



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of July 27, 2020 ~ 'Protect those who protect us'

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 27, 2020

| ISSUE: **LAW ENFORCEMENT**



We cannot sit back and simply accept and tolerate the ongoing attacks on the men and women in law enforcement serving to protect our communities and neighborhoods. They risk their lives around the clock, every day and every night, in an increasingly hostile environment.

Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, "Protect those who protect us"

In the aftermath of the George Floyd brutality and tragedy – which we should not forget, and where justice must take its due course -- I wrote, “There can be no place anywhere, in any of our institutions, for racial discrimination, injustice, abuse of authority, or violence...(and) there is not a place for the intolerable anarchy, rioting, looting, destruction, and anti-police rhetoric and violence.”

Unfortunately, since then, we have witnessed a troubling and extremely dangerous escalation of anti-police rhetoric and violence throughout this state, upstate and downstate -- from the hotbed of New York City to Rochester to Buffalo, and many places in between. In short, this heightened anti-police activity and the continued impact of disastrous pro-criminal public policies like the “No Bail” reform law that took effect earlier this year, have exacerbated unrest.

It threatens the men and women in blue everywhere.

Recently, county sheriffs from throughout the Southern Tier and statewide came together to raise alarm over this heightened violence and ongoing, unworkable public policies that work against law enforcement.

I agree with their deep concern. In response, last week at the State Capitol I stood together with many Senate colleagues and law enforcement officers to endorse a package of legislation known as the “Protect Those Who Protect Us” act. It is aimed at deterring violence against law enforcement by strengthening penalties for existing crimes and establishing new crimes to prevent attacks on police officers.

Our Senate Republican Conference attempted to move the legislation to a vote on the floor of the Senate, but our effort was rejected by the Senate Democrat Majority.

Among other provisions, the legislation calls for:

- Ø increasing the criminal penalty for resisting arrest;**
- Ø strengthening the penalties for assaults on police officers and making them crimes for which a judge could require the posting of bail;**
- Ø creating new crimes for harassing police and peace officers by striking them with any substance or object including bottles, rocks, bodily fluids, spittle, urine, feces, flammable liquids or other noxious, hazardous or dangerous substances or objects;**

Ø making any crime committed against a police officer because of his or her status as a police officer a hate crime;

Ø establishing a crime for doxxing (publishing private or identifying information on the Internet, i.e. addresses, phone numbers, etc.) of a police officer or peace officer because of the officer's status as an officer, or to dox any other person because of that person's relationship to, or affiliation with, a police or peace officer; and

Ø establishing a crime for following or surveilling a police or peace officer, whether such officer is on or off duty, or to approach within one hundred yards of the private residence or place of lodging of a police officer, without the consent of the officer, for reasons related to the officer's status or service as a police or peace officer, or for the purpose of intimidating the officer or the officer's family.

We cannot sit back and simply accept and tolerate the ongoing attacks on the men and women in law enforcement serving to protect our communities and neighborhoods. They risk their lives around the clock, every day and every night, in an increasingly hostile environment, to keep us safe from violent criminals who have no respect whatsoever for the law or for other lives.

Anyone who would simply shrug and say it's not happening here or it won't happen here isn't paying attention. I, for one, will not take that chance. It can happen here as quickly as anywhere else in this state or nation.

Furthermore, violence against a police officer anywhere is an attack on police officers everywhere.

We have to take steps to let our police officers, peace officers, corrections officers, all officers of the law, across the board, know that we stand with them and that we have their backs, as well as to ensure that we are doing everything possible to prevent a complete breakdown of our society.

There's a welcome place for peaceful protests to highlight unconscionable wrongs. Peaceful protests have been engaged across our region. I have supported them. I joined well over a thousand peaceful protesters in Elmira, for example, and spoke against police brutality and systemic racism at a gathering in Watkins Glen. Nonviolent events have been held in Corning, Ithaca, Penn Yan and elsewhere. We have been fortunate that our local demonstrations have been peaceful and focused on unity.

Yet, there can be no tolerance for shootings, looting, destruction and defacing of property, and the attacks on the officers who are fundamental to public safety and security.