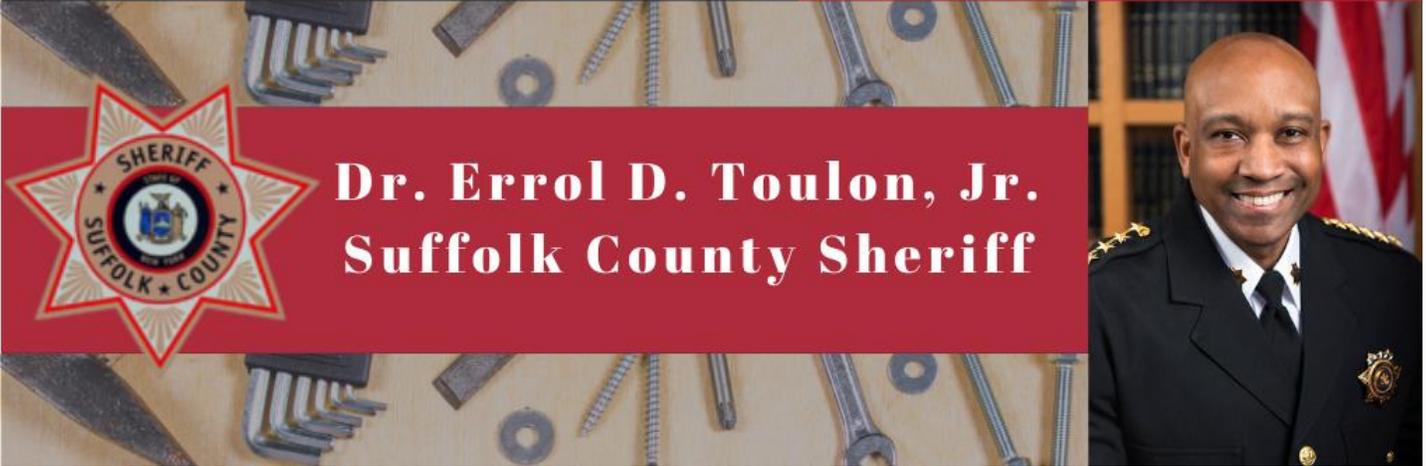


# DECONSTRUCTING

# the Prison Pipeline



**On January 1, 2018**, Dr. Errol D. Toulon, Jr. became Suffolk County’s 67th Sheriff of Suffolk County, New York and the County’s first African American to be elected to a non-judicial countywide office. Over the course of his 30-year career in law enforcement, including 25 years working on Rikers Island, Sheriff Toulon came to the conclusion that many current laws and policies aimed at reducing crime and recidivism were failing to consider the root causes – such as adverse childhood experiences, trauma and the effects of intergenerational-incarceration. In October 2018, he put together a task force called Deconstructing the Prison Pipeline, and brought together lawmakers, human service experts, impacted individuals, educators, and law enforcement officials to study the issue and implement holistic solutions.

## **THE DECONSTRUCTING THE PRISON PIPELINE TASK FORCE SEEKS TO CREATE A MORE EFFECTIVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND PREVENT JUVENILE DELINQUENCY**

*Sheriff Toulon believes that by focusing on the related needs of children, the community, and the incarcerated population, we can build a better society, reduce crime, and improve the correctional system.*

### Children

- Attention to Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Use of School-based Assessment and Intervention Programs to Replace Zero-Tolerance Disciplinary Policies
- More Funding for Before and After School Programs
- Mentoring Initiatives
- Universal Pre-K Programs

### Community

- Treat Psychiatric Conditions Rather than Punish
- More Access to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment
- Viable Employment and Training Opportunities
- Better Access to Healthcare
- Rapid Rehousing to Help End Homelessness

### Incarcerated

- Evidenced-based Rehabilitation Programming
- Programs for the Children and Families of the Incarcerated Population
- Vocational and Educational Training Opportunities
- Targeted Interventions for Unique Populations like Human Trafficking Victims

## MISSION STATEMENT

*“My motto is getting to the kids before they get to me.”*  
*-Sheriff Errol D. Toulon, Jr.*

**Safe schools and neighborhoods depend on a caring community where everyone feels they will be equally protected, supported, and heard. Deconstructing the Prison Pipeline seeks to address the root causes of youthful crime and racial inequities in the justice system -- and brings together law enforcement, lawmakers, school officials, human service professionals and impacted individuals to innovate and create systemic change.**

## HOW THE SUFFOLK COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE IS REALIZING THIS VISION



Under Sheriff Toulon’s leadership, the Suffolk County Sheriff’s Office became the first law enforcement agency in the nation to partner with Sandy Hook Promise to teach school children the **Say Something** and **Start with Hello** curriculum in county schools. Say Something helps youth recognize the signs of a peer in distress and how to handle situations like witnessing abuse, violence and self-harm. Start with Hello is designed to encourage positive social interaction to reduce loneliness, isolation and bullying. By teaching thousands of students in these programs each year, Sheriff Toulon hopes to create a cultural shift in society in which all children and adults become **empowered bystanders—and we reduce the stigma of seeking emotional and mental health support.** Sheriff Toulon is also seeking to address the unintended consequences of zero-tolerance school disciplinary policies that studies show feed the “school-to-prison pipeline.” In July 2019, Sheriff Toulon met with

many school superintendents and security staff to discuss the efficacy of an evidenced-based alternative known as the **Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines.** It is a program used to evaluate threats of violence, quickly resolve less serious transient threats and take appropriate action in response to more serious, substantive threats. The method encourages more collective problem solving that gets to the core of disciplinary problems. Studies have found that schools using this model were able to resolve threats safely and effectively, allowing almost all students to return to school. It also resulted in lower suspension rates and fewer alternative school transfers, with no racial/ethnic disparities for black and Hispanic students. Youth in special education programs received similar outcomes to other students, and in school climate surveys, students and teachers reported less bullying and more positive perceptions of school climate than students and teachers in control-group schools. Numerous school districts now intend to adopt this methodology.

*As someone that walked countless cellblocks and who has spent time talking with justice-involved youth, I can tell you that children’s pathways to violence and suicide are inextricably linked to trauma, a lack of mental health support, bullying and abuse – factors that often manifest in high anxiety, aggression, signs of depression, and sometimes a lack of empathy. These issues can lead to escalating behavioral problems in schools – and neighborhoods. – Dr. Errol D. Toulon, Jr.*

## FOSTERING A NEW APPROACH TO CORRECTIONS AND TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMMING

### UNTREATED MENTAL ILLNESS CAN BE A PIPELINE TO CHRONIC CONFINEMENT

- The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) released a study in 2017 that revealed 14 % of state and federal prisoners and 26 % of jail inmates reported experiences that met the threshold for serious psychological distress (SPD)
- 14% of prisoners and 10% of jail inmates who met the threshold for SPD in the past 30 days were written up while incarcerated -- or charged with assault
- Additional charges often lead inmates with serious mental illness **to spend significantly more time in jail and prison over the course of their lifetime**
- Most jails and prisons are not adequately staffed to treat these cases



Jails and prisons across the nation are filled with individuals with severe and persistent mental illness, drug addiction, and healthcare needs. If left unaddressed, these individuals typically return to our communities and re-offend within 1-3 years. This cycle of crime and incarceration can have lasting effects on victims, families and whole communities.

Sheriff Toulon launched multiple programs designed to address recidivism. These include the **Anti-Human Trafficking Initiative**, **Choose Your Path** for young adults ages 18-25, **Choose to Thrive** for incarcerated women, and the **Senior Program POD** for older adults. He also improved services for the **Veterans Program POD** and the **Sheriff's Addiction Treatment Program**. All of these initiatives are managed by a newly formed cadre of Correctional Counselors that are serving more than 2000 individuals each year with robust programming and transitional support. The services offered are designed to address core criminogenic factors and to provide a continuum of services as the offenders prepare for transitioning back into our communities.

*According to the National Association of Counties, an estimated 2 million individuals with serious mental conditions are booked into county jails each year, resulting in rates of serious mental conditions in jails that are 3 to 6 times higher than in the general population. An even greater number of individuals who are detained in jails each year have mental health problems that do not rise to the level of a serious mental condition but may still require a resource-intensive response.*

One of the more difficult challenges facing the nation today is the lack of mental healthcare in communities and correctional facilities. Sheriff Toulon is advocating for expanded community and jail-based treatment for those with mental illness and addiction, and for common sense legislation that will improve public safety and help to heal lives.

In October 2019, Sheriff Toulon kicked off an **Interfaith Council** which will work in tandem with the Office's Correctional Counselors to provide assistance to the families and children of the county's inmates.

\*\*\*SAVE THE DATE\*\*\*

JOIN SHERIFF ERROL D. TOULON, JR. AND NYS ASSEMBLYWOMAN KIMBERLY JEAN PIERRE  
For the first Annual Deconstructing the Prison Pipeline Full-Day Conference  
APRIL 17, 2020  
TOURO LAW CENTER, CENTRAL ISLIP, NEW YORK

Email us for more information: [Suffolk\\_Sheriff@suffolkcountyny.gov](mailto:Suffolk_Sheriff@suffolkcountyny.gov)  
Visit us online at [www.SuffolkSheriff.com](http://www.SuffolkSheriff.com)