



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Statement From Senator Patty Ritchie

PATTY RITCHIE December 21, 2020



I find it unacceptable and utterly despicable that the Governor would announce just four days before Christmas that Watertown Correctional Facility will close. Simply put, this is a slap in the face to the dedicated men and women who work in this facility, as well as their families.

Every day, the Governor has gone on TV, pontificating about how people are suffering due to the unprecedented pandemic. With this announcement, he's kicking them when they're down, and only adding to the stress and anguish so many people have been experiencing for

almost a year now.

Our correctional officers and other prison staff members have always had difficult, dangerous jobs but in recent months, the stakes have been even higher. Ever since the pandemic began, they have selflessly put their health and safety in harm's way to do their jobs and return home to their families at the end of their shifts, hoping that they wouldn't be passing on the virus to their loved ones.

Albany continues to preach about protecting the health and safety of frontline workers by limiting contact and practicing social distancing. As the pandemic rages on and cases rise across the state, I fail to see the logic in closing prisons and in turn, packing more inmates and staff in fewer facilities.

It's no secret that due to New York's disastrous new bail reform laws, there are fewer inmates in our prisons. The message to Albany is simple—my North Country colleagues and I did not support Albany's disastrous bail reform measures that are putting violent repeat offenders back out on the street. Radical left, downstate lawmakers did. If you are looking to close prisons, look there first.

Instead though, Albany again looks to rip something away from the North Country, a place where in the past, the state has closed facilities and never looked back, leaving them to languish in disrepair and become eyesores. In true Albany fashion, they go against all common sense by opting to close a facility where there is little potential for repurposing—instead of facilities downstate, many of which sit on prime real estate that could easily be put back into productive use.

I hear all the time about how these same downstate facilities have issues with staff not showing up to work or numerous violent incidents taking place inside prison walls. That's

not the case at Watertown Correctional, where reliable people come to work, they do their jobs and the prison is run well, without frequent altercations. To close a facility filled with hardworking people that operates smoothly, again defies all logic—but that's Albany for you.

To say that slating Watertown Correctional Facility for closure is a bad decision would be an understatement. We know though, that this decision would not have been made without Governor Cuomo's blessing. If the Governor wants to show, once and for all, that he cares about the North Country and its people, he will stop this closure.

In the days to come, I am committed to fighting alongside the roughly 400 Watertown Correctional employees, their families and my fellow representatives to make the Governor realize this decision needs to be reversed.