

The Chief

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NYSCOPBA Takes Case Against Jail Cuts Public

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DONN ROWE: Calls cuts unfair, unsafe.

New York State Correctional Officer and Police Benevolent Association President Donn Rowe May 20 launched a campaign calling on New Yorkers to protest Governor Paterson's proposal to cut 2,021 jobs from the Department of Correctional Services because the layoffs would jeopardize the health and safety of the public and Correction Officers.

The union will air radio and television ads as well as send direct mail, and hold rallies calling on Mr. Paterson's administration to protect the safety of Correction Officers by not reducing their numbers.

'Governor Dropped the Ball'

"Sadly, this administration has dropped the ball," said Mr. Rowe. "These ill-advised cuts of front-line Correction Officers would strain an already-dangerous situation."

Mr. Rowe added that cuts proposed to the Department of Correctional Services were disproportionate because 2,021 of the 8,700 state workers to be laid off July 1 work in his agency. Governor Paterson has asked state unions to roll back a three-percent raise in order to plug budget gap that increases by the day or he will lay off workers. State unions have refused.

The state prisons are already operating at 104-percent capacity, the union leader argued, while maximum security facilities are at 123-percent capacity.

"While we applaud Commissioner Fischer's willingness to play fast and loose with the facts when it suits his purpose, the reality is that the 104 percent figure is a Federally-mandated measure of the true capacity of prisons, and it's a measure used by DOCS itself," Mr. Rowe contended.

Says Top Staff Should Go

Mr. Rowe said there were other ways to deal with the budget crisis that would not jeopardize the jobs of Correction Officers. He said that currently there are more than 900 employees working at DOCS central office, 60 of whom make well over \$100,000 a year, not including the layers of administrators that work at each of the 70 prisons across New York.

"We at NYSCOPBA have repeatedly called on the administration to achieve saving by reducing the number of highly paid managerial employees at DOCS," Mr. Rowe stated. "When it comes time to make cuts, the Commissioner turns to those on the front line, proposing we guard more inmates with less staff. It is time that the Commissioner put the safety of Correction Officers above his bottom line."

A DOCS spokesman, Erik Kriss, said that the 900 central staff workers should be put into perspective by the fact that the department has more than 31,000 employees. "You still need people to run the agency," he said.

He added that eight of the top earners in DOCS have a combined 240 years of experience. "Their talent requires them to be paid," he said.

Mr. Kriss noted that the department would give every Correction Officer a chance to keep their job and transfer before being laid off. "It's time to right-size the system to keep it in line with the inmate population," which has decreased sharply, he said.