



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of August 21, 2023 -- 'Upstate localities need to act against migrant crisis'

THOMAS F. O'MARA August 21, 2023

| ISSUE: **MIGRANT CRISIS**



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Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and

policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, "Upstate localities need to act against migrant crisis"

There's no choice but to continue focusing on New York State's burgeoning migrant crisis -- because it's on the brink of becoming a tidal wave of asylum-seekers sweeping across Upstate New York communities, including right here at home.

Since the spring of 2022, New York City, which has long declared itself a sanctuary city, estimates that more than 100,000 asylum-seekers have arrived in the city from the southern border. The numbers of migrants have overwhelmed the city's ability to find housing and provide food and other social services. As a result, Governor Hochul and New York City Mayor Eric Adams have been working in tandem to identify shelters in communities around the state to move migrants.

Dozens of migrant advocacy groups are now pressuring the governor to take unilateral, executive action to overrule any county-level orders attempting to block the state from relocating migrants. Furthermore, President Biden recently denied Governor Hochul's request to utilize a largely vacant, 1,000+ acre, former military airfield in Brooklyn as a migrant camp. There have also been reports that a migrant camp set up on Randall Island in the city could cost the state \$20 million a month to operate.

We are at the tipping point of unmitigated chaos and disaster for local upstate communities. Many local communities have already issued emergency orders prohibiting hotels, motels, and other facilities from contracting with the city or state to accept migrants without local approval.

I have been urging every Upstate county, city, town, and village to do so in an effort to prevent Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams from unilaterally moving forward on mass relocations of asylum-seeking migrants from the city to Upstate communities.

Make no mistake: Once asylum-seekers arrive in a community and start to become settled, it's too late. Localities must be pro-active in issuing emergency orders. Many of us believe that local control can and must be exerted in this instance. Upstate counties including Albany, Buffalo, and Monroe that initially welcomed asylum seekers with open arms are now pulling back because of the public safety and health concerns that have already arisen. Furthermore, New York City is already ignoring its promises of financial assistance to these same upstate localities that willingly accepted migrants. In other words, it's another unfunded mandate in the making for local governments and taxpayers, one that risks being enormously, enormously expensive.

I'm fully supportive of a safe and responsible system of legal immigration in this nation. There has long been a failure of leadership at the federal level. It has been exacerbated by the Biden administration and has now led to this chaos.

Upstate localities have every right to try to protect their communities from an onslaught of asylum seekers that threaten to overrun local resources, social services, schools, and budgets, to mention nothing of the public health and safety concerns.

The migrant crisis is spreading across this state as fast as Governor Hochul can find shelters and Mayor Adams can fill buses with migrants off the streets of New York City. It's a crisis that is only going to get worse. Upstate localities should take every possible step, including issuing emergency orders, to try to exert local control over Governor Hochul's plan to send migrants to the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and all over Upstate.

The governor and her Democrat, New York City allies appear ready and willing to override local control once again in a crisis. Right now, it's the only plan on their table.

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