



## **State of New Jersey**

### **STATE PAROLE BOARD**

JON S. CORZINE, GOVERNOR

YOLETTE C. ROSS., CHAIRMAN

Post Office Box 862

Trenton, New Jersey 08625

# **Media Release**

For Immediate Release:

**1/21/09**

For more information contact:

**Neal Buccino**

**(609) 292-4031, office**

**(609) 468-9728, cell**

## **Yolette C. Ross Takes Charge As State Parole Board Acting Chair**

TRENTON –Yolette C. Ross, who over the last 20 years has emerged as a vital State leader and policymaker, has taken charge as the State Parole Board's acting chair. Ross began her career in law enforcement as a probation officer, and eventually served as a Deputy Chief of Staff to Governor Richard J. Codey. She is now New Jersey's first African-American female State Parole Board chairman, and one of four in America. Ross has been a State Parole Board Member since December 2005.

"As the state's lead re-entry agency, parole has a crucial public safety mission: to hold offenders responsible and help ensure those under supervision work to become law-abiding citizens," Ross said. "Under my administration, I will continue to make tough decisions to address critical re-entry needs and issues – from pressing and well-acknowledged issues such as addiction and employment, to emerging issues, such as those facing female offenders."

Ross became acting Chairman upon the retirement of her predecessor Peter J. Barnes Jr. She began serving as the agency's Vice Chairman in May 2007, and has emerged as an agency leader in the development of innovative gender-based reentry programs.

Ross has taken a key role in the Female Offender Reentry Group Effort (FORGE), a model program based in Essex and Camden counties. Female offenders are the fastest growing group in prisons, with a nationwide population increase recently measured at a stunning 757 percent. Female offenders face unique barriers in their reentry to the community. Based on the observations of New Jersey parole officers in the field, and on best practices used nationwide, FORGE is now a multi-agency partnership that provides employment-related, education and other services to female ex-offenders. In 2008 the program served 572 female parolees and other female ex-offenders in Essex County.

As Chairman, Ross will soon announce an expansion of FORGE through a partnership with the Department of Community Affairs' Division on Women. She also plans to thoroughly examine the reentry barriers that ex-offenders face in New Jersey, as well as all State Parole Board reentry programs and current legislation, to identify strengths and areas of enhancement.

*(more)*

Prior to joining the State Parole Board, Ross served as Deputy Chief of Staff to Governor Richard J. Codey. She is a member of the Gloucester County College Board of Trustees and the College's Foundation, a founding officer of the Salem County Rape Crisis Center, and president of the Deptford Township Library Board.

Ross graduated from William Patterson College in 1979, and went on to serve as a Salem County probation officer from 1980 to 1984. She was later hired as an investigator for the State Division of Gaming Enforcement, where she conducted background checks on prospective casino licensees. In 1999 she earned a Master of Arts in Public Relations from Rowan University.

The New Jersey State Parole Board (SPB) is New Jersey's lead reentry agency, and works to ensure ex-prisoners return to society as law-abiding citizens. As required by law, appointed Parole Board Members and staff conduct more than 20,000 hearings per year, solicit input from victims and decide parole matters. SPB sworn parole officers supervise more than 15,000 offenders statewide. In addition, SPB is New Jersey's primary law enforcement agency responsible for sex offender supervision. SPB officers are also active partners with multiple Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies and task forces. Finally, SPB's Community Programs Unit partners with government, non-profit and private agencies to connect ex-prisoners with vocational, mental health and related services, targeted to break the cycle and risk of crime.

###