



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Bill Eases County Jail Crowding

PATTY RITCHIE June 21, 2011

Would force state to take inmates now languishing in local jails

State Senator Patty Ritchie (R-C, Heuvelton) said the Senate today passed a bill she sponsored that would ease local county jail overcrowding by requiring the state to move more quickly in picking up its inmates and placing them back in state prisons.

The bill (S.5498) gives the Department of Correctional Services just 10 days to move parole violators from county lockups to state facilities. Right now, nearly a thousand state parole violators are languishing in county jails—some for months a time—forcing local taxpayers to pick up the tab.

In Oswego, Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties, state parole violators are contributing to jail overcrowding that is leading at least one lawmaker to call for a multimillion dollar jail expansion at the same time the state is looking to downsize empty prisons.

“Ironically, we are talking about closing empty state prisons while counties are looking at building expensive additions to their jails to hold inmates that don’t belong to them,” Senator Ritchie said, pointing out that state prisoners in county jails are costing local taxpayers thousands of dollars a day to house, feed and guard.

"In my district, one local sheriff is asking for \$12 million to expand his jail, because neighboring jails are all filled, and can no longer take the overflow caused by parole violators and other inmates filling county jails," Senator Ritchie said.

In Jefferson County, several parole violators have reportedly remained at the county jail since last year, and county taxpayers are paying to house inmates at other county facilities to ease jail overcrowding.

Under Senator Ritchie's bill, the state would have to reimburse counties for the cost of any state inmate that is left in a county jail beyond the 10-day period.

"We want to thank Senator Ritchie for helping us to find ways to help Jefferson County ease our jail overcrowding problem," said Jefferson County Legislature Chair Carolyn Fitzpatrick. "Anything that can be done to move prisoners back to state prison where they belong will be appreciated by Jefferson County's taxpayers."

"We appreciate Senator Ritchie recognizing and assisting us by helping to ease the outboarding costs that Jefferson County has been experiencing," said Jefferson County Legislator Phil Reed.

"We, as Sheriffs, have asked Senator Ritchie to help ease the overcrowding problem facing county jails across the state by forcing New York State to take back these parole violators," St. Lawrence County Sheriff Kevin Wells said. "The state needs to stop shifting prisoners and the costs of housing these parole violators onto county jails. The Sheriffs and the hard pressed county taxpayers have had enough of unfunded mandates by the State of New York."

Senator Ritchie said she would meet with the bill's Assembly sponsor later today in an effort to get the bill passed in that house before the end of the legislative session.