



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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All Parties Must Work Together to Ensure NYS Prisons are Safe for Everyone

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By definition, New York State Corrections Officers have one of the most difficult jobs in law enforcement. They are responsible for the security of our forty-two state prisons and the safety of inmates, staff, and visitors. On a daily basis, they are charged with maintaining order and discipline, actively supervising over 33,000 inmates.

Current conditions inside many of New York's correctional facilities have made an already dangerous environment even worse. Staffing shortages are at a crisis level, with thousands of positions unfilled. Officers are often required to work mandatory overtime, including double and sometimes triple shifts. This is detrimental to the health of workers and their quality of life, not to mention the overall safety of the facility. Meanwhile, the number of assaults on officers has doubled over the past five years, reaching historic highs. Last year alone, more than 1,900 assaults on staff were reported statewide. These conditions are unacceptable.

Corrections officers have repeatedly warned about these deteriorating conditions and recently took matters into their own hands, standing together and speaking out at dozens of prisons across the state, including Collins and Wende correctional facilities locally. Officers are demanding changes in policy, procedures, and staffing, among other things.

Under our constitution, the operation of state prisons is largely the responsibility of the governor and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, or DOCCS. But the Legislature cannot stand idly by when the safety and security of individuals and communities are at stake.

The state has an obligation to ensure that correctional facilities are adequately staffed and that officers have the resources and tools necessary to keep everyone in our prisons safe. The state has failed in this responsibility. If additional funding is necessary to attract, hire and retain officers, and to ensure they receive proper training and equipment to do their job, the Legislature must include it in this year's budget. Further, the state has the authority to implement better policies to limit contraband and has failed to sufficiently do so.

I urge my colleagues in the Senate and Assembly to permanently repeal the HALT Act, which took effect in 2022. I voted against the measure because it severely restricts the use of

segregated confinement for inmates who break the rules and engage in violent behavior. Hindering the ability to separate violent inmates from the general prison population is reckless and eliminates an effective deterrent to dangerous behavior. I co-sponsor a bill (S.2656) that would restore the use of this valuable tool to help keep the prison population safe.

Our correctional facilities are unsafe and dangerous. Everyone who lives, works, and visits our correctional facilities deserves a safe and secure environment. It is time for the Executive and Legislature to listen to, and work with, the Corrections professionals who do the job, to ensure that is the case.