

Letter to Editor: Democrat and Chronicle
RE: Response to NY Correction Association (Attica)
Date: December 14, 2011

Everyday, NYSCOPBA's members put on their uniforms, say goodbye to their families, and go to work in some of the most violent and unsafe places in New York. They serve the public with dignity and professionalism in unbelievably difficult settings. No violence against a corrections officer – or an inmate – should be tolerated. However, inmates cannot be the arbiters of what constitutes “safety” in our prison system as it puts both our officers and our communities at risk.

The Correction Association's depiction of Attica is uninformed at best, and dangerously misleading at worst. They present as fact unsubstantiated and anonymous claims from people who are serving prison time for breaking the law, which can only serve to harm society's last stop for public safety.

Inmates are absolutely entitled to rights, and should never be subjected to violence. But their anonymous complaints should also be met with an appropriate amount of skepticism, and the public must be reminded that Attica has a long and storied history of housing some of the most violent and troubled individuals in this country.

Following the recent indictments of four corrections officers at Attica, and as with any criminal accusations, we urge the public to wait until all of the facts are presented in their entirety before there is a presumption of guilt or innocence. And as those facts come to light, remember that violence against officers has steadily increased in recent years, as prisoners are increasingly packed into tighter conditions (currently New York State's maximum security prisons are over-capacity at 122 percent).

Context is important. While this case unfolds, it's also important to remember the extremely dangerous conditions in which these men and women serve every day.

-Donn Rowe, President, New York State Correctional Officers P.B.A.