



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara criticizes state prison officials for offering COVID-19 vaccine incentives to inmates: Questions prioritizing 'care packages and barbecues' while inmate violence continues escalating and staffing shortages are a growing concern

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Elmira, N.Y., July 1—State Senator Tom O’Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today criticized a move by the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to implement a COVID-19 vaccine incentive program for inmates while failing to take steps to address staffing shortages at state prisons or to better protect correctional officers and other prison staff from rising inmate violence.

According to a June 30, 2021 memo from DOCCS Acting Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci to all of the state’s inmates, the department plans to begin implementing a vaccine incentive program to encourage more inmates to get vaccinated. The memo says that approximately 45 percent of the state’s inmate population has been vaccinated.

“For those individuals who have been fully vaccinated on or before a date certain, including those already vaccinated, Central Office will randomly select five incarcerated individuals from each facility to receive a care package. The care package will consist of the most popular food items sold at your assigned facility’s commissary, not to exceed a \$75 value,” the DOCCS memo states. “In addition, at the conclusion of the vaccination campaign, Central Office will award a facility barbecue to all vaccinated individuals at six facilities...for the highest percentage of incarcerated individuals vaccinated.”

O’Mara has been outspoken about the failure of the Cuomo administration and the Democrat majorities in both houses of the Legislature to address the increasing violence within the Elmira Correctional Facility in his legislative district and at state correctional facilities throughout New York. He said staffing shortages at state prisons are also becoming a significant concern with correctional officers increasingly facing mandatory 16-hour shifts and seven-day-a-week work schedules.

O’Mara said, “The Cuomo administration has more important work to do than putting together and expending its resources on care packages and arranging barbecues for state prison inmates, including those who have already been vaccinated. State prison officials should be prioritizing their efforts on actions to put a stop to the rising tide of violence throughout our prison system and ensure adequate staffing levels. Governor Cuomo and the Legislature’s Democratic supermajorities have been 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. The ongoing attacks inside state prisons should serve as a stark reminder that steps are needed to better protect correctional 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.”