



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara continues to call for 'HALT Act' repeal: Says it puts officers at risk, sparks an increasingly dangerous climate of violence within NY's prisons

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 26, 2023

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Ongoing attacks inside the Elmira Correctional Facility and in other prisons across this region and state 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.

Elmira, N.Y., January 26—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C-Big Flats) has renewed his call for New York Governor Kathy Hochul and the Democrat-led State Legislature to immediately

repeal the “Humane Alternatives to Solitary Confinement (HALT) Act.”

The new law, which went into effect last April, was approved in 2021 by the Legislature’s Democrat majorities and signed into law by then-Governor Andrew Cuomo. The law severely limits the use of special housing units in correctional facilities and restricts the ability of prison officials to discipline the state’s most violent inmates, who commit criminal acts in prison, by separating them from the general population.

O’Mara said, “Governor Hochul and the Legislature’s Democrat majorities have been solely focused on coddling violent criminals 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. Ongoing attacks inside the Elmira Correctional Facility and in other prisons across this region and state 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. We can begin by repealing HALT. Our correctional officers remain extremely alarmed about rising violence inside prisons and we share their concern. Governor Hochul and New York’s current legislative leadership keep moving in the completely opposite and wrong direction. It is a careless approach to criminal justice and corrections, irresponsible, and dangerous.”

The New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association (NYSCOPBA) pointed to statistics from the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) showing that the single-year records for inmate-on-staff assaults and inmate-on-inmate assaults were set in 2022. The numbers show that prison violence spiked after the HALT Act was implemented. Since April 1, 2022, when the HALT Act took effect, overall violence in New York State correctional facilities rose by 31percent.

At “Restore Safety in our Facilities” rallies statewide over the past year, several of which O’Mara has attended, NYSCOPBA has continued to sound the alarm that since the law’s enactment, officers have been at even greater risk.

O’Mara continues to co-sponsor legislation to repeal the HALT Act. He noted that the Elmira Correctional Facility is the second-most dangerous prison in New York State for staff and inmates, and called on Hochul and the Legislature’s Democrat majorities to take immediate action to help restore safety.

At a rally outside the Elmira Correctional Facility last August, **NYSCOPBA Western Region Vice President Kenny Gold said**, “Since HALT went into effect in April, violence in our correctional facilities, especially against staff, has risen dramatically. The statistics tell the real story of the failure of this legislation in four short months. Our members have a target on their backs every day and there is no end in sight to the violence. Coupled with the fact that morale is non-existent, staff are working long hours with little or no relief, we are at a breaking point and the New York State Legislature must open their eyes to those facts.”