



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara to Cuomo: Give local leaders, school administrators decision making on graduation ceremonies

THOMAS F. O'MARA June 15, 2020

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**Elmira, N.Y., June 15**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) continues to join a chorus of voices from across the Southern Tier region calling on Governor Andrew Cuomo to revise the state-mandated size limit for in-person high school graduation ceremonies.

In early June, the governor issued an executive order limiting in-person graduation ceremonies to no more than a total of 150 attendees.

O'Mara and other Southern Tier leaders stress that this state-mandated restriction leaves many school districts unable to conduct a collective gathering for their entire graduating school community.

O'Mara said, "I think that's wrong. I believe we can and should trust school district administrators and regional officials to conduct safe graduation ceremonies. In my view, given all of the recent civil protest and unrest, these traditional high school graduation ceremonies for our young people to celebrate community, family, unity, achievement, and hope for the future are extremely meaningful and necessary this year. I continue to urge Governor Cuomo to recognize their overriding value at this time and place in New York State."

In a letter today to the Horseheads Central School District community, Superintendent Tom Douglas wrote, "Our senior class is over 300 students. In order to meet that requirement and include parents and personnel to help us adhere to safety guidelines and run graduation, we would need several ceremonies. To date (Governor Cuomo) has not changed this arbitrary number not based on fact or data. He has allowed gatherings for other events and activities such as beaches and big box stores at 25% of the location's capacity. We believe we can hold graduation safely using this guideline, but unless and until the governor changes his 150 limit, we are unable to hold one in-person graduation ceremony for this very special Class of 2020...Urge (Governor Cuomo) to increase the number of attendees at in-person graduation ceremonies using the same percentage limits being used for other gatherings at beaches, big box stores (Walmart, Lowes, Home Depot) and Grocery stores: 25% or more of the actual venue's capacity. If this reasonable request were granted, almost all districts in the state could hold one graduation ceremony that includes all graduates, two parents/guests, and the

necessary staff on their football fields and meet social distancing requirements.”

Last Friday, county executives and county managers from across the Southern Tier region – including Chemung County Executive Christopher Moss, Steuben County Manager Jack Wheeler, and Schuyler County Administrator Timothy O’Hearn – also wrote to Cuomo calling on the governor to revise the guidelines.

In their letter, the county leaders wrote, “We are NY Tough and we are also Southern Tier Strong. We appreciate your leadership and flexibility through this unprecedented crisis. Given the Southern Tier’s positive healthcare data we feel that we can accommodate larger graduations with the appropriate standards and precautions. Let’s work together to give the thousands of high school graduates and their families in the Southern Tier the graduations that they deserve.”

O’Mara and other Southern Tier leaders urge area residents who support their effort to call the governor’s office at 518-474-8390, or send an online message [HERE](#).