



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Area state legislators: Start up high school sports

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 14, 2021

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Elmira, N.Y., January 14—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), Assemblyman Chris Friend (R,C,I-Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) today called on Governor Andrew Cuomo to give the go-ahead to high school sports seasons.

In a joint statement, O'Mara, Friend, and Palmesano said, "Governor Cuomo focused his State of the State message this week on the need for reopening our local economies and to start getting the lives of New Yorkers as back to normal as possible now. For New York State's high school student-athletes and their families, coaches, and entire school communities, that means to let sports seasons get started. We are confident that the Cuomo administration, working in close partnership with local education and health officials, have the capacity to ensure this safe return of these student-athletes, the sooner the better."

In early December, the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSA), following guidance from the Cuomo administration, indefinitely postponed high school basketball, hockey, wrestling, and competitive cheerleading. All state winter sports tournaments were also cancelled.

The activities were considered high-risk for the spread of COVID-19. The NYSPHSA has been awaiting further guidance from the Cuomo administration, which the governor said would be provided by December 31.

Fall sports previously deemed high-risk by the state and postponed, including football and volleyball, are scheduled to resume on March 1 as part of a "Fall II" season.

O'Mara, Friend, and Palmesano sent a letter to the governor and other top Cuomo administration officials today that reads, in part, "These students have invested many years of discipline and training to maintain their physical fitness and to compete on behalf of their school districts and communities. For many, their involvement in sports is a critical part of what has made them attractive candidates for future colleges and scholarships. The continued hiatus puts all of this at risk."

The letter, which notes that New York is one of only seven states prohibiting high school sports, continues, “Given the fact that a number of sections and leagues moved and delayed the start of their sports seasons to January 2021, we highly encourage you to adopt a realistic, comprehensive and evidence-based model which would allow all student-athletes to safely resume their sport NOW. At this point, New York is stand-out for the wrong reasons, as it is one of only seven states prohibiting sports such as basketball at the high school level, despite it being played safely with proper protocols throughout the country. The Southern Tier has proven to be a leader in the state by having one of the lowest positivity rates by exercising the policies and procedures established by the Health Department. Our student-athletes ask for guidance from the state to allow all winter, fall and spring sports to start in the Southern Tier and throughout New York State. We know that doing so will provide an outlet and great enrichment to student athletes patiently waiting for their turn to play.”

[see above for attached copy of today’s letter]