



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Senate Republican Leader Ortt and Assemblyman Morinello Call for an End to The State Park Police Officer Hiring Freeze

ROBERT G. ORTT January 22, 2022

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**NIAGARA FALLS, NY -- Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt and Assemblyman Angelo Morinello along with members of the PBA of New York State** today demanded for an end of the State Park Police Officer hiring freeze that has been in place for almost three years, and to staff NYS Parks with Park Police.

Earlier this week, **Senate Leader Rob Ortt and Assemblyman Angelo Morinello** sent a letter to Governor Kathy Hochul and Erik Kulleseid, Commissioner of the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation urging them to lift the hiring freeze.

“With the ongoing pandemic, our State Park attendance is at the highest it’s ever been. These areas need to be proactively policed by professionals specifically trained in this field, or else the safety of New Yorkers could be at stake. Adequately staffing our parks with Park Police will allow for a safer environment for all those who enjoy New York’s outstanding state outdoor facilities,” **said Leader Ortt.**

Under the memorandum issued by former Governor Andrew Cuomo on December 2, 2019, Park Police were placed under the operational command of the New York State Police. The letter by Leader Ortt and Assemblyman Morinello asked that this order be fully rescinded, allowing the State Park Police to be reestablished as a fully funded and independent entity. The letter also asked that all halted operations, such as the transferring of officers, promotions, and purchasing of equipment, be reinstated.

“Safety should always be the number one priority when it comes to our state parks. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the desire for outdoor recreation and tourism has reached an all time high. This has led to a large increase in attendance in our parks. It is extremely important the visitors have trained professionals consistently in the area if needed. It is time to end the State Park Police hiring freeze, especially to start preparing for the busy spring and summer seasons,” **said Assemblyman Morinello.**

**PBA of New York State President and Park Police Sergeants Director Manuel Vilar along with members of the PBA stated,** “Former Governor Cuomo’s policy memo ordering the elimination of the State Park Police has placed the lives of New Yorkers and the future of our state parks in danger. We are grateful for the support of Leader Ortt, Senator Borrello and Assemblyman Morinello in educating the public on the critical mission of the State Park Police. We also appreciate the good working relationship we have with Governor Hochul’s administration and look forward to partnering on the revitalization of New York’s oldest state law enforcement agency.”

In addition, Senator George Borrello and Assemblyman Mike Norris urged their support as well to lift the freeze.

“Our spectacular state park system is one of New York’s greatest assets and a resource that is attracting record numbers of visitors. It is the state’s responsibility to provide the safest experience possible for those who utilize our parks, which is why it is concerning that the administration has allowed the ranks of our Park Police to fall to a historically low level. Park Police have specialized training in high-angle rescues, water rescues, and snowmobile and boating safety, among other things. They are an essential component of our law enforcement community and we need to increase their staffing. The safety of those who enjoy our parks is at stake,” **said Senator George Borrello,** whose 57th district includes Allegany State Park.

“New York State Parks are one of our greatest assets that drive tourism and economic activity. While our parks have great natural beauty and wonder that have been enjoyed by visitors in record numbers, it is

critically important that we maintain public safety and have the appropriate number of officers available to prevent and/or respond to emergency incidents in real time. Limiting New York State Park Police Officers' ability to patrol and protect is a disservice not only to the visitors of these State assets, but to the many local businesses that benefit from tourist activity associated with park outings," **said Assemblyman Mike Norris.**

*Letter from Senate Republican Leader Ortt and Assemblyman Morinello attached.*

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