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THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



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HEALTH
VETERANS, HOMELAND SECURITY AND
MILITARY AFFAIRS

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE
48TH DISTRICT
OSWEGO, JEFFERSON, ST. LAWRENCE COUNTIES

August 5, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
Executive Chamber
The Capitol
Albany, NY 12225

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We write to you today regarding the resumption of visits at New York State correctional facilities. Recently, we have been contacted by number of constituents who have expressed concerns regarding plans to resume prison visits. We too share these concerns.

As you know, those who work in our correctional facilities have very difficult, dangerous jobs. During these challenging times, permitting visitors from across the state to enter into facilities makes the work they do even more dangerous. Our districts includes five correctional facilities that are spread throughout a region of our state that has seen relatively low numbers of COVID-19. By allowing visitors to come to our region from other areas of the state—including those with significantly higher COVID-19 infection rates—we are increasing the likelihood that those who work in our prisons will contract the virus, bring it home to their families and in turn, spark community spread. Furthermore, it concerns us that these visitors—again, from across New York State and living in areas where COVID-19 numbers are higher—will surely be stopping along the way in our gas stations, grocery stores, restaurants and other establishments.

Additionally, many of our constituents have expressed frustration over the fact that while people will now be permitted to visit inmates in correctional facilities, so many others have yet to obtain permission to visit their loved ones in nursing homes. Others have shared that they have been denied permission to physically be present at graduation ceremonies for their children. We have also heard from a number of people who have been denied the opportunity to see loved ones from other states for funerals, weddings and other special events due to our state's quarantine restrictions.

REPLY TO: ALBANY OFFICE: ROOM 302, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247 (518) 455-3438
 JEFFERSON COUNTY OFFICE: 317 WASHINGTON STREET, ROOM 418, WATERTOWN, NEW YORK 13601 (315) 782-3418
 OSWEGO COUNTY OFFICE: 46 EAST BRIDGE STREET, FIRST FLOOR, OSWEGO, NEW YORK 13126 (315) 342-2057
 ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY OFFICE: 330 FORD STREET, OGDENSBURG, NEW YORK 13669 (315) 393-3024

E-MAIL: RITCHIE@NYSENATE.GOV

WEBSITE: RITCHIE.NYSENATE.GOV



In other heartbreaking situations, members of our military have been denied the opportunity to reunite with their families in New York following training or deployment in other states. Additionally, in recent weeks, our offices have heard from a number of people expressing frustration over the fact they are not permitted to be at the hospital with loved ones following major surgeries or with spouses for prenatal appointments.

It is our hope that you will take into account the current health risks associated with allowing visitations in our correctional facilities and reconsider resuming this practice. Furthermore, should plans for resuming visits continue to move forward, we respectfully request you seek ways to provide those in the situations previously mentioned with the same opportunities to safely and responsibly be with their loved ones.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Patty Ritchie
State Senator



Ken Blankenbush
Member of Assembly



Mark C. Walczyk
Member of Assembly

cc: Anthony Annucci, Acting Commissioner, New York State Department of Corrections
and Community Supervision