



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara blasts governor on Southport closure: Criticizes abrupt decision and lack of local input

THOMAS F. O'MARA November 8, 2021

| ISSUE: **SOUTHPORT CORRECTIONAL FACILITY**



Governor Hochul's abruptly announced decision to close the Southport Correctional Facility comes as a great shock to this community and region. It arrived with no advance warning and, obviously, no meaningful local input or outreach to local officials or the correctional officers union. The surprising decision impacts hundreds of local correctional officers and prison staff, which means hundreds of local families and a devastating toll on already hard-hit local economies.

**Elmira, N.Y., November 8**—State Senator Tom O’Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) strongly criticized today’s announcement by Governor Kathy Hochul that the Southport Correctional Facility is scheduled to close on March 10, 2022.

In a statement, O’Mara said, “Governor Hochul’s abruptly announced decision to close the Southport Correctional Facility comes as a great shock to this community and region. It arrived with no advance warning and, obviously, no meaningful local input or outreach to local officials or the correctional officers union. The surprising decision impacts hundreds of local correctional officers and prison staff, which means hundreds of local families and a devastating toll on already hard-hit local economies. It shows a disregard for Upstate New York’s communities and simply turns a blind eye to an increasingly violent crime wave throughout this state, as well as a currently explosive and dangerous prison environment that threatens correctional officers and prison staff. Governor Hochul needs to be transparent about its decision to close Southport. What factors justify closing a ‘supermax’ facility like Southport? What will it mean for public safety across this state? What measures are being considered for the future of the facility itself, but most importantly for the employees and their families, and the community at large? There are plenty of unanswered questions and we will immediately be reaching out to the Hochul administration to get answers. The bottom line is that Governor Hochul should be focused on spreading out the inmate population, decreasing inmate density, and protecting the men and women working in our prisons.

“Despite the recent trend of lowering prison population, we have not seen a correlating reduction of violence within the prisons. We read weekly of violent assaults by inmates on staff and other inmates occurring at Elmira Correctional Facility. We need to focus on safer prisons. The lower prison population should be capitalized on to spread inmates out for greater safety within the system as a whole.”

O’Mara noted that the state has recently invested \$20 million into operations at the Southport facility implementing a step-down program to work with the most violent inmates in the state’s prison system to get them ready for reintegration into the general prison population.

O’Mara and many other lawmakers have been critical of former Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Legislature’s Democrat supermajorities for actions over the past several years that they believe have focused on emptying state prisons for political gain.

That criticism has continued into the new Hochul administration.

“Governor Hochul has, so far, surprisingly and wrongly continued the radical and politically motivated actions of the former Cuomo administration and the Legislature’s one-party-control, downstate Democrat supermajorities to empty state prisons at any cost, especially the cost of public safety and security. Over the past several years up to now, we have seen action after action, from the disastrous bail reform to a radically lenient Parole Board, advancing a pro-criminal mentality over public safety and security and victims’ rights. It has emboldened this society’s criminal element,” O’Mara said.