



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

PRESS RELEASE: Griffo Says Keep Annsville Open While Investigating Youth Agency's Sex Party Involvement

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 11, 2010

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Griffo Says Taxpayer-Funded Teen Orgy at State Youth Facility Calls for Resignation of
OCFS Commissioner

*Senator also wants proposed closure of Annsville Residential OCFS Center halted until Investigation
concludes*

(Albany) - State Senator Joseph A. Griffo (R- IP-C, Rome) today said that a shocking lack of oversight and management in allowing a state taxpayer-funded orgy to take place during a dance at a youth facility that houses killers and other violent criminals, is enough reason for Commissioner Gladys Carrion to resign from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

Griffo said that the Senate would be conducting a hearing in Albany to further investigate the incident, as well as reports of violent youths being released prematurely into less secure settings where they have murdered and viciously assaulted community members, and of numerous attacks by youths against OCFS staffers who work at state-run facilities.

“Many of the young men who are incarcerated in these facilities have been removed from their home communities because they’ve committed acts of violence that have no place in a civil society,” said Griffo. “Can you imagine what one of their victims must feel when they read about these exploits?”

The New York Post today reported on the outlandish "social" that took place at Goshen Secure Center in Orange County on December 12, 2009. Girls as young as 15 were transported into the prison to attend the dance with convicted killers and other dangerous criminals. A lap dance was videotaped by a surveillance camera and other sexual acts possibly were committed.

One prison employee, Tony Collado, said that he was ordered to drive two women invited to the dance in a state car from a street corner in Albany to Goshen and back -- a distance of 230 miles round trip.

“My complaints to the higher-ups about what happened at this dance were ignored. Things are spinning out of control at Goshen and I know other facilities are having similar

problems. I've been hit with phone receivers, punched in the face on numerous occasions and some of my fellow workers have been on the opposite end of much worse. What happened at this dance was the last straw and I felt that coming forward was the right thing to do. Both the staff and residents should not be exposed to this type of stuff" said Mr. Collado.

Griffo mentioned that while the incident is six months old, there are already three state agencies still investigating it.

The Senate Special Legislative Task Force on Reform of the New York State Juvenile Justice System was formed to address a growing concern by community members, youth facility staff, and law enforcement officials who cited the closure of 14 youth facilities and reporting centers throughout the state, along with newly-implemented policies set forth by OCFS, as the reason for a spike in youth violence.

"Until there is a thorough review of such policy decisions that allow such incidents to occur, I'm recommending that the State hold off on closing any OCFS facilities, such as Annsville Residential, until it's determined that there's no link between fewer facilities and increased youth violence," Griffo added.

Griffo confirmed that a member of the Task Force submitted a Freedom of Information Law request to OCFS last November regarding increased gang membership of residents, violent incidents in facilities by residents and staff assaults, but has been stonewalled by agency officials. He also cited a recently released Assembly report that found OCFS workplace injury rates among the highest of any state agency, and that workers' compensation incident rates at state-operated youth residential facilities have increased by 33 percent in the past year. The report further concluded that Commissioner Carrion and the OCFS administration have neglected workplace safety as part of the agency's policy

changes which has increasingly put staff at risk.

Task force members have pointed to a number of incidents around the state as examples of disturbing emerging trends in relation to violent youths and residential services:

- o Last June, 24-year-old Renee Greco, an employee at a community youth home in Lockport, New York, was brutally beaten to death by two teenage residents who had been prematurely released from more secure state facilities.
- o In February 2009, 23-year-old Rochester Police Officer Anthony DiPonzio was shot in the head by a juvenile who was AWOL from a private residential community placement.
- o A worker at the state-operated Tryon Residential Center in Johnstown, New York suffered a stroke and died a month after he was struck in the head with a wooden club by a youth. Months after the incident, several employees sought and obtained orders of protection so they could come to work.

CSEA President Danny Donohue said, “Under Commissioner Gladys Carrion’s tenure we have seen an aggressive lip service for reform while action has consisted of undermining services and employees by failing to provide adequate training, resources and other help – she has failed the youth, she has failed the staff and she has failed the taxpayers.”

“This latest report of an administration-facilitated sex party is outrageous and offensive in every way and demonstrates her reform philosophy is also totally misguided,” Donohue said. “Coupled with last week’s Assembly report detailing the increasing risk to staff in OCFS facilities, it is clear the Commissioner must go.”

Kenneth Brynien, President of the New York State Public Employees Federation (PEF), said, “Rest assured, Commissioner Carrion will once again point the finger at members of her own staff rather than take responsibility for her actions. It was Carrion who showed extraordinarily bad judgment by promoting a party for juveniles who have been confined for criminal offenses.

“This is another example of the failed policies of Commissioner Carrion which have also led to increased violent situations for youths and staff at facilities across the state,” Brynien added. “PEF has been documenting injuries to our members at OCFS facilities and has repeatedly reached out to the commissioner and governor for policy changes. Clearly the sex party is the last straw and Carrion must be held accountable.”