



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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WNY State Legislators Call for a Halt in Gowanda Correctional Closing

GEORGE M. BORRELLO February 26, 2021

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GOWANDA – Citing a lack of transparency, members of the State Senate and Assembly called today for Governor Cuomo and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to pause the closure of the Gowanda Correctional facility.

Senators George Borrello and Patrick Gallivan, and Assemblyman Joseph Giglio, stated that requests for an accounting of the claimed \$89 million savings that will result from the

closure of Gowanda, as well as the Watertown and Clinton Correctional facilities, have gone unanswered.

The closures were announced on December 21 under an expedited 90-day timeline that was authorized in the last state budget. Typically, there is a one-year notification requirement.

“The Gowanda Area Redevelopment Corporation submitted a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request in January to the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision for budget figures related to the closure of Gowanda Correctional,” said Senator Borrello.

“They received a written response that it will take until April 2 - after the facility is slated to be closed - to fulfill their request. That is unacceptable,” said Senator Borrello. “FOIL requests are supposed to be fulfilled within 20 business days after receipt of the request is acknowledged. However, as recent events have proven, stonewalling requests for information is the administration’s standard operating procedure.”

Senator Patrick Gallivan said, “The administration's rush to close Gowanda Correctional Facility and the other upstate prisons puts enormous pressure on employees, their families and the communities where these facilities are located. Everyone involved deserves to know how these decisions were made, the true costs associated with these closings and the impact they will have on the municipalities involved. If the state cannot provide this information in a timely and transparent manner, it should halt efforts to close these prisons.”

Senator Borrello noted that compounding the question of cost savings is the fact that there are reports of major capital investments in Gowanda that are slated to go forward, even though closure is imminent.

“Millions of dollars in construction projects were reportedly approved for Gowanda Correctional prior to the closure announcement, including roof replacements and new

windows. These contracts will have to be honored, even though the facility will be empty,” he added. “Collins will likely need an infirmary and pharmacy, as it previously shared those housed at Gowanda. This represents a colossal waste of taxpayer money and calls into question the actual savings of this closure.”

“Considered together, this seemingly last minute and illogical plan suggests that the administration did not perform their due diligence when analyzing where closures should occur to achieve maximum cost efficiencies. That is the problem with allowing an expedited 90-day closure window. Rushed decisions, made behind closed doors and with incomplete information, often end up being poor decisions.”

Assemblyman Joseph Giglio said, “We do not believe the accuracy of the figures presented and would like a complete accounting of the alleged savings. The sudden closure of these facilities will disrupt the lives of employees and their families and will negatively impact the economic stability of the communities in which they are located for years to come. Physical facilities will remain and require maintenance and possible reconstruction prior to repurposing or sale. We are requesting a pause in the closure of these prisons to allow for a full review of the breakdown of the actual savings to be realized by these closures.”

“The fast-track authority that was granted to the Governor last year to close correctional facilities with 90-days’ notice was justified with the argument that these closures will produce cost savings. If that’s the case, then these figures should be readily available and the taxpaying public should have access to them. In the absence of that data, this closure should be halted until those documents can be provided,” said Senator Borrello.

“If they can’t show that this decision was made using sound analysis, then this is looking more like a political decision on the part of the Governor,” he added.

“This decision will devastate the community and force 600 dedicated corrections officers and staff to uproot their lives and those of their families,” he continued. “These brave men and women showed up every day for work to ensure the safety of their fellow New Yorkers. They deserve better,” he concluded.

Attached is a copy of a letter requesting a halt to the closure that was sent to the Governor and Commissioner Annucci.

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