



New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association, Inc.

“Keeping New York Safe”

State Corrections Officers Union Criticizes Plan to Close More Prisons

Union Cites Skyrocketing Violence and Reduced Staffing

For Immediate Release

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Albany, NY – The New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association (NYSCOPBA) objects to the announcement that additional correctional facilities will be closed in the upcoming budget cycle. NYSCOPBA is deeply concerned that closures will exacerbate prison violence, cause relocated staff to leave service through resignation and retirement, and further the cycle of unsustainable staff attrition and prison violence.

The proposed closure of up to five correctional facilities comes at a time of increased violence that requires higher staffing ratios and lower inmate density. As NYSCOPBA previously warned, the implementation of the unrestricted congregate settings and reduced penalties for rules violations via the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement Act (HALT) would result in increased violence against incarcerated individuals and staff. Latest data provided by DOCCS supports the argument that prisons are more dangerous than ever. Assaults on staff increased 13.4 percent in 2023, following a 25 percent increase the previous year when the HALT Act went into effect. Incarcerated individual assaults increased a staggering 41.5 percent in 2023, followed by a 34 percent increase in 2022. Staff cannot effectively protect themselves or incarcerated individuals at this rate.

“As the violence increases and staffing levels plummet, mandatory overtime for correction officers and sergeants has spiked to record highs. This overtime is well documented and it is unsustainable. Continuous mandates are straining members’ physical and mental health, their families, and their quality of life. Members are burning out at alarming rates. How can the State of New York demand that our members continue working in these conditions and have the mental and physical ability to keep incarcerated individuals and staff safe? Members need relief.”
– stated Chris Summers, NYSCOPBA President.

NYSCOPBA calls upon the policymakers to see reality. Prisons are safest for everyone when they are properly staffed and when incarcerated individuals are not forced to live on top of one

another. Closing facilities fails to provide a long-term solution to staffing because staff do not want to uproot their families to move hours away. Closing facilities fails to provide a long-term solution to violence because more densely populated prisons make it increasingly difficult to separate the bad actors from preying upon those who are quietly serving their sentences.

The solution is to keep prisons open, spread out the incarcerated individual population, and to add more staff as quickly as possible.

To that end, NYSCOPBA calls for support in its efforts for a salary upgrade and additional financial incentives in its collective bargaining agreement. Whether people want to admit it or not, there will always be people who commit heinous crimes in New York State. Correctional facilities will always be needed to separate them from the public. We cannot staff those facilities with our depleted membership. Nobody wants to take this job for the pay, the low quality of life, and the personal risks. Closures won't fix staffing. Violence won't get better unless we do something different.

The solution is simple. Incentivize new and existing staff. Keep prisons open. Reduce the density of the incarcerated population to make it easier to separate bad actors.

"I stand with NYSCOPBA members who rightfully have significant concerns over the latest prison closure proposal. Our state facilities are woefully understaffed and the solution ought not to be closing prisons and consolidating workforces - the solution is paying our hardworking correctional officers better wages and hiring additional, sorely needed COs. At a time when our correctional officers feel undervalued and demoralized, it is high time to focus on increasing safety in our state facilities and paying a living wage." – said New York State Senator James Skoufis (D – Rockland, Orange).

"All conversations about public safety need to include our correctional facilities. I am highly disappointed by the Governor's decision to close more correctional facilities across the state because it will do nothing to mitigate the rise in crime or increase safety in prisons. I also am concerned about how these closures will impact communities like the North Country who support these correctional facilities and depend on them. Instead of 'right-sizing,' the state should be discussing how we keep the system safe for the hardworking men and women inside those prison walls. The state needs to do more to support the correctional officers and civilians that walk into these facilities every day to help keep us all safe, not overcrowd them or shut them down. We owe this to their friends and loved ones who worry about their safety every day." – stated New York State Assemblyman Billy Jones (D-Chateaugay Lake) 115th Assembly District.

"The foundation of any state budget must begin with protecting our most vulnerable citizens and ensuring public safety. New York continues to be in a public safety crisis and the last thing the state should be doing is balancing a budget on the backs of the safety of the people of our state and jeopardizing public safety by the willy-nilly closing of correctional facilities. This will lead to overcrowding in remaining facilities and place our dedicated corrections officers in even greater harm's way," said Senator Jim Tedisco (R,C-Saratoga Springs).