

# Corrections officers' union challenges department

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**Justin Murphy** *The Citizen* AuburnPub.com | Posted: Friday, December 17, 2010  
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**The state correction officers' union is revving its engine in the public affairs battle over corrections staffing levels — and driving the department up the wall in the process.**

**The New York State Correction Officers and Police Benevolent Association issued a press release Thursday morning advertising the facetious “first annual parking lot challenge contest.”**

**“Any state elected official who can drive their car to (Department of Correctional Services headquarters in Albany) and find a parking spot ... will be entered into a drawing to win a one-week vacation in the Bahamas,” the release said. “You will be competing for a parking spot with hundreds and hundreds of highly paid administrators at an annual salary cost of over \$75 million, so get there early.”**

**Chris Leo, NYSCOPBA's legislative director, said the fake contest — there will be no free Caribbean vacations — is a way to draw attention to what he called the bloated DOCS administration.**

**“We figured this is a way to get the spotlight back onto the administration so we don't have the same budget situation year after year,” he said. “We need more staffing actually watching inmates, not sitting up front.”**

**Leo cited figures showing 907 administrative staffers in Albany in 2009, which he said is an increase from 793 in 2006.**

**DOCS spokesman Erik Kriss disputed those statistics and called NYSCOPBA's promotion “incredibly misleading.”**

**According to Kriss, there are currently 694 full-time equivalent employees in the DOCS administration in Albany, a decrease of 18 percent from 849 on April 1, 2009.**

**Over that same period, Kriss said, “front-line” jobs in prisons are only down five percent.**

***“It is a lot easier to find empty parking spaces now than it was when I started here in 2007,” he said.***

***The web site [www.seethroughny.net](http://www.seethroughny.net), operated by the Empire Center for New York State Policy, lists 849 positions in DOCS administration.***

***Recent prison closures and consolidations, including the shuttering of minimum security Butler Correctional Facility in Wayne County, have enflamed tensions between the correctional officers’ union and DOCS leadership.***

***The 23,000-member union accuses the administration of cutting front-line jobs with too heavy a hand, which it says endangers guards, inmates and the public.***

***“We have to be careful and stay away from the simplistic approach of just cutting for the sake of cutting,” Leo said. “If there are going to be cuts, we have to look at the administrative level.”***

***Kriss countered that by saying administrative staff has already been cut and pointing to legislative mandates that forced DOCS to add positions in Albany.***

***For instance, mandated expansions of sex offender treatment programs and services for disabled inmates both required additional administrative positions, he said.***

***“The central office is the nerve center for the agency,” he said. “There aren’t that many people versus front-line folks.”***

***At least on Thursday, Leo and NYSCOPBA weren’t buying it. According to the parking lot challenge press release, “Odds of winning are based on how many administrators take off for the holidays. Contest ends when the DOCS administration actually shrinks for once.”***

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