



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Crime Should Not Pay

MICHAEL F. NOZZOLIO May 21, 2010

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All across New York State, law-abiding citizens have been tightening their belts, cutting spending and foregoing even the smallest luxuries. Everyone has had to sacrifice in these difficult economic times—everyone except those individuals who have broken the law, and are now incarcerated in our State's prisons.

As the cost of living continues to climb for New Yorkers, so does the cost of incarcerating, rehabilitating and providing health care for New York's prison inmates.

Last year, New York taxpayers spent over \$121 million to provide top-of-the-line health care to prisoners, amounting to about \$2,000 per inmate, while millions of New Yorkers either go without medical coverage or are struggling to pay their health insurance premiums. In New York State, it is clear that crime does pay.

Hardworking taxpayers are being forced every day to change or even drop their health care coverage because of rising premiums, unbearable co-pays and outrageous State taxes on healthcare benefits. In fact, the 2009-2010 New York State budget, which I adamantly opposed, included over 100 new taxes and fees, including a tax on employer provided healthcare plans. This cost has been passed on to employees across the State and as a result, many have had to opt out of their health care plans.

Meanwhile, those convicted of violent crimes, murder, rape, robbery and drug offenses enjoy unlimited access to free health care at your expense. It is simply unacceptable to me that those who have been removed from society for breaking the law enjoy the health care at no charge that so many hardworking taxpayers can no longer afford.

The health care benefits provided to our State's inmates are often expensive and medically unnecessary. Shockingly, New York State taxpayers have had to pay for elective procedures, including hormone treatments for inmates preparing to undergo gender modification.

These costs are exorbitant and New York State's taxpayers deserve relief. That is why I have authored and introduced legislation (S.2404) that would require individuals currently incarcerated in New York State, to contribute to the cost of their medical care.

This important legislation would require prisoners to pay \$7.00 per visit as a co-payment for medical treatment. No inmate would be denied medical treatment for an inability to pay, safeguarding their health and safety, but it would reduce the excessive and non-emergency health care visits currently taking place in our prisons and save millions of taxpayer dollars each year.

More than 2/3 of states have already enacted co-payments for inmate medical services, including California, Arizona, Pennsylvania and Nevada. In 2000, the federal government successfully adopted and implemented a co-payment system for federal prisoners, saving the Department of Justice millions of dollars every year. In states that have instituted a co-pay program, the abuse in the number of sick call visits by inmates was reduced by as much as 76%, also saving these states millions of taxpayer dollars. Clearly, this is because inmates are being held responsible for their own health needs, just as you and I are.

During these difficult economic times, we must fight to protect our hardworking taxpayers, especially those individuals struggling to make ends meet. We cannot continue to ask more of our law-abiding citizens than we do of those who have broken the law. Now more than ever, it is vital that we correct this injustice in our corrections system and require prisoners to pay their fair share for health care.