

Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 21, 2025

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Senator Helming and Local Leaders Call for Closing Loophole to Protect Students and School Safety *Legislation would require OCFS and DOCCS to notify school districts and local law enforcement when a felony offender under 18 is released*

Senator Helming was joined by law enforcement and school leaders to call for the Legislature to require timely communication from state agencies when a felony offender under 18 is released from state custody. This is to help law enforcement agencies and school districts better prepare and protect students and public safety.

The need to close this loophole in state law was identified following a 2022 incident in which a 15-year-old student brought a loaded firearm to a high school located in Ontario County and was subsequently convicted of multiple felonies. After serving two years in an OCFS facility, the student, then still a minor, was released back into the community. Neither the school district nor local law enforcement were notified.

Under current state law, DOCCS is required to notify local law enforcement when felony offenders are released from its custody. However, there is no similar requirement when minors who are felony offenders are released back into the community from the custody of OCFS.

Senator Helming has introduced legislation (S.3624) to close this loophole by requiring the state Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to coordinate efforts in order to notify local schools and law enforcement before a felony offender under the age of 18 is released.

Senator Helming said, “Certainly we can all agree that any step to ensure the safety of our children and schools is a step worth taking. We have an opportunity with this legislation to close a potentially dangerous loophole in state law and ensure that state agencies coordinate efforts in order to provide timely notification to school districts and law enforcement when felony offenders under 18 are released from state custody. This will help schools and law enforcement prepare accordingly, not only for student, school and community safety, but also where applicable, to support that student’s safe reintegration into school.”

Chris Barnard, Superintendent of Red Jacket Schools, said “As a Superintendent and a father, I strongly believe every student has the right to a safe and supportive learning environment. Recent challenges have highlighted the need for a clearer, more effective approach to ensuring school safety while also providing the necessary resources for student reintegration. This measure empowers school districts to take proactive steps in protecting students while maintaining a system rooted in transparency, accountability, and compassion. By strengthening our ability to address these critical issues, we can create a safer and more inclusive school community. I urge its passage to safeguard our schools and enhance the well-being of our students, staff, and families.”

Kelly Zimmerman, Superintendent of Dansville Schools, said “The transition of children who committed juvenile offenses back into society is a critical process that requires strategic support systems to reduce recidivism and promote rehabilitation. Schools play an indispensable role in this transition by offering education, structure, and support that can fundamentally alter a child’s life trajectory. However, for schools to effectively fulfill this role, it is essential that they receive pertinent information about the child’s history, needs, and risk factors. This bill, emphasizing information sharing between juvenile justice agencies and educational institutions is a necessary step toward fostering better outcomes for these youth and ensuring a safer school environment.”

Ontario County District Attorney Jim Ritts said “In order to proactively plan for situations such as this, it is imperative that our schools know when someone who has engaged in violent activity is released. Learning that someone who locked down a school and held an administrator at gunpoint has been released because he is on or near the campus is a loophole that cannot continue. While this impacts our community, there are other survivors of violent crime who are likewise not advised of the release of their offender. This notification is important so that the necessary precautions can be taken before victims are re-traumatized by the presence of their attacker.”

Assemblyman Jeff Gallahan sponsors the bill in the State Assembly and said, “I’m proud to sponsor this legislation in the State Assembly. We must protect our community and ensure that all students have access to a safe high quality learning environment. This common sense piece of legislation will enable our schools to better serve the learning needs of all and our law enforcement to prepare for reintegration of youth felony offenders.”

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