



Correctional Officers' Union Blasts Governor Cuomo's Plan to Close More Prisons

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ALBANY, NY — The New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association, Inc. (NYSCOPBA) today criticized Governor Cuomo's decision to close more prisons as a part of his Executive Budget plan for fiscal year 2020-2021. The announcement to close Gowanda Correctional Facility, Watertown Correctional Facility and the Annex at Clinton Correctional Facility will impact more than 900 NYSCOPBA positions, disrupt the family lives of thousands and devastate communities.

"Announcing closures just days before Christmas is not only highly inconsiderate but it also demonstrates a lack of respect for the hardworking men and women of NYSCOPBA and their families. Can Governor Cuomo look our members in the face and say that, despite prison violence at near record levels, closing prisons is what's best and will produce a safer environment?" said Michael B. Powers, President of NYSCOPBA.

Despite having authority to close more state prisons, NYSCOPBA has urged the Governor and the Legislature to halt any closure plans until violence escalation within the prison system is first addressed.

"Even in the face of the pandemic that greatly restricted inmate movement, New York did not see a reduction in prison violence during 2020. And despite limited visitations during the pandemic, illegal contraband remains a significant problem in correctional facilities. Calling for additional closures will only serve to condense the prison population within a decreasing number of facilities, further jeopardizing the safety of NYSCOPBA members and the inmate population as a whole," stated Powers.

The Union, which represents correctional officers and sergeants working inside New York's prisons, has for years been calling on the State Legislature and the Governor to refrain from prison closures before an adequate assessment of safety within the prison system occurs. That has yet to happen, according to NYSCOPBA.

Likewise, the economic impact of this news cannot be understated. Upstate communities that maintain prisons rely heavily on revenue generated from those employed in such facilities.

"Upstate communities were struggling even before the onset of COVID. Removing hundreds of jobs within these localities will be a crippling financial blow. And to deliver this news just days before Christmas is flat out wrong. We'll continue to fight for our members and the communities where they live," added Powers.

NYSCOPBA is also calling on the State Legislature and the Governor to enact safety reforms to the prison system that recognize the dangers that the men and women, who are on the front line face every day, regardless of the existence of a pandemic.

According to Powers, the State needs to reinstitute a secure vendor package program, enact statutory measures requiring the removal of double bunks in the medium dormitory settings, and provide a more robust officer to inmate ratio, among other initiatives.