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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 21, 2023

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Prison Oversight Office Announces Deputies over New Divisions

TRENTON, New Jersey – The Office of the Corrections Ombudsman today announced that Ronald Pierce and Danielle Romano have been hired as Deputies to lead two new divisions in the Office.

Mr. Pierce, a criminal justice researcher and policy analyst who has written and spoken extensively about his lived experience in prison, will head up the Office's Community Engagement Division.

Ms. Romano, who has steered stakeholder collaboration and outcome monitoring for New Jersey's juvenile justice agencies, will oversee the Office's Systemic Monitoring Division.

"I'm so grateful to have these two exceptional minds, Ron Pierce and Danielle Romano, join the office," **said Terry Schuster, the New Jersey Corrections Ombudsman.** "Their expertise, wisdom, sound judgement, and decades of experience will help us support and partner with champions of reform inside and outside of the Department of Corrections."

[The Dignity Act](#), which Gov. Murphy signed into law in 2020, expanded the access and mandate of the Office of the Corrections Ombudsman, requiring the independent oversight authority not only to field individual concerns from incarcerated people and their loved ones, but also to inspect prison facilities, survey incarcerated individuals, analyze data, hold public meetings, and engage with policymakers on legislation impacting prison conditions.

As Deputy Ombudsman, Mr. Pierce will develop and lead community engagement activities, public education events, and policy initiatives focused on the safety, health, and well-being of incarcerated individuals in New Jersey. Pierce has a Master's degree in Criminal Justice from Rutgers University. He has provided research and data analysis for the state's Sentencing and Disposition Commission, led policy

reform campaigns related to voting rights and jury service for people with criminal convictions, and written and lectured about prison and jail conditions, isolated confinement, behavioral health, and his own lived experience over three decades in state prison.

“I am excited to join the team of the Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson,” **said Ron Pierce.** “As a formerly incarcerated person, I understand the value of having an impartial entity outside the Department of Corrections to review the policies and practices of the Department. I hope to bring credibility to the process and devote my energy to ensuring I maintain the highest standards to help this office complete its mission under the Dignity Act.”

Pierce will assume responsibilities as Deputy Ombudsperson on September 11, 2023.

In her role as Deputy over the Office’s Systemic Monitoring Division, Ms. Romano will oversee prison inspections and manage a diverse portfolio of activities designed to monitor the programs, policies, and services of the Department of Corrections. In the past, Romano held leadership and technical assistance support roles in the Juvenile Justice Commission’s State Youth Advisory Board and Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative. Romano has also provided treatment and case management services to women returning to the community from prison. She has a Master’s degree in Criminal Justice from St. Joseph’s University.

“With this new Division in the Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson, I hope to zoom out from individual complaints about prison conditions and engage with correctional leaders about how best to protect everyone from harm—the incarcerated population, the staff in our state prisons, and the public,” **said Danielle Romano.**

Romano assumed responsibilities as Deputy Ombudsperson on June 5, 2023.

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