



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Senator Fred Akshar: Supporting Police and Supporting Reform are Not Mutual Exclusive Concepts

SENATOR FRED AKSHAR May 16, 2021

| ISSUE: **PUBLIC SAFETY, POLICE SAFETY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**



National Police Week has provided us a chance to reflect on the sacrifices so many brave police men and women have made to keep others safe. At the same time it's impossible to ignore how the past few tumultuous years and several horrific incidents have challenged the image of the institution those individuals represent.

We've all been forced to confront the difficult realities of racism in society, and this has sent us searching in countless directions for solutions. As with any deep-rooted, multigenerational issue, disagreements on solutions are inevitable, but I believe the vast majority of Americans are growing sick of a narrative that's emerged in the national discourse: You either support the police or you support reform. As an institution, police are either unassailable or irredeemable.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

I respectfully offer that supporting our police and working to make life safer for all members of our community are not mutually exclusive concepts. Police training, policies, strategies and tactics are not the same today as they were 50, 20, 10 or even 5 years ago because continuous improvement is essential for effectively protecting the communities law enforcement serves.

**The key word is improvement, not diminishment, dismantlement or disbandment.**

Sadly, the current leadership in Albany remains focused on some sort of misdirected punishment on New York police for crimes committed by law enforcement in various parts of the country.

We continue to see the direct results of that same leadership's irresponsible bail and discovery "reforms," which, along with the disbanding of the NYPD's "anti-crime" unit and overall \$1 billion decrease in New York City police funding, has upended New York City's justice system and created a revolving door that sends violent criminals back onto the streets within hours of committing their latest crimes.

In New York City, **violent crime has risen at an alarming rate over the past year**, with the most recent report by the NYPD showing that overall crime rose by 30.4% compared to April 2020. This rapid increase in crime was driven in part by a 35.6% increase in felony assault, a 28.6%

increase in robbery, and a 166.1% increase in shooting incidents.

According to a recent State of Safety in America report by Safewise, New York is the “most worried about safety” state in the nation, with **70% of New Yorkers reporting that they are “concerned daily” about their safety**, with only 40% of New Yorkers feeling safe in their everyday lives and 78% acknowledging that crime is increasing.

Despite all this, New York’s men and women of law enforcement continue doing their jobs heroically each day, like NYPD Officer and mother Alyssa Vogel, who sprung into action last week to save a 4-year-old girl caught in a horrific shooting in Times Square.

Heroic acts like Officer Vogel’s do not erase horrific acts like that of George Floyd’s murderer, but they help us maintain a perspective focused on fixing problems where they exist without creating new ones where they don’t.

My focus will continue to be in providing law enforcement with the tools, training and support they need, while also strengthening relationships and trust with the communities they serve.

We’ve been able to secure funding for body cameras to promote transparency, along with crisis intervention and deescalation training to help our communities avoid tragedy and resolve difficult situations without violence, but much more is needed, including more mental health support for individuals in crisis.

We must also focus on making the next generation of law enforcement officers the most skilled and diverse group ever assembled, and we can’t attract quality candidates without active support from our community and from lawmakers.

My conference has introduced a **slate of legislation** aimed at supporting law enforcement and helping them attract the best and the brightest, but our proposals are destined to remain just that without the support, collaboration and participation from everyday New Yorkers, and without pressure on those in power.

I believe that **everyday New Yorkers value public safety, justice and community pride**, but we must all now take an active role in building communities that foster all three. We cannot leave that to radical politicians, pundits or activists on either side of the political spectrum. If we do, we'll continue to see negative changes or no changes at all.

We must all be willing to work together to build better relationships between the men and women of law enforcement and the communities they are sworn to protect. The only way forward is by our communities working together on solutions that result in safer communities for everyone. **My commitment to that end is unwavering, our community deserves nothing less.**