



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Senator Griffo Column #9: No Taxpayer Dollars For Free College Educations For Inmates

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College for Inmates?

Gov. Cuomo's proposal to use taxpayer dollars to provide a college education to state prisoners has provoked a lot of passionate responses from my constituents.

I don't support the proposal and my reasoning is two-fold.

First, it's not appropriate to offer a benefit to an inmate that we don't also offer to every law-abiding student who is eligible for college. I don't support initiatives that make prison more attractive to criminals, because people shouldn't be rewarded for breaking the law.

Second, the money the governor wished to allocate to this initiative could be better spent elsewhere. I hear daily from superintendents, board of education members, teachers and parents about budget shortfalls in schools in my district. School officials are often faced with an undesirable choice of cutting staff, offering fewer extracurricular activities or sports teams, or excising electives and Advanced Placement courses.

I support providing additional funding for schools beyond what the governor proposed and I'll be working with my colleagues until the budget is passed to make that a reality.

In addition, I would consider state initiatives that help incoming college students better understand their funding options, including financial aid, scholarships, grants and work-study programs. The money could also be better spent if it were designated to the state's Tuition Assistance Program, which helps low-income, law-abiding students afford a SUNY education without going bankrupt.

Philosophically, I understand the importance of rehabilitation in a prisoner's life. I support an inmate receiving a college education, just as long as it's either paid for by the prisoner or a private enterprise.

I'll be working to put a stop to the governor's proposal so it doesn't become a reality, but I need your help. Together, we need to send a clear message to the governor and his supporters that this is not how we want our hard-earned money being spent.

I encourage you to sign my petition so I can bring your voice with me to Albany and make a stronger case. The petition is here: <http://www.nysenate.gov/webform/say-no-taxpayer-funded-college-inmates-1>

In the petition's first 48 hours, it received nearly 2,000 signatures from concerned residents in my district. If you don't agree with us, I'd still welcome your input. Write me at: Senator Joe Griffo, 207 Genesee St., Room 408, Utica, N.Y. 13501 or e-mail me at griffo@nysenate.gov.