



JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
111 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA MAINE  
04333-0111

RANDALL A. LIBERTY  
COMMISSIONER

January 17, 2023

PRESS RELEASE

Media Contact:

Randall A. Liberty, Commissioner  
Anna Black, Director of Government Affairs  
207-530-3794  
[Anna.Black@Maine.Gov](mailto:Anna.Black@Maine.Gov)

## **Maine Department of Corrections' Statement on Selection of Deputy Commissioner Thornell to Serve as Director of Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation & Reentry**

The Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC) issued the following statements after Governor Katie Hobbs of Arizona announced today that she has selected MDOC Deputy Commissioner Ryan Thornell, Ph.D., to serve as Director of the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation & Reentry.

“Along with Commissioner Liberty, Deputy Commissioner Thornell has been a visionary leader for the Maine Department of Corrections, implementing national best practices like the widespread delivery of medication for substance use disorder, while balancing rehabilitation with public safety and respect for the rights of victims,” **said Governor Janet Mills**. “I am grateful to Deputy Commissioner Thornell for his ‘perfect effort’, as they say in the MDOC, and for his many contributions to strengthen our corrections system in Maine. I wish him all the best in Arizona.”

“Ryan’s approach to modernizing correctional practices has improved the way the Department conducts itself,” **said MDOC Commissioner Randall Liberty**. “The positive impact he has had in every area of this department cannot be overstated. He’s a trusted mentor and coach to staff and residents alike, and his compass is centered in justice and in doing what’s right, always.”

“It has been an honor to serve alongside Commissioner Liberty and the hundreds of employees across this great department. Together, with the support of Governor Mills, this team has advanced a modern, more humane approach to corrections, fundamentally improving the field of corrections,” **said Deputy Commissioner Thornell**. “I am proud to have been a part of leading this effort in Maine. I will miss my MDOC family, and I will think of them often as I step into this exciting new challenge.”

Thornell, a leader in correctional reform nationally, first came to Maine in 2014 as the Executive Director of the Board of Corrections. He joined the MDOC in 2015 as the Director of Correctional

### ***MDOC's Mission Statement:***

*Making our communities safer by reducing harm through supportive intervention, empowering change, and restoring lives.*

Phone: (207) 287-2711

(TTY) Maine Relay 711

Fax: (207) 287-4370

Program Practices, was promoted to Associate Commissioner in 2016, and was appointed Deputy Commissioner in 2018.

With Thornell's guidance the MDOC implemented a new vision and mission, creating a non-adversarial culture inside facilities that ensures public safety while prioritizing the humanity of residents and fostering respectful interactions among residents and staff. Deputy Commissioner Thornell's work successfully reformed the department's use of restrictive housing, increased rehabilitative programs and services, including expanding education, ushering in and continuing partnerships with universities, including the University of Maine at Augusta and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and also led the creation of MDOC's first resident-led [debate team](#).

Early in his tenure at the MDOC, Thornell received the Department's Transformational Leadership Award for his work to improve the Maine State Prison's Intensive Mental Health Unit. Through the fostering of relationships, shared vision, and new policies with staff, county jails, State hospitals, courts, and community providers, Thornell reformed the purpose of the unit to restore wellness through necessary medical, behavioral, and recreational support services in the least restrictive manner.

In July 2019, Thornell led MDOC's implementation of [medication for substance use disorder \(MSUD\) treatment services](#). What started as a small pilot serving 100 residents across three facilities turned into a full scale, [nationally recognized](#) program accessible to any resident in MDOC meeting clinical criteria. Residents now access a wide array of services that include assessment, medication, counseling, peer support, recovery groups, harm reduction, and direct connections with community supports. Thornell credits the [success of the program](#) on the staff and residents who embraced practices and polices not customary in corrections but have resulted in more than 1,400 residents successfully completing treatment prior to release.

Commissioner Liberty and the MDOC's Executive Leadership team will assume Thornell's responsibilities until a replacement is named.

###