



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Senate Ok's Ritchie Bill to Open Underused State Prisons to Ease Local Jail Crowding

PATTY RITCHIE May 20, 2015

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Bipartisan Measure Would Save County Taxpayers Millions for “Outboarding” Prisoners

The State Senate today approved legislation sponsored by Senator Patty Ritchie that would allow county taxpayers across New York to save millions of dollars each year by allowing inmates at overcrowded local lock-ups to be held in underused state prisons.

The bipartisan measure (S.2394) directs state corrections officials to hammer out agreements with local communities so that they can use available space at nearby prisons, such as Watertown's Dry Hill prison, which has several unused dormitories, instead of having to transport them to other local jails that are much further away.

“While the number of inmates being held in state prisons has declined over the past 10 years, county jails are bursting at the seams, and county taxpayers are footing the bill to move prisoners to available cells that can be hundreds of miles away,” Senator Ritchie said.

“This measure is not only a way to alleviate overcrowding and provide sorely needed mandate relief to counties and local taxpayers, it's also consistent with the Governor's goals of encouraging local governments to find partnerships and cost-sharing agreements that save tax dollars.”

Local counties are paying as much as \$90 to \$130 or more each day to outboard prisoners at local jails in other regions. According to the state Division of Criminal Justice Services, counties were outboarding 525 prisoners to other jails last month, including 33 from Jefferson, Oswego and St. Lawrence Counties.

In addition, county jails were teeming with almost 1,000 “state-ready” inmates, meaning prisoners who have been sentenced and are awaiting orders to report to state prison, as well as those who are being held on state parole violations. The three counties represented by Senator Ritchie reported 34 state-ready/parole violators in local custody last month.

Senator Ritchie has argued that the state needs to do a better job of removing these inmates in a more timely way from facilities that are paid for by local taxpayers. She’s sponsored a companion bill (S.1834) to speed the transfer of these inmates to state prisons to save counties money that’s repeatedly been approved by the Senate.

“Counties are struggling to balance budgets without raising taxes, and the state needs to help in that effort by taking responsibility for these inmates, as well as finding ways to work cooperatively to improve the efficiency of our criminal justice system at every level,” Senator Ritchie said.

The number of inmates in state prisons has dropped 20 percent in the past decade, and the state has closed entire prisons as well as wings of still-operating prisons. But the number of county jail inmates has held steady, and even increased in certain communities.

Senator Ritchie’s bill was sent to the Assembly, where it is sponsored by Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther.