



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo Writes OMH Regarding Psych Center Attacks

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO September 10, 2014

| ISSUE: **CRIME, HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, CORRECTIONAL**



Senator concerned about staff safety in light of recent riot

UTICA – Sen. Joseph A. Griffo wrote today to the state Office of Mental Health regarding the Sept. 3 riot at the Central New York Psych Center in Marcy that left 12 staff members injured.

The senator asked Commissioner Anne Marie T. Sullivan what her office was doing to better ensure the safety of staff in light of this incident and questioned whether the offending inmates could be transferred to state prison.

"If these inmates are mentally capable of planning and executing a coordinated attack on officers at a predetermined time, is it appropriate for them to be in the Psychiatric Center at all?" Griffo asked.

In June, the state Legislature passed a bill that would improve staff safety by granting peace officer status to security hospital treatment assistants. If signed by the governor, any assault against these employees would be considered a felony offense.

"Each Psych Center staff member is responsible for multiple inmates, which presents a real problem when prisoners start coordinating attacks. Employees deserve to feel safe at their workplace and that there will be real consequences for any violence against them," said Griffo. "I look forward to talking to the commissioner about ways in which we can send a clear message to the inmates that rioting and attacks against staff will not be tolerated and will result in severe punishment."

A copy of the letter is below.

Sept. 10, 2014

Anne Marie T. Sullivan

Commissioner

New York State Office of Mental Health

44 Holland Ave.

Albany, New York 12229

Dear Anne Marie:

On Sept. 3, 12 staff members at the Central New York Psychiatric Center in my district were injured during what is thought to be a coordinated attack among inmates. Two employees

suffered head injuries that were serious enough to require a trip to the hospital.

I've talked to employees at the facility who tell me that attempted riots are prevalent, with little to no culpability for the instigating inmates. I'm writing to get your perspective on this matter.

I'd like to know how often inmate attacks on staff occur at this facility and what has been the resolution. What steps are you taking to better ensure the safety of staff in light of this incident and perhaps prior incidents?

I'm also disturbed to read that the riot was premeditated. If these inmates are mentally capable of planning and executing a coordinated attack on officers at a predetermined time, is it appropriate for them to be in the Psychiatric Center at all? Is there a procedure in place that allows you to re-evaluate the inmate and transfer them to a state prison?

As you're probably aware, the state Legislature passed a bill in June that would grant peace officer status to security hospital treatment assistants. The legislation is pending review by the governor. I often talk to members of the New York State Correctional Officers Police Benevolent Association about what more can be done legislatively to increase officer safety. If you have additional ideas of remedies that can be accomplished through legislation, I'd welcome that insight.

I look forward to you or someone from your office calling to update me on this situation and to provide answers to the questions I've raised in this letter. I can be reached at (315) 793-9072.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Griffo

Senator, 47th District