



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend reject Cuomo's proposal for free college for inmates, renew call to keep open Monterey Shock (UPDATED, Feb. 19th)

THOMAS F. O'MARA February 18, 2014

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Elmira, N.Y., February 18—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C-Big Flats), Assemblyman Chris Friend (R-Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) today rejected Governor Andrew Cuomo's plan to provide a free college education to state prisoners and again urged the Cuomo administration to reverse its decision to close the Monterey Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility in Schuyler County later this year.

In a joint statement, O'Mara, Friend and Palmesano said, "We reject Governor Cuomo's proposal to have state taxpayers pick up the tab for providing inmates with a free college

education. Hard-working, law-abiding students and families across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions are sacrificing and struggling to find a way to pay for college in the face of rising tuition costs and other expenses, and they're not asking for a state handout to get that education. It's another bad proposal at the worst possible time for New York State taxpayers. We need to stay focused on cutting taxes, keeping state spending under control and turning around the upstate economy. Now's no time to add another questionable – and potentially very expensive – state spending commitment. Governor Cuomo already has a proven way to reduce recidivism that, at the same time, saves state and local taxpayer dollars and gives inmates the discipline and the determination to turn their own lives around. It's called the Monterey Shock Incarceration program and the governor should keep it open for the benefit of the local economy, local workers, local communities, and the inmates themselves. Monterey's a better way to turn lives around and reduce state spending."

[Update, Feb. 19th: Read more in today's [Corning Leader](#), [Star-Gazette](#), [The Odessa File](#), [Finger Lakes Radio](#)]

Over the weekend, Cuomo **unveiled a proposal** to provide college-level education at state correctional facilities in 10 regions at a cost of approximately \$5,000 per inmate annually. The state currently spends \$60,000 a year to house an inmate and approximately \$3.6 billion in total spending across the state's correctional system. There are an estimated 54,500 inmates currently confined in state prisons. In announcing his proposal, Cuomo highlighted studies showing "that by earning college degrees, inmates are far less likely to return to prison. New York's current recidivism rate is 40 percent."

O'Mara, Friend and Palmesano again pointed to Cuomo's emphasis on reducing recidivism as a way of cutting incarceration costs as one of the main justifications for **keeping Monterey open**. In terms of its impact on recidivism, statistics from the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) have shown that 26% of shock graduates released from shock facilities returned to prison within three years, compared to 42% for all DOCCS releases. Add reduced incarceration times to lower recidivism rates and the shock program has saved the state more than \$1B over the past 26 years, the area lawmakers said. They also noted DOCCS statistics showing that shock inmates pass General Educational Development (GED) tests at a rate of 80%.

O'Mara, Friend and Palmesano said, "We already know that Monterey Shock works to dramatically reduce recidivism rates and incarceration times while, at the same time, cutting costs, saving taxpayer dollars and giving inmates something even more important than free college classes, and that's the desire and the drive to turn their own lives around by furthering their education or acquiring a practical skill or trade that offers a livelihood and an independent, success-driven future."

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