



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruth Hassell-Thompson

SAVING JOBS: Majority REQUIRES ESDC TO MAKE RE-DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

RUTH HASSELL-THOMPSON June 15, 2010

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(Albany, NY) Continuing its commitment to economic growth and good jobs throughout the state, the Senate Democratic Majority today unanimously approved legislation requiring the redevelopment and reuse of state prison facilities considered for closure.

The legislation (S7068/Hassell-Thompson) requires the Commissioner of Economic Development to issue an adaptive reuse plan for state prison facilities that are scheduled to be shut down.

Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D-Mt. Vernon), Chair of the Senate's Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee and lead sponsor of this legislation said, "Historically, these prisons were placed in certain communities as part of a solution to aid their economies. While their structure is still critical to the vitality of these areas, the use of the facilities needs to be adapted. Closing a prison without having a reuse plan can have a devastating effect on an entire region. It is imperative that the Commissioner of Economic Development engage those affected communities before a closure is imminent in order to potentially offset some of the job losses."

Senator Darrel J. Aubertine (D-Cape Vincent), Chair of the Senate Upstate Caucus and the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources said, “For our Upstate communities hosting correctional facilities, be it Ogdensburg, Watertown, Gouverneur or Cape Vincent, the economic impact is very real and surrounding businesses depend on these facilities. The Department of Corrections is not in a position to make economic development decisions. Our priority should be to keep these prisons open, but with this legislation, we are putting the correct agency in place to develop a plan to protect the economic future of our communities before the state can close a prison. We cannot afford to pull jobs out of a community and expect DOCS to pick up the pieces of a broken economy.”

Under current law, the commissioner of the Department of Correctional Services (DOCS) must provide local governments and employees at least twelve months advance notice of a prison closure and issue an adaptive reuse plan for the facility. However, the DOCS commissioner is not in the best position to determine the most appropriate and economically viable reuse of these facilities because of a lack of comprehension regarding economic impacts of the facility, or its lack thereof. As a result, the consideration of closing no longer needed prisons has been met with fear and concern, rather than seen as an opportunity to attract new jobs and industry to the community.

Today’s legislation also requires that local government officials as well as other relevant agencies, authorities and stakeholders be consulted in the development of the reuse plan.