

NEWS

Ellington officer rallies community to donate 1,000 items to Hartford Community Court closet

By [Tyler Fedor](#), Staff Writer Feb 25, 2026



From left to right: Ellington Resident State Trooper Joe Fratini, Ellington Police Officer Joe Decker, Hartford State's Attorney's Office Investigator/Ellington Police Officer Jose Martinez, Ellington First Selectman Laurie Burstein and Ellington Resident Trooper Sergeant Tim Merrill pose in the Clothes Closet on Feb. 19, 2026.

Courtesy of Community Partners in Action

ELLINGTON — Jose Martinez usually walks between the [Hartford](#) Superior Court and Hartford Community Court for his work as an investigator in the Connecticut State's Attorney's Office, passing through a green space where unhoused people sometimes lay on the benches.

He'll often ask if they need food or clean, warm clothing. For the clothing, he'll stop at the Clothes Closet in the Community Court run by Community Partners in Action, a nonprofit dedicated to criminal justice reform and rehabilitation services.

The scenes bring to mind his own upbringing as the oldest son in his family and how his mother struggled to put food on the table.

"I've served my entire career with that mindset that any opportunity I have that I can give back in some form or some way, I always do so," said Martinez, who is also a part-time police officer in Ellington.

So, when he saw how close to empty the Clothes Closet was getting, he rallied his fellow officers in Ellington, local businesses and churches with the assistance of other police officers to collect 1,000 items to donate throughout January.

People exiting prison may not have business attire and would need to use the suits and dresses if available in the closet, Martinez said he learned from Deborah Barrows, the program manager of Hartford Community Court's Community Service Program.

The collections included various types of clothes and hygiene items, and is "one of, if not the biggest overall donation of clothing items," to Community Partners for Action, Martinez said.

Martinez said working in Ellington for years taught him how caring the community is. Ellington First Selectman Laurie Burstein was supportive of the drive and even made donations of her own, while some items donated by others were also brand new.

Other Ellington Police officers also donated their own items and some, such as Officer Joe Decker, also met with businesses and residents who wanted to donate items.

Martinez said it was an "incredible feeling" to see people donate to the drive.

"As we speak about the mission itself, it touches you personally because we're dealing with folks oftentimes when we speak about homelessness that are absolutely at one of the lowest points of their life," Martinez said.

Martinez realized people needed more than clothes and heavy coats, though. Churches brought in hygiene items for men and women and businesses brought in thermal wear, such as hats and socks.

"It was just incredible the amount of clothing items that we ended up getting and how this evolved over the month," Martinez said.

Martinez retired as a sergeant in the [Bloomfield](#) Police Department and said community-focused drives and events like the one he performed in Ellington is the "work that I enjoy doing," a love of which came from his time in Bloomfield.

He hopes his previous work outside of traditional law enforcement measures and this drive inspire younger police officers to pursue and support similar causes, including Connecticut State Police Trooper Joe Fratini, who met with Ellington businesses and residents who wanted to donate items when Decker wasn't available.

The closet at the Hartford Community Court is open to anyone who is in need, Martinez said.

"I can't stress enough how just these small, simple acts can bring dignity in difficult moments and give hope," Martinez said.