

A regular meeting of State Prison Complex Correctional Institutions, Jones Farm Conference and Training Center, 721 Bear Tavern Road, Ewing NJ at 11:30 AM, Friday, April 17, 2026

Call to order at 11:44 a.m. Reading of the public meeting statement.

PLEDGE

ROLL CALL By: Ashling MacDonald

Present: John Fuqua, Ronald Charles, Charles Albino, Damon Venable, Deborah Corbett, Aisling MacDonald, Carl Styles (via teams).

Approval of Meeting Minutes: January 16, 2026.

- Meeting Minutes approved by the committee.
 - D. Corbett – motion to approve
 - C. Albino – 2nd that motion
 - Motion Carried, meeting minutes approved

- **Damon Venable arrived at the meeting at 11:50a.m.**

Presentation by Dr. Darcella Sessomes, Chief of Programs and Reintegration Services.

- **Highlights from the presentation:**
 - Education and academic Services is divided into different unit academic affairs and career technology education unit.
 - The academic affairs unit handles all things adult based; GED programs and college enrollment and college correspondence unit for any person looking to further their education.
 - We administer the GED Exam – 2025 year 261 applicants and 184 applicants passed their exam. This is a 70% passing rate which exceeds the national school district rate.
 - We partner with the NJSTEP consortium program which is how college enrollment happens in NJDOC. We work with Rutgers University, Raritan Community college, Drew University and Princeton University.
 - Any person wishing to enroll in college, must apply to the college of choice, just like on the outside for students. NJDOC makes no determination in the outcome of the application from the student.
 - Approximately 4 months ago, Drew University has become accredited program at East Jersey State prison, and we are now offering a Master's degree program for religious studies.
 - State Facilities Education Act – SFEA – classifies that any incarcerated person under the age of 21, and they're classified, they have to go to school for education purposes. This predominantly at Garden State Correctional facility and for the females at Edna Mahan Correctional facility. It is the law for them, so they have to go to school. Unlike an adult basic education, we cannot make them go to school.
 - School becomes they employment while incarcerated, so they are paid for their attendance to the classes.
 - We are as a department also monitored for these services by the State of NJ.
 - And this is not a GED program; they will receive their high school diploma.
- **Questions:**
 - D. Corbett – What would you say is on your wish list of items that you would like to see this program achieve?
 - Chief Sessomes- our biggest struggle is the lack technology. Stand alone computers for use in the facilities and mobile USB drives so that the population can save their data without putting it on to a hard drive where everyone can access it. We also believe that ViaPath will assist with the outreach to the students enrolled in the programs.
 - D. Venable – Reference to the difference between adult students and the 21 and under students
 - Chief Sessomes – this is specific to the population that is classified and under the age of 21, they must attend school under the SFE Act. This is all listed under their academic standing. And we always try to focus on

keeping the SFEA population at facilities where the staff and programming is most prominent since there are set requirements for that population.

- R. Charles – What is the acceptance rate for the educational programs, is it high or low compared to outside the facilities.
- Chief Sessomes – The college programs rate of acceptance is pretty high; they tend to accept many of the applicants that due apply. As long as they show the maturity for wanting to do the work and they do look at the institutional behavior and adjustment. That would be the one thing that could possibly bar someone from acceptance, but that determination is made by the University.
- C. Albino – How are the students interacting with the facility teachers? Meeting for class? Online?
- Chief Sessomes – No, the professors meet in person at the facility. It is on-site learning and we have email set up through J-Pay which is being converted to ViaPath to assist the students. Which allows for facility designees from the colleges access to reach out to the students directly on their tablet or kiosk. And with the new ViaPath system we are setting up more software to grant accessibility between the professors and the students. And this will allow for possible online classroom in case of situations or scenarios that limit on-site in person interaction.

- **Carl Styles left meeting at 12:00p.m.**

Presentation by Assistant Commissioner Tome from Women and Veterans Services.

- **Highlights from the presentation:**
 - Created in 2021, it was designed to work with the department and federal government moving forward under the consent decree involved around sexual safety at Edna Mahan. We had over 121 paragraphs of different environments that we had to resolve within a 5-year time span. We currently have 44 paragraphs left, 77 total are complete and removed from the decree.
 - Division works with all in collaboration with all staff. It is broken up into two units: Compliance Units which is sexual safety and compliance at all of the NJDOC facilities. The other is education and certain services for identified veterans, to help connect them with VA Services and help provide transition, housing, employment, and to help increase their stability long-term. We also connect them with outside partners for assistance.
 - Also, our division has been working very hard on the New Women's Correctional facility, that is something we are very intentional in terms of planning for the program so the women so that we can take in for account of any specialized facility housing requests for the typical IP.
- **Questions –**
 - C. Albino - Not so much a question, but a comment. Being in a unique position and being a part of this department for over 50 years, I know where Edna Mahan was when I walked through the doors. And seeing where Edna Mahan now is and the progress that has been made under the Commissioner's leadership and your guidance has been tremendous, and I just think that deserves accommodation. I just appreciate all the effort over the last five years of this transformation. Because as a person, who did audits for ACA, I audited a number of female facilities around the country and we were not where we needed to be, but we are a lot closer now. So, congratulations.
 - AC Tome – Thank you, I appreciate that.
 - D-Corbett – how do you see the board assisting in any specific interactions or areas moving forward? How can we be helpful to you and your division.
 - AC Tome – In the last five years we have had a lot of support from outside agencies and legislature. This has resulted in legislation that was passed in the Incarcerated Women's Protection Act that created a board of trustees. So, moving forward when we reach the point of creation, we will be looking for your assistance and the Governor's office in the creation of the new board.
 - A- MacDonald - Do you foresee any issues with creating specialized housing for certain IP populations?
 - AC Tome – We will continue to follow laws as they are written, and we will continue to follow the policies as they are written.

Presentation by Administrator Berryman – East Jersey State Prison.

- Over a year ago, we created a 55 plus housing unit located of 2-down at East Jersey state prison. This is a double bunk unit that can house 104 IP's and was designed to create a foster community among the aging population.

- It supports rehabilitation and reintegration while creating a calmer and structured environment for peer support and shared experiences.
- Offers passive recreation and stability for the population and promotes dignity, safety and community housing.
- The unit offers meals within 2-down, cardio equipment and physical activity. There is a television in the dayroom along with books and other activities.
- Eligibility requirements include being over the age of 55, must have 1 year charge free, zero tolerance infractions within 3 years and requires program completion. And must remain charge free while assigned to 2-down.
- This program enforces good behavior within the IP population because it is a privilege for them, not a right. Which promotes accountability in the population. The IP population is aware that any infraction would lead to removal from the program which would open a position for an IP currently on the waiting list.
- This environment fosters a structure in the aging community of the population. Much of the feedback that i receive from this group is that it is a positive environment, because they have a lot of shared experiences that they can discuss; family, grandchild, body changes, health and so on.

- Questions -
- D. Corbett – what do you mean when you say, ‘passive recreation’?
- Admin. Berryman – Typically the other housing units go outside for cardio recreation. This unit is different because they have the availability to do cardio workouts inside on the provided equipment.
- R. Charles – All custody levels?
- Admin. Berryman – Yes.
- R. Charles – Is there currently a waiting list?
- Admin. Berryman – Yes, there is a waiting list of approx. 50 IPs.
- D. Venable – Are there any special programs in this area?
- Admin. Berryman – Social workers tour this area weekly if not more, pending the needs. They are always constantly updating and adjusting based on what the IP population is asking for.
- R. Charles – Request to receive a copy of the PowerPoint presentation.
- Admin. Berryman - Of course.
- D. Venable – What have you learned over the last year from the population in refence to this program?
- Admin. Berryman – Because this is a double bunk area, we have learned that certain IP’s prefer single cell bunk areas. So, the ones that seek out this program are doing so for the community environment.

Presentation by Director of Operations, Marc Sim and Lt. Steven Jonaitis

- ViaPath Presentation from the Division of Operations
- Tablets: Secure operation system, multiple network options, flexible charging options, configurable profiles to restrict or expand access to content and integrate with third party applications.
- Population given a tablet with charger and headphones, tablets provisioned to IP upon arrival at facility, must be relinquished when leaving that facility. IP population is responsible for negligent damage. Charging carts available to units with no plugs in cells. Restrictions for certain units, i.e. RHU/Level 1.
- Phone calls will be accessible via the tablet, same settings as GTL. This will reduce extortion for the wall phones. The wall phones will be staying inside the facilities, because the IP does have the option to not use the tablets.
- IP’s will be able to complete video visits from the tablets. Tablets must be docked to have a video visit.
- They will have capabilities for free and paid services on the ViaPath tablet. This includes education, religion, self-help, movies, television shows, games, books and so on.
- This will be a cloud-based system, this will expand our system for retention requirements. Access to all data within the contracted retention period is on demand within the application, not archived. Because the tablets are assigned the facility, the cloud-based system will allow for ease when a transfer happens. Example, if an IP is housed at South Woods State Prison and is transferred to Northern State Prison, the table will stay at South Woods, and the IP will receive a new one at Northern State Prison. The cloud-based system will allow for ease of transfer of data from facility to facility.
- Future Consideration – Commissary will be accessible via an app on the tablet. This will add to ease for ordering.
- Also, moving forward Tele-Med will be an option. There will be access to the law library, direct staff messaging, access to money accounts.

- Questions:
- D. Venable – Phasing out paper, is this a lead into eliminating contact visits?
- M. Sim – No – we’re never going to completely phase of paper. And no, contact visits are not going away.
- D. Venable – Phone call pricing, is it being lowered or remaining the same?
- M. Sim - The pricing will be cheaper than the previous program, J-Pay, I don’t have the exact rate price, but I do know that it is lower. Also, we will be keeping the wall phones inside the facilities, because we need a backup system should we lose Wi-Fi.
- D. Venable – Does RHU have access to their tablets?
- M. Sim – Currently with J-Pay, within the restorative housing unit; the Level 1, which is the highest level of restriction will not have access to their tablet. If through good behavior which moves them to Level 2, they regain access to their J-Pay tablet. But with ViaPath, all levels will be granted access to their tablet because that will have the phone call access application. So, it will be restricted through the tablet, but the tablet will remain with them. We want good behavior in the RHU unit, so with this advancement with the tablets we are creating a better progressive scale based on positive behavior with rewards on the tablet access.
- C. Albino – Transition Status, where are you currently?
- M. Sim – Currently we have transitioned at Edna Mahan Correctional facility, Bayside State Prison and Mid-State Correctional Facility. As we transition, its one for one. We take back the J-Pay tablet, and they receive the ViaPath Tablet same day.
- C. Albino – What is the projected completion date?
- M. Sim - We are approximately 2 months away from completion.
- C. Albino – Can you possibly explain some of the security features of the tablets.
- M. Sim – All communications that are completed by the IP are recorded and reviewed by NJDOC Custody. Systems are in place to look for phrases, ‘buzz words’ that would raise suspicion of activity. While the IP population can hand their tablet off to another, we do have certain features to help control misuse. We can track usage, searches, where and what they have been looking at. It will take a picture of the person attempting to open the tablet. So, every so often the tablet will snap a picture, and we can see if two different people or more are using the same tablet. We are not on the level of facial recognition like our person cell phones, but we do review and attempt to control misuse. The Custody Review Team that Lt. Jonaitis oversees reviews every photo that is sent to the IP population. And we also monitor the use of the tablets looking for IP’s that are showing elevated levels of stress, expressing suicidal ideation, planning an assault on staff or IP.
- D. Corbett – Will these new tablets offer communication with the population and their professors?
- Lt. Jonaitis – Communication is normally done one way, so we will be working with ViaPath to review the platform that the colleges use to make sure there are no security issues within the limitations of the college programs. This is very similar to the Tele-med application.
- R. Charles – Transfer of data from the J-Pay system to the new ViaPath System? Games, photos, movies.
- M. Sim – Games are going to be lost, we informed the IP population beforehand to let them know. Photos will allow the data to be mailed to their home or have someone come and pick it up at the facility to hold for them. So that they don’t lose them. Or they can be turned into NJDOC, and we will be destroying them. IPs however are expected to receive of their photos. J-Pay is currently communicating with ViaPath for the transfer of data, this included previously purchased music and photos in the storage system. We are a few months out from completion of transfer, but we are working with the two companies to complete the task.
- R. Charles – We saw issues with being able to retain tablets during the Covid era, so we had to write it into contract that we had a reserve of tablets available to our population. Are you doing the same?
- Lt. Jonaitis – We have a plus 10% for each of our facilities, this is for the tablets, earbuds and wall chargers.
- D. Venable – You may have answered this, with the transfer of data and then loss of certain items, is there any plan to procure dividends for the population.
- M. Sim – IP’s that have money in their media accounts, that money will be reissued to them for use with their new tablet. This will take some time also, because technically the money is held by J-Pay, so they have to release the funds to us for re-distribution to the IP population. The basic and easiest way to explain the transfer of the two systems, is like comparing two different types of phones, the programs won’t always transfer, so the engineers from both companies have to work together to move the products, but not everything is going to transfer because the software can’t support the original games that were ordered on the new platform tablet. But this will allow for advancement with health services. The IP will be able to request their ‘keep on person’ KOP meds directly through their applications

and sent messages to health services with questions. This will integrate more technically and possibly help the IP population upon release to the community.

- D. Venable – With the old J-Pay system, the IP's had access to buy stamps, is that still available.
- Lt. Jonaitis – Yes, they will still have access to buy stamps.

Chairperson Report:

- Chairperson MacDonald; Thank you so much to my fellow board members. It is so nice to see some folks that I don't see too often and thank you to the department for their work in the public that we are meeting on. I also want to thank the members of the public who are present, so I can't speak for the entire board, but I do believe the commissioner and department were sincere when they swore us in, that were where committed to greater transparency and responsible oversight. We regret that public comment was not feasible at this meeting. I do want to note for the record that, while the sunshine law, states in the floor of this not being a public forum, that does not describe the ceiling of the law or all possibility. I'm quite sure there will be lots of spirited discussions amongst the board, over the following weeks, on what establishing a by-laws looks like, or by describing a mission for this board will be. As we are fully in the throes of adjusting precedents set by 20 years of your past board and finding our own feet in this ecosystem. I also sincerely hope that this energy, the passion that everyone brought to this service over the first couple of months, can be tempered and maintained. It has been my explicit survival experience, and my personal professional expertise that institutions such as this tend to have to find the balance between like a terrible and literal urgency, and also a sustained and delicate action plan. And a lot of the really, really cool stuff that we were all brought in for, and has not been my experience of the commissioner, that she is fooled or the department or fools. But if we hope to accomplish the greater good, it may take a little bit longer than urgency tells us it should take. None of us are really chosen by accident. I am fully confident of that. And I really, really hope that we can continue moving forward in this dignity center, equity-minded focus. Thank you so much.

Old Business:

- None at this time

New Business:

- D- Corbett – Budget, not knowing the oversight of the board, would we able to have someone advise us of the plans for NJDOC and the State budget
- A. MacDonald – If I can make a brief comment and response, the budget is a public forum, and I believe NJDOC is scheduled for the second week of May. I believe I should be able to attend. I think it would be very, very wise or productive or educational towards being used for to attend, if possible, and if we can figure it out with our work schedules, you name it. That was a really, really insightful thought.
- Motion by return to new business by C. Albino. 2nd motion by J. Fuqua; looking to adjust the time of the start of the meeting to 10:00am or 10:30am.
- Board of Trustee's voted to adjust the meeting start time to 10:00am, for the next meeting and any foreseeable meeting until it is voted upon again to chance.

No private session needed.

Adjournment

- C. Albino– Motion to Adjourn.
- R. Charles– Second the Motion.
- Meeting adjourned at 1:03 p.m.