



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

20 Computer Dr. West, Albany, NY 12205  
(518) 427-1551 [www.nyscopba.org](http://www.nyscopba.org) [nyscopba@nyscopba.org](mailto:nyscopba@nyscopba.org)



August 6, 2025

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NYSCOPBA Members,

We are sharing with you our official **Response to the State of New York's Strike Report**, issued on May 9, 2025, regarding the unsanctioned strike that began on February 17, 2025. This document, dated August 6, 2025, was prepared to provide critical context and tell your side of the story—something the State's report failed to do. Our goal is to ensure you understand why this response was necessary and to reaffirm NYSCOPBA's commitment to advocating for you.

## Why We Issued This Response

The State's Strike Report outlined the events of the illegal strike but omitted the underlying issues that pushed our members to a breaking point. While NYSCOPBA unequivocally condemns the strike as illegal under the Taylor Law and did not sanction it, we still believe it is essential to explain the dire working conditions that have continued to deteriorate each passing year without change. These include:

- **Crushing Mandatory Overtime:** Chronic staffing shortages forced many of you to work up to 24-hour shifts, with no relief in sight.
- **Surging Violence:** The **HALT Act** (implemented in 2022) removed critical disciplinary and management tools, leading to a 47% increase in staff assaults and a 118% increase in inmate-on-inmate assaults.
- **Staffing Crisis:** Filled correctional officer positions dropped from 19,076 (2016–2020 average) to 14,095 by 2024, worsened by prison closures and an increasing incarcerated population.
- **State Neglect:** Despite our repeated warnings, state leaders ignored the deteriorating conditions and rejected calls to amend HALT or pass supportive legislation, such as the vetoed "death gamble" bill and violence study bill.

These conditions, created by poorly conceived policies and Albany's inaction, left many of you feeling unheard and unsafe. For many, the strike was a desperate cry for help, and our response ensures the public and policymakers understand the full context.

## What Our Response Covers

Our document is structured in five parts to provide a comprehensive account:

1. **Circumstances Leading to the Strike:** Details how state policies, particularly the HALT Act, and legislative leadership failures created a dangerous and unsustainable work environment.
2. **NYSCOPBA's Warnings:** Highlights our efforts to alert the State, including showing a video of member frustrations to a Governor's aide, which went unheeded.
3. **Mediation and Advocacy:** Outlines our work to end the strike, including proposing mediator Martin Scheinman, securing a Consent Award (February 27, 2025), and negotiating a Memorandum of Agreement (March 8, 2025) to protect your jobs and make non-legislative changes to facility operations.

4. **Post-Strike Actions:** Describes improvements we've secured, such as \$9,000–\$10,000 annual pay increases, regional hiring, referral bonuses, and reinstating terminated members.
5. **Moving Forward:** Commits to ongoing advocacy for better policies, recruitment, retention, and a stronger collective bargaining agreement.

### **Why This Matters to You**

This response is not just a rebuttal to the State's report—it's a testament to your resilience. You work in some of the most challenging conditions in New York State, and your voices deserve to be heard. We issued this response to:

- **Set the Record Straight:** Counter the State's narrative by showing how their policies and inaction fueled the crisis.
- **Highlight Your Struggles:** Ensure the public and lawmakers understand the toll of understaffing, violence, and mandatory overtime on you and your families.
- **Reaffirm Our Commitment:** Demonstrate that NYSCOPBA fought for you during and after the strike, securing tangible improvements and continuing to push for change.

### **Next Steps**

We encourage you to read the full response. As we approach negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement in 2026, we need your input to strengthen our strategy. Look out for a revamped contract survey to share your priorities. Together, we will continue to demand the respect, safety, and support you deserve.

Thank you for your strength and dedication as public servants.

NYSCOPBA Executive Board



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## **RESPONSE OF THE NEW YORK STATE CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS & POLICE BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION, INC.. TO THE STATE'S ARTICLE 14 SECTION 210(4) REPORT ON THE 2025 STRIKE OF CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS**

On May 9, 2025, the State of New York, through its Office of Employee Relations, issued a *"Report Pursuant to Article 14 New York State Civil Service Law Section 210(4) Concerning an Illegal Strike by Certain Public Employees of the Executive Branch of the State of New York,"* hereinafter referred to as "the Strike Report."

Although NYSCOPBA acknowledges and agrees that striking in the State of New York is illegal pursuant to the Taylor Law and that we must condemn the strike,<sup>1</sup> the State's Strike Report fails to provide critical context for the strike. This context is necessary to understand that those who stood on the strike lines did so for a variety of reasons: crushing mandatory overtime with no end in sight, dramatic increases in violence, rampant drugs and contraband, a hopeless recruitment and retention situation, and not feeling like their voices were being heard. The security staff worked, lived, and suffered through the short-sighted political decisions that have made many aspects of the correctional system worse and more dangerous for incarcerated individuals and staff alike. The deterioration of prison conditions statewide and the indifference of the State's elected leaders to cries for help from the rank-and-file pushed staff to the breaking point, and then they broke.

The truth is not complicated. This crisis was not created by the officers who put on a uniform each day. It was created in Albany, where elected officials disregarded our repeated warnings and passed laws that made DOCCS facilities far more dangerous. These ill-considered laws weakened security, emboldened violence, and stripped correctional officers of the authority and tools needed to maintain control. As conditions deteriorated, these same officials ignored the data, refused to listen, and turned their backs on those who serve on the front lines. When the consequences of their choices became plain for the world to see, the Governor and Legislature did not take responsibility. Instead, they looked to shift blame away from themselves and onto the very workforce they abandoned.

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<sup>1</sup> Nothing in the below NYSCOPBA Response is intended to, nor should it be construed to, condone or in any way support strike-related or any other illegal activities. Unequivocally, NYSCOPBA did not sanction the February 2025 strike, and must agree that it was illegal. NYSCOPBA worked tirelessly to help end the strike. Nevertheless, our members' significant concerns over the underlying issues that led to the strike were justified and even while the strike was ongoing, NYSCOPBA was obligated to advocate on behalf of its members regarding those concerns.

## **Part I – Circumstances Surrounding Commencement of Strike that Caused Staff to Break**

Part I of the State's Strike Report analyzes "Circumstances Surrounding Commencement of [the] Strike." This section purports to recount the events of February 17, 2025, when a group of officers and sergeants went on strike seeking relief from excessive overtime and chronic short staffing, appropriate compensation and retirement benefits, and improved safety in state correctional facilities.

The State's report begins with the events of February 17. But an honest and thorough analysis of the circumstances surrounding commencement of the strike must begin far earlier, and it must account for the actions of state government that directly precipitated the crisis situation in our correctional facilities.

In 2021, the State Legislature passed, and former Governor Andrew Cuomo signed, the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement (HALT) Act, which eliminated the use of long-term solitary confinement in correctional facilities, set limits for the amount of time an inmate can spend in a special housing unit, and prohibited the use of solitary confinement for certain classes of inmates.

For years, NYSCOPBA had warned the State that implementing HALT would do nothing to improve the lives of incarcerated individuals and would, instead, make our facilities more dangerous. We had argued and successfully defeated previous iterations of this law for many years prior to its passage because solitary confinement as it was alleged to exist by proponents of HALT did not actually exist in New York. As the men and women who work in this State's correctional facilities can attest, programming, recreation, and other related services had ensured that the incarcerated population were not isolated even when placed in segregated housing for violent actions or other violations of DOCCS policies. There had also been a recent NYCLU settlement that restricted various forms of segregated confinement.

It was always our position that if segregated housing as it actually existed was eliminated, a critical tool to separate bad actors from the rest of the prison population would be lost forever and, as a result, violence would only increase. Our message has been straightforward and clear: reducing disciplinary penalties will only produce more violence. We didn't just complain about what would happen if this poorly conceived legislation became law; we worked toward an alternative. We drafted legislation authorizing a study of prison violence and pleaded with the Legislature to pass it before implementing HALT, but **the State's elected leaders ignored the message.**

Over our objections, HALT became law in 2021, though it was not immediately implemented. NYSCOPBA did not wait for implementation. Instead, we immediately filed a federal lawsuit to overturn HALT. In it, we told the stories of NYSCOPBA members who had been brutally assaulted by incarcerated individuals. We cited staggering violence statistics against both incarcerated individuals and staff that broke records year after year. To us, the State of New York had created a dangerous working environment that threatened everyone. Ultimately, our lawsuit was not successful.

The HALT Act was fully implemented on April 2, 2022. As we warned, it was an immediate disaster and has been a disaster ever since. HALT made correctional facilities more dangerous both for inmates and corrections personnel. On April 27, 2022, not even one month into the Act's full implementation, NYSCOPBA pointed out that attacks in our facilities had already significantly increased and that 2022 would be the most violent year in the recorded history of New York State correctional facilities. We called for State Legislators who supported the Act to make immediate modifications. **Again, the State's elected leaders ignored the message.**

By the time 2022 ended, it had indeed been the most violent year in the history of state prisons. But that record didn't stand for long. New records were set in 2023 and 2024, with NYSCOPBA alerting State leaders and the public on October 31, 2024, that violent attacks that year had already surpassed the record total for the entire year of 2023. The deterioration in safety had been astounding: since 2021, assaults on staff had by then increased by 47%, and inmate-on-inmate assaults had more than doubled, increasing by 118%. We informed and demonstrated to the State over and over and over again that HALT was failing and unsustainable, creating an increasingly dangerous environment for both staff and inmates. **The State's elected leaders continued ignoring the message.**

The impact on our members of this explosion in violence—and of state elected leaders' abject failure to even acknowledge it, let alone do something about it—was not difficult to predict. The mental, physical, and emotional stress of working in facilities with inadequate disciplinary systems drove away experienced, capable men and women. Some of our members retired early. Some transferred to other facilities further from home and their families in order to find a semblance of safety and work-life balance. Some just resigned. But all of our members, whether they left or stayed, experienced the trauma and unrelenting stress of wondering on a daily basis whether they would make it home to their families—and whether, when they did make it home, they would have the capacity to be who their families needed them to be.

It was not possible to timely recruit and train new officers to replace those who left service in our facilities. This resulted in our members being forced to work unprecedented amounts of mandatory overtime, at times including shifts as long as 24 hours straight. As a result, the state's entire correctional system found itself trapped in a cycle of staffing shortages, burnout, low morale and increasing violence, all leading to further erosions in staffing. This doom loop was created and perpetuated by the State's elected leaders.

From 2016 to 2020—the five years before HALT was signed into law—DOCCS statistics show that there were, on average, 19,076 uniformed security staff positions filled statewide at the end of each year. This was relatively unchanged from the preceding five-year average of 19,269 (2011 to 2015). But by the end of 2022, the first year HALT was fully implemented, and after the State had emerged from its shutdown of our Training Academy due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that number had dropped to 16,178 positions filled. By the end of 2024, just 14,095 positions were filled. This precipitous drop in staffing was accompanied by an increase in the incarcerated population, from 30,746 at the end of 2021 to 33,677 by the end of 2024.

During the five years leading up to February 17, 2025—since 2019—the State of New York had already closed ten prisons with five more on the way to closure due to the adopted 2024-25 State Budget. The transfers of correctional staff from closing facilities to other locations uprooted families and, in especially difficult cases, forced parents to add hours to their daily commute. These extended commutes would also prove to be dangerous for tired, burnt-out staff to make every day. These factors only accelerated the retention and recruitment crisis.

If it ended here, the story of state elected leaders' culpability in creating a dangerous powder keg in our correctional facilities would be bad enough. Sadly, it doesn't end here. The men and women who put themselves in harm's way every day in our correctional facilities had also grown accustomed to being underappreciated, ignored, and flat-out disrespected by executive leadership. In one of those instances, in December 2024, Governor Kathy Hochul demoralized correctional officers, their spouses, and children when she vetoed the Legislature's bipartisan passage of NYSCOPBA's "death gamble" legislation, a straightforward measure intended to provide financial security to the families of correctional officers who, in a worst-case scenario, lose their lives while continuing to work after reaching retirement eligibility. It marked the fourth time in less than ten years that this commonsense legislation was passed by both houses of the State Legislature and then vetoed, twice by Cuomo and twice by Hochul. Branding Governor Hochul's veto "indefensible," NYSCOPBA President Chris Summers echoed the sentiments of all our members when he condemned the Governor's "stark disregard for the sacrifices [correction officers] and their families make to ensure public safety."

The policy changes made by the State of New York brought only pain and suffering to our members. They were – and still are – continually assaulted, hospitalized, and exposed to narcotics and other dangerous chemicals abused by the incarcerated population. They continue to spend more of their waking hours inside a prison than at home. They fear discipline and termination if they refuse to work mandatory overtime. Many are too exhausted to safely drive home to their families. Many quietly suffer from various forms of PTSD and other mental health issues that make living and working a constant struggle. They fear that their home facility may close, and their new facility will be even further away from the family they barely see. And they see no end in sight, no help coming, and elected leaders who are not listening.

The irrefutable conclusion is plain: the unsanctioned strike that began in February did not happen in a vacuum, nor did it materialize over nothing; the atmosphere of daily distress about the danger our members confronted simply by going to work was directly caused by state elected leaders adopting poorly conceived laws, then stubbornly refusing to accept that their policy was bad policy. In short, we needed Albany's help. Instead, we got their blatant disregard—over, and over, and over again.

## **Part II – Efforts by NYSCOPBA Imploring the State to Take the Possibility of a Strike Seriously**

At no point did NYSCOPBA sanction the 2025 strike. At every juncture, we reminded our members that going on strike would be illegal and could result in termination, and we informed them they could not take that action. NYSCOPBA did, however, believe that the *possibility* of

members striking on their own was strong. We shared this belief and warning with the State prior to February 17.

At NYSCOPBA's Executive Assembly held in Syracuse on February 5-6, a significant number of our members expressed their strong belief that the State had ignored our concerns and would continue doing so. A few suggested that members go on strike. Again, NYSCOPBA leadership declared that striking was illegal, that it could not be done, and that other legal options had to continue to be pursued. But the membership had made their frustrations known. Shortly after, we showed a videotape of this meeting to a top public safety aide to Governor Hochul during a meeting at NYSCOPBA's Albany headquarters. We took this unprecedented step because NYSCOPBA wanted the Governor's office to see firsthand the high level of frustration among the membership. After watching the video, this aide stated that he was going to discuss it with the Governor and express to her that the NYSCOPBA membership **needed to see tangible changes immediately**.

Still, nothing happened. Like NYSCOPBA's initial pleas to state lawmakers not to pass the HALT Act; like every one of our calls since 2022 for HALT supporters to amend the law; like every new and terrible record for violence in our correctional facilities; and like every data point demonstrating that the crisis in our prison system was unsustainable, **the State's leaders ignored our warnings that an unsanctioned strike was likely**. Regrettably, as at every stage leading to February 17, 2025, State leaders chose to disregard the warnings and failed to address the crisis.

### **Part III – Mediation, Negotiations, and NYSCOPBA's Actions to Protect its Members' Jobs and Return Them to Work**

From the time the strike began, NYSCOPBA needed to avoid facing strike charges itself because the heavy costs associated with defending the union against such charges and, at worst, the heavy monetary and contempt penalties, would divert our resources away from what we are supposed to do: protect the jobs and livelihoods of our members, including those who might be penalized for striking.

Like the State, we consistently called for the strike to end. Unlike the State's elected leaders, we understood that their unacceptable working conditions caused members to participate in an unsanctioned strike. NYSCOPBA believes that our members who decided to participate in this strike did so because they felt their backs up against the wall, they feared for their lives, and they believed there was no other way. They chose to go against NYSCOPBA's recommendations and violate the Civil Service Law because they believed it was a choice between following the law and protecting themselves and their families.

#### **Direct Communications by NYSCOPBA**

NYSCOPBA consistently advised our members not to strike and to return to work. This harmed NYSCOPBA's credibility in the eyes of members who called for union support on the strike line, support NYSCOPBA could not legally provide. Those who followed our advice ultimately kept their jobs. We sent many letters to our membership communicating the union's official opposition to the strike, urging striking members to return to work, and describing our advocacy

activities designed to bring about an end to the strike. Several of the communications that were part of our efforts to end the strike are summarized below.

Date	Message Communicated
2/17/2025	Notice reporting to our members an illegal job action at Elmira Correctional Facility and Collins Correctional Facility, stating (emphasis in the original): <b>NYSCOPBA DENOUNCES ALL STRIKES, JOB ACTIONS, SLOWDOWNS, CALL-INS, AND OTHER SIMILAR ACTIONS. NYSCOPBA CALLS FOR ANY PLANS AND ACTIONS TO CEASE IMMEDIATELY.</b> The message also conveyed that participating members' pay would be docked at a rate of two days for each day of the illegal job action, and that they faced suspension, other discipline, and potential termination. We also reminded all union officials of their legal obligation to echo this message.
2/17/2025	Notice reporting to our members an illegal job action at Groveland Correctional Facility, stating (emphasis in original): <b>NYSCOPBA DENOUNCES ALL STRIKES, JOB ACTIONS, SLOWDOWNS, CALL-INS, AND OTHER SIMILAR ACTIONS. NYSCOPBA CALLS FOR ANY PLANS AND ACTIONS TO CEASE IMMEDIATELY.</b> The message also conveyed that participating members' pay would be docked at a rate of two days for each day of the illegal job action, and that they faced suspension, other discipline, and potential termination. We also reminded all union officials of their legal obligation to echo this message.
2/17/2025	Notice reporting to our members illegal job actions at DOCCS facilities generally, stating (emphasis in original): <b>NYSCOPBA DENOUNCES ALL STRIKES, JOB ACTIONS, SLOWDOWNS, CALL-INS, AND OTHER SIMILAR ACTIONS. NYSCOPBA CALLS FOR ANY PLANS AND ACTIONS TO CEASE IMMEDIATELY.</b> The message also conveyed that participating members' pay would be docked at a rate of two days for each day of the illegal job action, and that they faced suspension, other discipline, and potential termination. We also reminded all union officials of their legal obligation to echo this message.
2/20/2025	<p>As ordered, distributed Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) executed by Judge Donna Siwek of the New York State Supreme Court, Erie County, to the membership, which prohibited all members from "engaging in a strike or other concerted stoppage of work or slowdown, including engaging in, causing, instigating, encouraging, condoning or in any way aiding or abetting a strike or other concerted stoppage of work or slowdown by any public employee or employees of DOCCS, or picketing, congregating, or walking back and forth within one hundred feet of any DOCCS correctional facilities."</p> <p>We further reiterated (emphasis in original): <b>"NYSCOPBA DENOUNCES ALL STRIKES, JOB ACTIONS, SLOWDOWNS, CALL-INS, AND OTHER SIMILAR ACTIONS. NYSCOPBA CALLS FOR ANY PLANS AND ACTIONS TO CEASE IMMEDIATELY."</b> The message also conveyed that participating members' pay would be docked at a rate of two days for each day of the illegal</p>



	job action, and that they faced suspension, other discipline, and potential termination. We also reminded all union officials of their legal obligation to echo this message.
2/20/2025	Report that NYSCOPBA had been advocating on behalf of members to improve working conditions in DOCCS facilities and announcing that, consequently, the State would: (1) suspend provisions of HALT indefinitely; (2) station National Guard personnel indefinitely to help staff DOCCS facilities; (3) offer enhanced pay to staff who return to work; (4) rescind the "70/30" memo; (5) reduce penalties for staff who return to work immediately; and (6) participate in mediation with NYSCOPBA to discuss and resolve outstanding issues.
2/20/2025	Announcement that we had secured participation of our mediator, Martin Scheinman, to mediate our issues with the State at the earliest possible opportunity, with such issues including but not limited to: suspension of HALT provisions; recruitment & retention; insufficient staffing; mandatory overtime and RDOs; violence; drugs; vendor programs; legal mail; civil service title upgrades; geographic pay; and body scanners.
2/28/2025	Message encouraging striking members to return to work and providing clear communication of the provisions in the February 27 mediated Consent Award, including that failure to return to work within its prescribed timelines would result in termination, departmental discipline, Taylor Law penalties, and termination of health insurance benefits.
3/5/2025	Message informing members that despite NYSCOPBA's best efforts to mediate with the State, and despite the best efforts of individuals not affiliated with NYSCOPBA who had been attempting to negotiate unofficially and behind the scenes on behalf of members, there was consensus among everyone involved "that no real progress can be made until members begin returning to work."
3/6/2025	Report to members regarding aggressive new efforts undertaken by State officials, including Governor Kathy Hochul, to intimidate us. This report promised that NYSCOPBA's commitment to the rights, safety and interests of our members would not waver due to these intimidation tactics.
3/7/2025	Report to members communicating legal actions NYSCOPBA would be taking in response to the State's intimidation tactics. We also used this communication to reiterate: "This strike must end immediately."
3/8/2025	Report to members about negotiations in which the State refused to ensure critical protections for their health insurance. We also used this communication to reiterate (emphasis in original): <b>"NYSCOPBA must continue to condemn the strike and demand that all staff immediately return to the facility while the union continues to fight."</b>
3/8/2025	After negotiations with the State ended with a new MOA, we reported its terms to members. In this letter, we also said: "We strongly encourage members to consider these terms. This strike must end."

In addition to providing sound and consistent guidance in communications to our membership, NYSCOPBA's activities during the strike were also focused on communicating with State

leaders about our striking members' concerns and attempting to resolve them. While we did not agree with their decision to strike, these men and women were still NYSCOPBA members, and NYSCOPBA was obligated to help address their needs, especially if doing so had a chance to end the strike. We therefore did all we could to get changes made that were significant enough to convince striking members to return to work.

When the strike began, the State immediately went into legal mode. As highlighted in the Strike Report, on February 19, the Attorney General commenced a proceeding for a court order enjoining NYSCOPBA and all of our members from "engaging in a strike, including engaging in, causing, instigating, encouraging, condoning or in any way aiding or abetting a strike or other concerted stoppage of work or slowdown by any public employee or employees of DOCCS, or picketing, congregating, or walking back and forth within one hundred feet of any DOCCS correctional facilities." The State was granted its request for a restraining order.

The Strike Report goes on to summarize the retention of Mediator Martin F. Scheinman, Esq. to bring all parties to a resolution that would end the strike. The State fails to properly credit, or even mention, that NYSCOPBA conceived of and proposed the idea of an independent mediator to help negotiate a resolution to the underlying working conditions that caused the strike. The State took our suggestion. Very shortly after we proposed it, the State agreed to submit to voluntary mediation and to the retention of NYSCOPBA's proposed mediator. NYSCOPBA pressed DOCCS and the Mediator to begin as soon as possible, because as long as the strike continued, the prison system stood at a standstill and our members stood outside losing valuable paychecks. The stakes in mediation were very high, as neither party was obligated to agree to or follow the terms the Mediator might propose, and terms could not be forced on either party without mutual agreement.

Prior to mediation, NYSCOPBA officials canvassed members standing out on the strike line in order to attempt to identify the changes that would be most important to their return to work. Many of those changes included suspending provisions of HALT, safer working conditions, less violence, less mandatory overtime, and greater quality of life.

NYSCOPBA participated in pre-mediation discussions with the Mediator and state officials between February 19 and February 21, 2025. The following week, we participated in mediation sessions for four consecutive days, in which we presented all the concerns and arguments put forth by our members. The parties reached a mediated Consent Award late on the night of Thursday, February 27, 2025. Though it certainly did not solve all problems, it made progress toward addressing our members' long-ignored concerns. The Consent Award would only go into effect if enough of our striking members returned to work. NYSCOPBA undertook a thorough campaign to inform our members of the benefits of the Consent Award and the perils they would face if they did not return to work, including termination, discipline, strike notices, and termination of their health insurance.

Unfortunately, many members found the mediated Consent Award to be insufficient to merit their return to work, and the mediated Consent Award was therefore never executed. At this critical moment, the State resorted to pressure tactics and intimidation and declared the Consent Order null and void, which NYSCOPBA firmly opposed. NYSCOPBA was

disappointed in the way certain state officials conducted themselves during this tense and difficult time, including when the Governor perfidiously claimed in a media statement that she was unaware of the reasons the strike occurred in the first place and what the members were seeking to accomplish. It was an irresponsible statement that pretended NYSCOPBA had not painstakingly communicated and demanded that the needs of the members be met prior to and during Mediation. Instead of working with NYSCOPBA to find a suitable outcome and demonstrate to her own DOCCS workforce that she valued them, the Governor tersely demanded in a phone call to the President of NYSCOPBA, "Get your members back to work." The situation called for leadership the Governor was unable or at best unwilling to provide.

With the strike still holding, the State moved to its next pressure tactic: unilaterally cancelling the health insurance for members and their families, resulting in thousands of people including children being deprived of coverage without due process. Members' health was negatively impacted as a result. NYSCOPBA quickly filed a lawsuit to challenge this and was granted a preliminary injunction to stop the State's actions.

Despite high tensions after Mediation, the parties directly engaged in further negotiations to make positive changes that would bring the strike to a close. The membership looked to us to get the best that we could get at the negotiating table and as quickly as possible. NYSCOPBA played a leading role in pushing through some very difficult discussions the evening of March 7 and into March 8. Because of our participation in these discussions, a new Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed with the State, conditioned upon a return to work of at least 85% of striking workers by March 10. NYSCOPBA worked hard to convince the membership to do so, and a significant number of them did. They kept their jobs when the strike ended.

Unfortunately, the State initially declared that the 85% threshold was not met and that only certain provisions of the MOA would therefore be honored. However, after further discussions with the State, review of the underlying staffing data, the return of additional staff who the State improperly terminated while they were on approved leave, and submission of the dispute to NYSCOPBA's contractual Master Arbitrator, the parties fully implemented the MOA.

#### **Part IV – NYSCOPBA's Actions Since the Strike to Make Working Conditions Better**

After the strike ended, it was disheartening to see the State attempt to return to business as usual, as if a dire situation no longer existed in DOCCS facilities. For the second year in a row, Governor Hochul used budget negotiations to authorize the closure of additional facilities and impose still more stress on hundreds more NYSCOPBA families who will be forced to face transfers. The budget ultimately adopted by the Governor and State Legislature will close three more DOCCS facilities.

On April 4, NYSCOPBA called publicly for an urgent meeting with DOCCS to address a range of serious issues that remain after the strike, including but not limited to: staffing shortages; unsafe working conditions; the implementation of 12-hour shifts; scheduled regular days off (RDOs); and vacation periods. Our call for a meeting followed weeks of refusals by State

leaders to engage in a productive conversation about these critical issues. DOCCS agreed to the meeting.

Since April, NYSCOPBA and DOCCS have been actively working on impactful measures that will jumpstart recruitment and retention at our DOCCS facilities. The logic is straightforward: if we cannot bring in new recruits, and we cannot keep our veteran membership, we will never have the appropriate staffing levels to provide the quality of life that our membership deserves. We have made progress. Changes we have secured include:

- ✓ **A title upgrade and geographic pay differential** for all correction officers and sergeants, averaging \$9,000 to \$10,000 per member annually. These two pay enhancements equate to more than \$95 million in additional base pay per year for our members, which does not include overtime. Since this compensation also increases our members' overtime rate of pay, the enhancements will be worth substantially more than \$100 million per year. The additional compensation is also pensionable and will increase our members' retirement benefit.
- ✓ **Regional hiring of new recruits**, a strategy to address the reality that the new generation, and therefore the new crop of recruits, is far less likely to take the job than previous generations if they are required to move far from home in order to do so. While including protections for current members, the program will provide some assurances to new recruits that if they sign up to serve, they will not be assigned anywhere in the state regardless of where they live.
- ✓ **A new referral bonus program** for members who bring in new recruits, totaling up to \$3,000 per recruit referred.
- ✓ **A new education lump sum payment** for members holding college degrees.
- ✓ **A new lump sum payment of \$1,000** for members with 25-29 years of service.
- ✓ **A new lump sum payment of \$5,000** for members with 30 years or more of service.
- ✓ **New state budget language** allowing for out-of-state hiring, optional payroll lag offset for new hires (a measure that reduces the waiting period before receiving a first paycheck), and reducing the hiring age to eighteen (18) years.
- ✓ **Reinstating additional members** who were terminated pursuant to Article 14.10 of the contract for failing to return to work by the MOA deadline.

#### **Part V – NYSCOPBA's Plan for Moving Forward**

Policy changes in Albany are still urgently needed. We will never stop trying and speaking out for our members. Our advocacy agenda will target the Governor, Legislative leaders, rank-and-file Legislators, candidates for State Legislature, and candidates for Governor. Our demand is action, not promises.

We thank those in the State Senate, Assembly, and within DOCCS who have supported us and still do. They know who they are. So do we.

In the meantime, where we can make headway is retention and recruitment. As we have since the strike, we will continue working with DOCCS to make administrative changes within State law and the current collective bargaining agreement. Conditions in our facilities must improve. We must try new approaches to bring qualified candidates through our gates and provide existing staff with much-needed relief.

The surest vehicle to accomplish these urgent goals is a stronger collective bargaining agreement. Our current agreement expires after March 31, 2026. The State of New York often talks about being NYSCOPBA's "partner" in retention and recruitment. We will call on them to be a full partner when they are seated with us at the negotiating table. We also want full partnership from our members. As negotiations near, members should expect a revamped and strengthened contract survey that allows for detailed input on the negotiation strategies and demands. The stakes for all of us have never been higher. Our approach to these negotiations will reflect that.

There has never been a more difficult time to work in corrections in New York State. Our facilities are needlessly dangerous because of political choices. We don't have enough people to staff them. The job itself is harder than ever. We don't have adequate support from those in State government who have the power to improve our working environment. At times it can feel like the outside world does not hear us and is not rallying to support us.

But the men and women who safeguard our prisons are public servants of the first order. They have continued to show strength, professionalism, and resolve in the face of chaos. They held the line when others would not. And now, they continue hanging on under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. They are good people. Their families matter. Their wellbeing matters. They are worthy of the public's respect and our elected officials' support. NYSCOPBA will always have their backs. NYSCOPBA is committed to regrouping, uniting, and organizing to achieve the contractual, administrative, and legislative changes these difficult times demand. Our members and their families are worth the fight.

Dated: August 6, 2025