Sen. Griffo joins law enforcement and legal professionals to express concerns with criminal justice reforms in state budget

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO   April 5, 2019

State Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-I-C-Rome, Oneida County First Assistant District Attorney Michael Coluzza, New York State Sheriff's Association President and Oneida County Sheriff Rob Maciol and Lewis County Sheriff Michael Carpinelli detailed their concerns with several pro-criminal reforms that were included in the state budget that was passed earlier this week.

The reforms in the budget includes new measures that will tie the hands of the prosecutors and law enforcement officials who work tirelessly to pursue justice for victims and to keep communities safe. The new changes also will make it harder for police officers to do their jobs.

This misguided plan, nicknamed the Criminal's Bill of Rights, includes:

· Changes that will let up to 90 percent of individuals arrested for a crime walk free and who will instead receive an appearance ticket from the office. Offenses for which individuals will be issued an appearance ticket but will not be detained includes, but is not limited to, second-degree burglary, fourth-degree arson, first or second-degree unlawful imprisonment and seventh-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance.

· An end to cash bail for everything shy of the most severe violent felonies.

· The reduction of sentences for illegal immigrants who commit crimes for the sole purpose of helping them evade deportation.

· Discovery "reform" that will weaken prosecutorial authority and has the potential to jeopardize witnesses and their safety.

· Weakening the authority of police officers by subjecting them to unnecessary and time-consuming review that could cause officers to second-guess themselves, which could put their safety at risk.

· The closure of three prisons.

· A measure limiting the public release of mugshots, a clear threat to public safety and a blow to openness, transparency and the public's right to know.

Sen. Griffo said, "With so many communities struggling with increasing amounts of violent crime and gang violence, the last thing we should do is make it harder for law enforcement to keep us safe. These reforms will tip the scales of justice toward criminals and against prosecutors and police. Simply put, the state budget crafted by Democrats in Albany doesn't make our communities any safer."

Oneida County District Attorney Scott McNamara said, "As a profession, we remain open to input from the communities we serve and to the legislature that seeks to serve all of us. However, judgment and caution must be observed when contemplating changes that are urged just for the sake of change, or in reaction to anecdotal events that have had unfortunate outcomes. The law must always seek to provide police and prosecutors with the tools that they need in order that guilt not escape nor innocence suffer. The legislative initiative now contemplated is ill advised. It seeks a one-size-fits-all approach to bail that will result in dangerous and violent offenders either failing to return to court, or worse, returning to the victim who they traumatized. This will have a profoundly adverse impact upon public safety and make our jobs harder without a corresponding increase to the fairness of our justice system."

New York State Sheriff's Association President and Oneida County Sheriff Maciol said, "Instead of using taxpayers' money to pass more legislation that protects and defends criminals, let's focus our attention on fighting to protect and defend the victims of crime, which in turn keeps our communities safe. I greatly appreciate Sen. Griffo's advocacy of police and law enforcement during his time in office."

Lewis County Sheriff Carpinelli said, "It is sad to see the Governor, who once stood for justice, fairness and law enforcement, cave to unreasonable and mindless legislation that protects no one. I am glad to see that Sen. Griffo and others are standing up for the law enforcement community."