



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie, Corrections Chair Meet WITH Local Sheriffs on Jail Crowding

PATTY RITCHIE October 15, 2012

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After Meeting, Lawmakers Tour Empty State Prison as Possible Solution to Problem

State Senator Patty Ritchie today hosted a meeting with the Oswego, Jefferson and St. Lawrence County Sheriffs, along with the Senate's top expert on corrections and prison issues, to discuss the problem of state parole violators who are crowding county jails, and costing local taxpayers millions of dollars in unreimbursed expenses.

Senator Ritchie and Senator Michael Nozzolio, longtime chair of the Senate's Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee met for an hour with the Sheriffs before heading to the nearby, state-run Watertown Correctional Facility to tour two empty dorms that were recently closed down, and which the Senators said could be used to house the state inmates currently being held in the county lock-up.

"Counties and local governments across the state are struggling to make ends meet in tough economic times, but the state is insisting they bear this unnecessary cost of housing inmates who really should be the state's responsibility," Senator Ritchie said.

“I invited Senator Nozzolio here so he could hear firsthand how this issue is affecting local taxpayers and to explore together ways we can relieve this burden, and save local tax dollars.”

The meeting was attended by Jefferson County Sheriff John Burns, St. Lawrence County Sheriff Kevin Wells and Oswego County Undersheriff Gene Sullivan.

“Senator Ritchie is to be applauded for her effort to eliminate this costly, unfunded mandate that dramatically hurts our property taxpayers,” said Senator Michael F. Nozzolio, Chairman of the Crime Victims, Crime and Correction Committee.

“Senator Ritchie is also to be praised for developing a state level solution that will utilize excess prison capacity to achieve significant cost savings for state taxpayers as well.”

At the meeting, the Sheriffs described cases of state parole violators that are left in their jails for months—in one case, Sheriff Burns said his jail has been holding a parole violator for more than 70 days. The state does not reimburse counties for parole violators that are left in county custody, and together, the three counties estimate the cost to local taxpayers could exceed \$2 million annually, plus additional costs for transportation, food and medical care.

“These state inmates put a significant strain on the sheriff’s budgets, and have caused other problems related to overcrowding and security,” Senator Ritchie said. “It just makes sense that the state, which has extra space in its prisons, should take responsibility for these inmates, and provide this relief to county taxpayers.”

Right now, there are 783 state parole violators being held in county jails across the state, including 22 in Oswego, Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties, according to the state Commission on Corrections.

Meanwhile, counties are spending millions of dollars to out-board 626 inmates at other facilities to ease overcrowding in their own jails.

The Senate has twice passed a bill sponsored by Senator Ritchie (S.5498-A) that would require the state to move parole violators to a state facility within 10 days.

“I have presented multiple options for the state to help with this problem, including my legislation and this proposal to use empty prison space to house these inmates. It’s time for the Department of Corrections to step up and help provide this needed relief for counties and county taxpayers,” Senator Ritchie said.

(Pictured from left to right with Senator Ritchie and Senator Nozzolio in the above photo, are Oswego County Undersheriff Gene Sullivan, St. Lawrence County Sheriff Kevin Wells, Jefferson County Sheriff John Burns, Lieutenant Kristopher Spencer and Jefferson County Undersheriff Andrew Neff)