



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara joins colleagues in co-sponsoring 'Communities Heroes Protection Act'

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 21, 2018

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Albany, N.Y., March 21—The New York State Senate has approved legislation co-sponsored by Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) to designate crimes specifically targeting police officers, firefighters and other emergency service workers as hate crimes.

The legislation (**S1114A/A2962A**), called the “Community Heroes Protection Act,” has bipartisan support in the Legislature. Assemblyman Peter Abbate (D-Brooklyn) sponsors it in the Assembly.

“We need to stand strong behind the brave men and women putting their lives on the line day in and day out, night after night, protecting our communities and neighborhoods,” said O’Mara. “They are doing their jobs in an increasingly dangerous, hostile and, far too often, deadly environment where they are being targeted for violence simply because of the uniform they wear. It cannot be tolerated.”

There was a 68% increase in firearms-related fatalities among law enforcement between 2015 and 2016, according to research. Sixty-four police officers were fatally shot in 2016. According to the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, approximately 52% of these first responders claimed to have been injured by assault and over 20% said personal safety was their primary concern.

The Community Heroes Protection Act classifies all crimes against first responders, such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency medical services personnel, as hate crimes. These offenses are designated as hate crimes only if they are intentionally aimed at first responders based on the profile of their career. Under current law, when a person is convicted of a hate crime and the specified offense is a misdemeanor or a class C, D or E felony, the hate crime shall be deemed to be one category higher than the specified offense or one category higher than the offense level applicable to the defendant’s conviction. Police officers and first responders are not included in the current definition of a hate crime.

The Senate has also approved the following pieces of legislation O’Mara co-sponsors:

> **Senate Bill 1984** would strengthen existing penalties by creating a new crime when a terrorist threat is made against a police officer. A person would be guilty of making a terror threat against a police officer when they threaten to commit or cause to be committed a specified offense against a police officer, while also demonstrating intent to intimidate or coerce the public or government actions through murder, assassination or kidnapping; and

> **Senate Bill 2125** would prohibit civilian drone use within 1,000 feet of a correctional facility. The civilian use of unmanned aerial systems, or drones, has dramatically increased in recent years. In August 2015, a drone dropped a package containing tobacco, marijuana and heroin into the Mansfield Correctional Institution in Ohio. By restricting drone use in the immediate vicinity of a correctional facility, this measure would help achieve a safer prison environment.