of the Parole Quality of Work Life Committee for their hard work, dedication and commitment to recognize and appreciate their co-workers. He also acknowledged Director Rhianna Gingras for her ongoing support and encouragement. All the P&CS staff members who participated in the various fundraisers conducted throughout the year, which provided the funds for the awards ceremony, were also acknowledged. Last but not least, Parole Supervisor Sullivan thanked Alyssa DeJohn, and the department's Honor

Guard for their part in making the awards ceremony a success.

The podium was then turned over to Director Gingras who expressed her gratitude for all that P&CS staff do during the course of the year. Next up to address the gathered crowd was Commissioner Angel Quiros, who also thanked the parole staff, adding that it was an honor to be there to acknowledge the hard work they do.

Parole Manager Sullivan returned to the podium to present the various awards. This year's P&CS award recipients include:

**Parole Officer of the Year:** Erica Richardson, Parole Officer

**Director's Award:** Jessica Castillo, Parole Officer

**Dana Laudati Award:** Katherine Montoya, Parole Officer

**Leadership Award:** Christopher Sullivan, Parole Supervisor

**Employee of the Year:** Michael Binion, Correctional Counselor

**Meritorious Service Award:** Parole Officers Lindsay Carrington, Jose Cartagena,Carolynn Lindley, William Ludovico, and Joseph Timbro; Secretary II Kim Karas and Parole Supervisor Steve Faiella

**Professional Partner Award:** Bridgeport Correctional Center Maintenance staff members - Christopher Bowery, Richard Coore, Carlos Fernandes, Matthew Gibbs, Todd Haversat, Gabriel Milord and Scott Prutting.



**Parole Officer of the Year Erica Richardson with Parole Supervisor Micah Mann.**

# Running to Remember

Hundreds of individuals including numerous Department of Correction staff members came out to honor a fallen colleague as part of the 10th annual *Believe 208: Run for the Brave and Finest 5K* in East Hartford on September 22, 2024. Runners, walkers, and supporters participated in the event which, this year, was dedicated to the memory of retired Deputy Warden Gregorio Robles. In line with their mission of supporting our own, members of the department’s Employee Assistance Unit and Critical Incident Stress Response Team participated in the event alongside staff from various facilities and departments within the agency. The runners represented the department well, coming in 2<sup>nd</sup> place out of all the first responder teams that competed. The Health Services Unit’s Azira Salihovic finished third among the female first responders.

*Believe 208* is an initiative in collaboration with the Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement (CABLE); together they provide resources, training, and information on all aspects of first responder well-being. The efforts of this initiative were instrumental in the passing and expansion of state legislation, which assists first responders, including corrections staff, in seeking essential support and treatment for post-traumatic stress injuries sustained in the line-of-duty, as well as in protecting the confidentiality of peer support teams within these organizations. A great deal of progress has been made over the past decade in terms of breaking the stigma surrounding mental health, as well as suicide awareness and prevention. Opportunities to support these endeavors are important to the agency’s wellness mission.

Congratulations, and thank you to all those who participated in this special and important event.



The DoC contingent for the 10th Annual Believe 208 5K

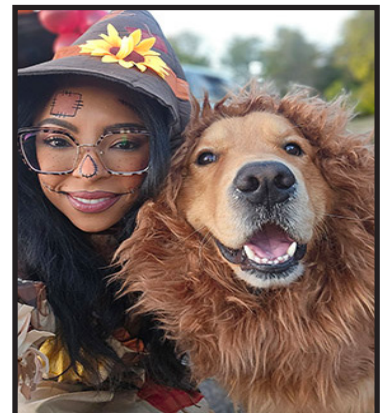
# Halloween Fun at the DoC



L-R: York CI’s Dr. Chris Homiski, APRN Tara Hood, and Medical Records Specialist Patti Golka

Staff of the Maloney Center for Training and Staff Development once again held a family oriented “Trunk or Treat” event on October 18, 2024 from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm. The event was coordinated by the members of the department’s Wellness Committee and featured not only carloads of candy and music, but also the world’s most adorable lion (the DoC’s therapy dog Semper Fi in costume).

Warden Trina Sexton and other staff members of the York Correctional Institution also had the Halloween spirit, donning some creative costumes to celebrate the holiday.



Lieutenant Casey Ramos and K9 Semper Fi

# Helping Mothers and Children

York Correctional Institution's Counselor Supervisor (CS) Jennifer Page was selected to represent the Department of Correction at the annual National Parents as Teachers (PAT) 2024 International Conference in San Diego, CA on October 14 – 17.

Celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, PAT provides critical early childhood education and support by connecting parents and caregivers with trained professionals who make regular personal home visits during a child's pre-natal through kindergarten years – assisting with both early childhood education and parenting skills.

This year's event enabled approximately 2,000 early childhood professionals to convene for four days of professional development; join in discussions and workshops; and engage with esteemed administrators from such organizations as: the US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families; Child, Adolescent and Parent Support Services; and Child Abuse Prevention Services.

PAT was the brainchild of educator Mildred Winter in the early 1980s, when she began to consider the critical impact of a child's development and learning that largely begins before birth. She firmly believed that providing direct support and practical learning tools during the first years of life is essential in the raising of healthy and thriving children. A pilot project was initiated in 1984 that involved 60 pregnant women. Today PAT is internationally recognized, and is responsible for the positive transformation of the lives of innumerable caregivers and their children.

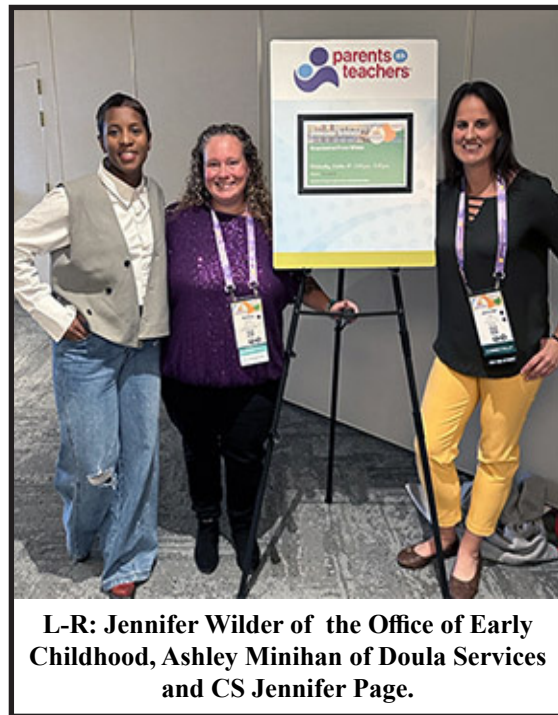
This year's conference theme, "Born to Learn – Power of the Past – Building for the Future" was especially relevant for CS Page as she is heavily invested in ensuring a constructive foundation for the pregnant women at York CI and their newborns.

Luz Rivera of the State's Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and Ashley Minihan of Doula Services joined CS Page at the conference. The symposium provided this trio an invaluable opportunity to join forces with others that support this endeavor to learn ways to further promote the best possible outcomes for the children of incarcerated parents. The three women have worked together previously on the "Empowered from Within" initiative – in which support is provided to pregnant women at York CI before and during labor and delivery. Information related to the benefits of skin-to-skin contact following birth, as well as crucial guidance related to breastfeeding by women who have been prescribed methadone is also provided.

Warden Sexton was confident that CS Page would be an excellent choice to represent our agency. CS Page was able to share her firsthand experience and perception as it relates to the females at York CI.

CS Page shared with Warden Sexton that her presentation actually brought other participants to tears, with many attendees asking insightful and provocative questions. Participants from Nevada voiced their aspiration to travel to Connecticut and delve further into the programs offered at York. CS Page also relayed that at the end of their presentation they played a recording of an incarcerated woman speaking about her personal experience at York CI, and her gratitude for the immense support she received.

Warden Sexton would like to take this opportunity to personally recognize CS Page, Ms. Rivera and Ms. Minihan for their tireless efforts, and inspiring belief that their efforts will have a positive impact on all the incarcerated mothers and their children.



**L-R: Jennifer Wilder of the Office of Early Childhood, Ashley Minihan of Doula Services and CS Jennifer Page.**