

April 6, 2026

Contact:

Press@legal-aid.org

*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

30 Legal Organizations, Advocates Demand DOCCS Immediately Address Discriminatory and Dangerous Conditions Impacting Safety, Well-Being of TGNCNBI Individuals at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility

In the Past Two Months, Three People Have Died at the Facility

(WESTCHESTER, NY) — More than 30 legal organizations, advocacy groups, attorneys with transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and intersex (TGNCNBI) clients, and others sent a [letter](#) to New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello III demanding he take immediate action to address the [deplorable conditions](#) currently threatening the safety, health, and well-being of TGNCNBI people housed at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in upstate New York.

According to the letter, these policies and practices include increases in unjustified uses of force, extended lock-ins, restrictions on out-of-cell recreation, lack of access to safe, private showers, as well as barriers to accessing gender-affirming clothing and care.

These conditions, the letter asserts, were primarily implemented following the installation of Deputy Superintendent of Security (DSS) Michael Blot in the summer of 2025. Despite [advocates](#) and [lawmakers](#) raising alarms about DSS Blot's policies, no corrective actions have been taken, and TGNCNBI people have continued to suffer under his draconian leadership. Earlier this year, three people died in the facility – two by suicide — in a period of just four weeks.

The letter outlines several actions DOCCS can immediately take to mitigate this crisis, including:

- an immediate, independent investigation into reports that DSS Blot is ordering staff to engage in unjustified uses of force against incarcerated people;
- a reversal of any official or discretionary policies that have led to extended lock-ins and lack of sufficient and safe access to showers, including but not limited to rescinding Facility Operations Manual 311;
- restore indoor recreation in all housing units;
- end the practice of requiring trans masculine and nonbinary individuals to wear bras upon intake;

- ensure timely and regular access to medical and mental health treatment, including gender-affirming care;
- ensure staff, including National Guard staff, are trained on and compliant with policies to ensure the respectful treatment of TGNCNBI people in custody, and discipline staff for any misconduct; and
- remove DSS Blot from any role requiring direct interaction with incarcerated individuals or oversight of security staff.

Moreover, the letter requests that Commissioner Martuscello promptly meet with a group of representatives and advocates for TGNCNBI individuals — and particularly those with lived experiences by — to discuss the concerns, as well as proposed solutions to improve the safety and well-being of TGNCNBI people housed at the facility.

“Despite numerous attempts from advocates and lawmakers to bring attention to the deplorable conditions at Bedford Hills, DOCCS has failed to address the dangerous conditions and practices ushered in by DSS Blot, which incarcerated people have reported has led to unjustified uses of force, denied medical and mental health care, and tragic losses of life,” said **Erin Beth Harrist, Director of the LGBTQ+ Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “We demand immediate action be taken to mitigate these harms and protect TGNCNBI people at Bedford Hills, including an independent investigation into the unjustified uses of force.”

“People who are incarcerated deserve dignity. Yet, at Bedford Hills, DOCCS continues to subject transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and intersex people to abhorrent conditions,” said **M. Porter, staff attorney at the New York Civil Liberties Union**. “Every day of inaction is a direct threat to the safety, health and well-being of our incarcerated community members. With the Trump administration escalating its attacks against trans people behind bars, DOCCS must act immediately to ensure this facility provides the fundamental care and respect every human being is entitled to.”

Diana Colavita, an organizer with Survived & Punished New York, said, “The latest crisis of violence, neglect, and repression inside Bedford Hills Correctional demonstrates once again that there’s no such thing as a safe cage. We echo the demand for DOCCS to remove DSS Blot from any role requiring direct interaction with incarcerated individuals or oversight of security staff, on the basis that his appointment has overseen a period of intensified violence in the facility. Such an action would be one step towards much needed changes at Bedford, including the restoration of indoor recreation and safe access to showers for all incarcerated people. Ultimately, we believe that the best cage is an empty one and in the meantime, stand with the TGNC community in ensuring that conditions inside Bedford shift rapidly.”

“The crisis at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility is a blatant failure of accountability. Women and TGNCNBI people inside have long raised alarms about dangerous and degrading conditions, yet New York still fails to act. Multiple deaths later and DSS Michael Blot, who oversees this women’s facility despite serious allegations of misconduct, remains in a position of power. Blot must be removed immediately, and swift action taken to protect the health, safety, and dignity of everyone in custody,” said **Serena Martin, Executive Director of New Hour for Women and Children**.

“We do not believe in the carceral prison system. We understand it functions as one that harms and terrorizes communities. We will continue to stand in solidarity with our loved ones inside to resist any new DOCCS administrative practices that increase violence and harm. We will not wait for further injury, death, or abuse to occur at the hands of this system — whether through correctional officers, National Guard involvement, administrative policies, or alleged cover-ups and misinformation. DOCCS and Commissioner Martuscello have been placed on notice by our community. We demand that conditions at Bedford Hills be restored to how they existed prior to Deputy Superintendent Michael Blot’s appointment. We are also calling for the removal of DSS Michael Blot from Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. To ensure that those responsible are held accountable for

their intentional disregard for the lives and well-being of all affected by these recent illegal changes in policy, we demand a thorough and comprehensive independent investigation into the circumstances that led to the deaths of Shamdai Arjun, Tracy Morales, and Manuela ‘Mannie’ Morgan, as well as any incidents involving correctional officers or members of the National Guard who have resorted to violence, causing injury or harm to individuals held at this facility. These claims and details are based on allegations provided and have not been independently verified,” said **Bayna-Lehkiem El-Amin, Community Organizer with F2L.**

###

The Legal Aid Society is a nonprofit law firm that exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For 150 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of the people we serve and helps improve our communities.

www.legalaidnyc.org