



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara says ongoing inmate attacks at Elmira Correctional Facility signal need to address prison violence: Governor and Legislature taking actions that put officers at risk

THOMAS F. O'MARA June 2, 2021

| ISSUE: **PRISON SAFETY**



Governor Cuomo and the Legislature's Democratic supermajorities have been solely focused on coddling inmates by severely hampering disciplinary sanctions, finding ways to parole more and more inmates, and diminishing the ability of correctional officers to deal with violence inside prisons.

Elmira, N.Y., June 2—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C,I-Big Flats) today said that multiple attacks by inmates on corrections officers at the Elmira Correctional Facility throughout the

month of May continue to highlight the need for Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Democratic leaders of the State Legislature to address the rising violence inside state prisons.

According to the New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association, Inc. (NYSCOPBA) in a news release today, in four separate inmate attacks on prison staff from May 13 through May 26, approximately 15 officers at the Elmira Correctional Facility sustained injuries.

O'Mara said, "Governor Cuomo and the Legislature's Democratic supermajorities have been solely focused on coddling inmates by severely hampering disciplinary sanctions, finding ways to parole more and more inmates, and diminishing the ability of correctional officers to deal with violence inside prisons. These ongoing attacks inside the Elmira Correctional Facility should serve as a stark reminder that steps are needed to better protect corrections officers, prison staff, inmates themselves, and the overall safety and security within the walls of our prisons. This must include a revitalized action plan to cut down on the dangerous drugs, weapons, and other contraband finding its way into our correctional facilities and contributing to a rise in violence. Our correctional officers are extremely concerned about rising violence inside prisons and I share that concern. Governor Cuomo and New York's current legislative leadership are moving in the completely opposite and wrong direction. It's a carefree approach to criminal justice and corrections, and it's irresponsible and dangerous."

Most recently, O'Mara noted, the Legislature approved and Cuomo signed into law a measure O'Mara strongly opposed to strictly limiting the use of solitary confinement in New York's correctional facilities. The governor signed the new law despite noting in his own approval message that it will need to be amended in order to protect officers and other prison staff from violent inmates, O'Mara said.

In today's NYSCOPBA news release, NYSCOPBA Western Region Vice President Mark Deburgomaster said, "It has become a broken record of sorts reporting weekly on staff being attacked by inmates. The reality is, until the disciplinary system is strengthened, we will continue to bring to light the assaults that plague our prisons. Eight officers needing hospital treatment at one prison is simply unacceptable. State Legislators need to open their eyes to the constant danger our members face and strengthen policies that will help deter these attacks from occurring. This also applies to inmate on inmate assaults. Last Thursday, staff needed to deploy chemical agents to stop six inmates from fighting in the recreation yard. Not before several inmates were cut with make-shift weapons. It is simply incomprehensible that our elected officials would sit back and let this violence continue without making meaningful changes that will protect staff and inmates."

O'Mara continues to co-sponsor legislation (S2594) to require the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to establish a multi-faceted "Contraband Screening Plan" for New York's correctional facilities.

NYSCOPBA has noted that more than 80 percent of inmates housed in maximum security facilities like Elmira are convicted of violent felony offenses. Incidents of inmate-on-inmate and inmate-on-staff assaults have been at some of the highest-ever levels over the past few years.