

NY State Assembly Member Carrie Woerner
198 State Street
Albany, NY 12248

Dear NY State Assembly Member Carrie Woerner:

As a constituent represented by the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association, Inc. (NYSCOPBA), I am writing to express my concerns with the Governor's budget proposal to close up to five unidentified correctional facilities with only 90 days' notice. This is another slap in the face to me and my brothers and sisters and I urge you to reject the Governor's proposal to close more prisons.

Current state law requires a one-year notification prior to the closing of a correctional facility; along with an economic impact study on the affected community – these are laws passed by the state legislature that are continuously ignored by the 2nd Floor. It is unfair and unreasonable to expect staff and the affected communities to make life-altering decisions with only 90 days' notice. Families will be uprooted and broken, homes will need to be purchased and sold, leases will be broken, children will be required to switch schools, commutes to work will be extended, and businesses will suffer; all evidenced by the impacts of the 20+ prison closures we have experienced in the last decade. When will it end?

The Governor and DOCCS claim that there will be no staff layoffs as a result of prison closures. Sadly though, we know that many of my colleagues in security and civilian titles will not remain employed by DOCCS due to prison closures. We are already experiencing a severe staffing shortage in security and civilian titles in DOCCS. Prison closures will only exacerbate the crisis and cause dedicated workers to seek employment elsewhere. Closing prisons is not a sustainable recruitment and retention tool when we are in need of hundreds of bodies to fill our rank. How can we expect prospective employees to take these jobs if they are concerned that they will be forced to uproot their families this year, next year, or sometime down the road?

Additionally, the environment that we work in has become increasingly dangerous since the implementation of the Humane Alternative to Long-Term Solitary Confinement (HALT) law. New York's prison violence has increased to levels we have never seen before, even with a lower prison population. Over 75% of the prison population is incarcerated for violent felony offenses. We have suffered dramatic increases with assaults-on-staff and an even higher increases of assaults on the incarcerated individuals by other incarcerated individuals. Reducing the capacity of the prison system will cram more violent prisoners into less space resulting in more violence. This is a formula that has been proven as the violence continues to increase with every round of closures. Having the space to spread the prison population out, separate problematic individuals, and protect vulnerable populations is an important tool needed to maintain safety in prison. Closing more prisons will only add to the extremely volatile working and living conditions we are currently experiencing.

As my elected representative, I kindly ask that you support the members of NYSCOPBA and work with the leadership in your house to oppose the closure up to five unidentified prisons. Thank you for your time, attention and consideration of this very important issue.

Sincerely,

Ben Moeller