



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Sen.Young Calls for Resignation of OCFS Commissioner Gladys Carrion

CATHARINE YOUNG May 26, 2010

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Senator will also conduct a hearing to further investigate the incident

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ALBANY - State Senator Catharine Young (R,I,C-Olean) today called for the immediate resignation of New York State Office of Children and Family Services Commissioner Gladys Carrion for sanctioning a state taxpayer-funded orgy that took place during a dance at a youth facility that houses killers and other violent criminals. At least one underage girl and a suspected prostitute were brought into the juvenile prison and performed a lap dance and possibly, other sexual acts.

Senator Young also announced that she will be conducting a hearing in Albany to further investigate the incident, as well as reports of violent youths being released prematurely into less secure settings where they have murdered and viciously assaulted community members, and of numerous attacks by youths against OCFS staffers who work at state-run facilities.

"It is shocking and outrageous that teenage girls are being escorted at the taxpayers' expense

into youth prisons. These are gang members and hardened criminals convicted as adults for violent crimes such as rape, murder and armed robbery. They are being rewarded by having girls brought to them for their personal entertainment, including sex acts," Senator Young said.

"We have an unprecedented fiscal crisis in our state, and our overburdened taxpayers are paying for this type of garbage? It's deplorable," Senator Young said.

Currently, there are three state agency investigations into the incident, which is six months old.

"We need action. Under Commissioner Carrion's direction, the entire juvenile justice system is spinning out of control. As a direct result of her radical policies, many innocent people are being hurt, or worse," Senator Young said.

The New York Post today reported on the outlandish "social" that took place at Goshen Secure Center in Orange County on December 12, 2009. Girls as young as 15 were transported into the prison to attend the dance with convicted killers and other dangerous criminals. A lap dance was videotaped by a surveillance camera and other sexual acts possibly were committed.

One prison employee, Tony Collado, said that he was ordered to drive two women invited to the dance in a state car from a street corner in Albany to Goshen and back -- a distance of 230 miles round trip.

"My complaints to the higher-ups about what happened at this dance were ignored. Things

are spinning out of control at Goshen and I know other facilities are having similar problems. I've been hit with phone receivers, punched in the face on numerous occasions and some of my fellow workers have been on the opposite end of much worse. What happened at this dance was the last straw and I felt that coming forward was the right thing to do. Both the staff and residents should not be exposed to this type of stuff" said Mr. Collado.

Last summer, Senator Young paid an unannounced visit to a "social" at the Brookwood Secure Center for youths in Columbia County and said she was shocked to learn that the inmates were allowed to invite young women into the facility for a dance.

Senator Young is the Chair of the Special Legislative Task Force on Reform of the New York State Juvenile Justice System. The Task Force was formed to address a growing concern by community members, youth facility staff, and law enforcement officials who cited the closure of 14 youth facilities and reporting centers throughout the state, along with newly-implemented policies set forth by OCFS, as the reason for a spike in youth violence.

Task force members have pointed to a number of incidents around the state as examples of disturbing emerging trends in relation to violent youths and residential services. Last June, 24-year-old Renee Greco, an employee at a community youth home in Lockport, New York, was brutally beaten to death by two teenage residents who had been prematurely released from more secure state facilities.

In February 2009, 23-year-old Rochester Police Officer Anthony DiPonzio was shot in the head by a juvenile who was AWOL from a private residential community placement.

A worker at the state-operated Tryon Residential Center in Johnstown, New York suffered a stroke and died a month after he was struck in the head with a wooden club by a youth. Months after the incident, several employees sought and obtained orders of protection so they could come to work.

“In my over 17 years at the District Attorney’s Office, I have watched well intentioned policies evolve to protect residents from excessive use of force by staff members, and these models may appear good on paper,” Fulton County District Attorney Louise Sira said. “While I am not an expert in child psychology, I am ever mindful of the fact that these youths are in placement for violent offenses, and the execution of the models currently in place has resulted in a marked increase in violence on staff.”

Senator Young submitted a Freedom of Information Law request to OCFS last November regarding increased gang membership of residents, violent incidents in facilities by residents and staff assaults, but has been stonewalled by agency officials. Assembly Member Rory Lancman recently released a report that found OCFS workplace injury rates among the highest of any state agency, and that workers' compensation incident rates at state-operated youth residential facilities have increased by 33 percent in the past year. The report further concluded that Commissioner Carrion and the OCFS administration have neglected workplace safety as part of the agency's policy changes which has increasingly put staff at risk.

CSEA President Danny Donohue, “Under Commissioner Gladys Carrion’s tenure we have seen an aggressive lip service for reform while action has consisted of undermining services and employees by failing to provide adequate training, resources and other help – she has failed the youth, she has failed the staff and she has failed the taxpayers.”

“This latest report of an administration-facilitated sex party is outrageous and offensive in every way and demonstrates her reform philosophy is also totally misguided,” Donohue said. “Coupled with last week’s Assembly report detailing the increasing risk to staff in OCFS facilities, it is clear the Commissioner must go.”

Kenneth Brynien, President of the New York State Public Employees Federation (PEF), said “Rest assured, Commissioner Carrion will once again point the finger at members of her own staff rather than take responsibility for her actions. It was Carrion who showed extraordinarily bad judgment by promoting a party for juveniles who have been confined for criminal offenses.

“This is another example of the failed policies of Commissioner Carrion which have also led to increased violent situations for youths and staff at facilities across the state,” Brynien added. “PEF has been documenting injuries to our members at OCFS facilities and has repeatedly reached out to the commissioner and governor for policy changes. Clearly the sex party is the last straw and Carrion must be held accountable.”

Members of the Task Force include Senators Joseph Robach, George Maziarz, Hugh Farley, William Larkin, Michael Nozzolio, John Bonacic and Marty Golden.

Senator Bill Larkin (R,C- Cornwall-on-Hudson) said, "The allegations raised in today's New York Post article are some of the most shocking I've heard in a long time. It is unconscionable that an event like this was allowed to take place in a state facility, much less at the taxpayers' expense. The Office of Children and Family Services must be held accountable for their actions and I look forward to their attendance at our Task Force hearing to explain how things deteriorated to this level," said Larkin.

Senator Hugh T. Farley (R,C – Schenectady) said, “Policy changes, and a lack of leadership, have endangered both the staff and the residents at OCFS facilities. Many hard-working staff feel abandoned and betrayed by the leadership at OCFS. Also, I remain alarmed by the proposed downsizing of facilities and the unrealistic policy shift toward less secure community residences. These residences will not provide the services and oversight that are needed, and they raise troubling concerns for the communities that will be affected.”

Senator Marty Golden (R,C,I – Brooklyn) said, “The Office of Children and Family Services is like the Wild West. There are no guidelines, rules, or respect for the Law. Only by having Commissioner resign right now, can we restore integrity to an agency who is responsible for the supervision of some of New York State’s most hardened juvenile criminals. We can only “clean up Dodge,” by bringing in a new sheriff – a new commissioner,” said Senator Marty Golden.

State Senator John Bonacic (R,I,C - Mt. Hope) said "The repeated, shocking, and sometimes tragic incidents occurring at OCFS facilities demonstrate a culture of incompetence by the agency administration. Rank and file employees at these facilities often work in the fear of either physical or other job related threat. We need to overhaul OCFS starting at the top."

State Senator Mike Nozzolio (R,C – Fayette) said, “During these difficult economic times, while our hardworking taxpayers are struggling to make ends meet, it is simply unconscionable that taxpayer dollars are being wasted on outrageous and illegal entertainment for violent felons. The ineffective new policies that have been implemented at OCFS are clearly more concerned with the luxuries of convicted criminals than protecting staff and taxpayers. Because of these irresponsible policy changes, crime rates will undoubtedly increase and the safety of our communities will be jeopardized. We must

correct this dangerous mistake before even more tragedy occurs.”

Senator Dale M. Volker (R,C,I – Depew) said, "It is crystal clear that this is a state agency that is spiraling out -of-control and placing its residents and state personnel in danger," said Senator Dale M. Volker. "There is a systematic failure going on at these state youth detention facilities and drastic action is needed immediately. If nothing is done, more murders, more sex offenses, and more illegal behavior will take place. The taxpayers are paying for this dysfunction within our secure youth detention facilities, and we must demand accountability right away. The job of rehabilitating these young people is so very important. If we fail them now, we fail them later in life as they may again be in contact with the criminal justice system down the road."

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