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Griffo and Buttenschon continue push for more stringent penalties for those threatening mass violence

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New York State Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-C-Rome, Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon, D-Marcy, and Assemblyman Brian Miller, R-C-New Hartford, gathered today with Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente Jr., Oneida County Sheriff Robert Maciol and area school officials at Marcy Elementary School to push for immediate action following a swath of threats and swatting calls made to schools across the state.

Over the last several weeks, more than 50 school districts received threats. Thankfully, law enforcement agencies were quick to investigate and found that the threats were unfounded.

However, these false reports caused widespread fear and disruption in educational institutions and communities, especially at a time when many parents and schools are already on edge following the recent school shooting in Tennessee.

Additionally, these threats place a financial burden on the law enforcement agencies responding and divert their attention from other responsibilities in their jurisdictions.

To address this scourge of unfounded reports of mass violence, Sen. Griffo and Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon have introduced legislation (S1603/A6383) since 2018 that would amend the penal law and establish a new crime of making a threat of mass violence toward a school, college or university, place of worship, mass gathering of 25 people or more or a business.

More specifically, the legislation creates two crimes:

- Making a threat of mass violence in the first degree would be considered a class D felony and would apply to anyone 18 years of age or older. The punishment for this crime would be a \$35,000 fine and a sentence of no less than three years in prison.
- Making a threat of mass violence in the second degree apply to individuals under the age of 18 and carry a fine of \$35,000 and a mandatory sentence of 10 days in a juvenile detention facility, or, for those over the age of 18, 100 days in a specialized secure detention facility.

The legislation, which Sen. Griffo and Assemblywoman Buttenschon have introduced for several years, has the support of law enforcement agencies, school officials and others.

Sen. Griffo and Assemblywoman Buttenschon also have communicated with Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and the governor about the bill and the need for it to be considered, passed and signed into law.

“We have seen threats of mass violence made in various schools districts in the region and the state,” **Sen. Griffo said.** “We believe that there should be stiffer repercussions and consequences for individuals threatening mass violence at our schools, places of worship and other places where a large number of people may gather. It is time for the Legislature and the governor to act so that we can hold the perpetrators of these heinous threats accountable for their actions.”

“This legislation was introduced to respond to the threats of harm we are witnessing against our children, family members, and residents,” **Assemblywoman Buttenschon said.** “It is unacceptable

to state that you are going to harm others that have come together for any purpose. If you make a threat, you will be held accountable. “

“In recent weeks, schools in the local area and across New York State have seen an uptick in swatting incidents. Not only do these false reports cause fear and disruption to children, parents, teachers, and the school communities as a whole, but they potentially place them in harm’s way while also placing an unnecessary burden on our law enforcement officers who are already stretched thin,” **said Assemblyman Brian Miller.** “Advancements in technology have made it easier for perpetrators to conceal their identity and more difficult for law enforcement to track them down. Schools are just one example of places of mass gatherings that have been impacted as of late. It is time to hold those responsible for these threats accountable for their inexcusable actions.”

“I strongly support this legislation that is being sponsored by Senator Griffo and Assemblywoman Buttenschon,” **said Oneida County District Attorney Scott McNamara.** “As we have seen in our community recently, these ‘swatting incidents’ are very disturbing to the schools, students and the parents. If passed this law would greatly enhance our ability to successfully prosecute the individuals who are perpetrating these troubling false reports.”

“With two weeks of back-to-back false threats of violence at schools throughout New York State, we must ensure that there are stiff and significant penalties upon those responsible for them,” **Oneida County Sheriff Maciol said.** “Not only are we diverting massive amounts of police resources to these fake calls, but we are also placing an incredible amount of fear upon our children, our parents, and our teachers – all of which greatly and negatively affects their mental health.”