

THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



SENATOR
PAMELA A. HELMING
54TH DISTRICT

COMMITTEES

AGRICULTURE
COMMERCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND SMALL BUSINESS
CULTURAL AFFAIRS, TOURISM, PARKS
AND RECREATION
RACING, GAMING AND WAGERING

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

INSURANCE

LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON
RURAL RESOURCES

MEMBER

LEGISLATIVE WOMEN'S CAUCUS

January 19, 2022

Honorable Kathy Hochul,
Governor

Acting Commissioner Anthony Annucci,
NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Acting Commissioner Jeanette Moy,
NYS Office of General Services

Acting Commissioner Hope Knight,
NYS Empire State Development

Dear Governor Hochul, Acting Commissioners Annucci, Moy, and Knight,

Over the past two months, Senator Pam Helming and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano have held and attended various meetings with elected officials and leaders from Seneca County, the Town of Romulus, the Town and Village of Ovid, the Romulus and South Seneca School Districts, representatives of the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), and numerous community stakeholders to discuss the proposed closure of Willard Drug Treatment Campus (Campus). As you can imagine, there are many concerns and unanswered questions about the impact of this closure on our community, including the impact on the Romulus and South Seneca school districts.

The following items are, but not limited to, various major unanswered issues, possible future steps, and proposals to address these issues.

During our initial discussions with state and local officials, the ownership of the various Willard Campus properties is unclear. We are requesting the state provide a recent survey showing property lines and ownership of the various buildings and land.

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Current Employees

The Willard Drug Treatment Campus is the largest Town employer and one of the largest County employers. We have expressed deep concerns to DOCCS Acting Commissioner Annucci and his staff concerning the significant negative impact this closure will have on the hundreds of employees and their families, as well as surrounding area businesses and our schools. DOCCS has assured both the union representation and us that there will be no employee layoffs. While we appreciate most employees will be offered comparable positions at other locations, we have learned there are many provisional employees who will not be offered alternative employment opportunities. We respectfully request that DOCCS provide all Willard provisional employees comparable positions at other area facilities.

Redevelopment, Reuse and Job Creation

Willard is a unique and historically significant site. Its location on the shore of Seneca Lake, one of our state's most prestigious water bodies, presents numerous opportunities for redevelopment, reuse and job creation. Camp Edgemere, with its beautiful cabins and serene setting, presents a rare opportunity for the state to create a new public access point to the lake or to transfer the camp to the community or an organization like Finger Lakes Land Trust. Subdividing surrounding lakeside and lakeview lands from the Willard Treatment Center could provide an outstanding opportunity for the state to sell the land for private development. This would benefit the state, add to the local tax base, and provide increased tourism and job opportunities.

We are requesting a partnership and more direct communications with DOCCS, Office of General Services, Empire State Development and any other agencies involved with the closure or issuance of a state-issued Request for Proposal (RFP) for new economic development options. In order to facilitate this communication, we are requesting the current contact information for each of these agencies.

Currently, several Campus buildings are utilized by the localities. For instance, the Town of Romulus uses a Campus building for their historical society. The ownership of the occupied buildings that are deemed structurally sound should be conveyed to the localities. Local officials are also requesting direct involvement with the appropriate state agencies to demolish the unsafe and condemned buildings.

We encourage the state to work on an alternative plan for the credit union currently located on the Campus. The nearest credit union is twenty miles away from this site.

We also ask the state to provide a written plan for the continued maintenance of the cemetery located on the Campus.

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Infrastructure

As you are aware, the Campus currently shares a multitude of services with the surrounding towns. Therefore, the county and towns are requesting all maps and records of water and sewer facilities on the campus.

In addition, it is imperative that DOCCS and OGS bring the water treatment plant up to NYS Department of Health (DOH) standards. Furthermore, the state must provide the Town of Romulus with the resources needed to hire an engineering firm and secure legal assistance to help guide the Town with the acquisition of the water treatment plant; and, the State must continue to pay for the operating costs associated with the treatment plant until costs can be determined by the locality and levied. It should be noted that because the State failed to provide the Town with sufficient advance notice regarding the Campus closure, the Town did not have the option of budgeting for these unanticipated costs.

Seneca County continues to await a definitive answer from DOCCS on its financial contribution for the required upgrades to the Willard and Five Points Wastewater Treatment Facilities. Seneca County cannot properly move forward without a formal commitment of funding.

The responsibility for the future maintenance of the roadways and snow removal needs to be addressed.

Local officials are concerned with the potential liabilities of the fencing and whether it will remain in place or be removed. We would also like clarification on who will be responsible for patrolling the campus after March 10, 2022.

Direct Financial Support for Impacted Communities and School Districts

We are appreciative that the Governor has stated that she recognizes and understands the negative impacts these closures have on the communities and the necessity to repurpose these facilities to counter these devastating impacts. Therefore, we are respectfully requesting that New York State provide direct funding assistance to Seneca County, the Town of Romulus, the Town of Ovid and the surrounding communities as has been the case with other prison closures in previous years. We have outlined a few examples below:

1. In the 2011-12 Enacted Budget, Empire State Development (ESD) had \$50 million in the Economic Transformation Grant Program that was to assist communities that were impacted by the closure of eleven correctional and juvenile justice facilities.
2. In the 2014-15 Enacted Budget, ESD had \$32 million in support of four specific prison closures (Chateaugay, Monterey Shock, Mount McGregor, and Butler Correctional), with \$8 million being allocated to each community.

The allocation of direct financial support to the communities and school districts negatively impacted by prison closures is an important obligation that the State needs to fulfill and funding should be included in this year's budget to address this important issue and critical need.

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We respectfully request the various agencies work with the undersigned on the issues described in this letter to ensure that the closure of Willard presents more opportunities and benefits rather than negative consequences to the various residents and municipalities affected by this closure.

Thank you again. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



Pamela A. Helming
Member of Senate



Philip A. Palmesano
Member of Assembly



Bob Hayssen
Chairman, Seneca County



Joseph Borst
Supervisor of Ovid



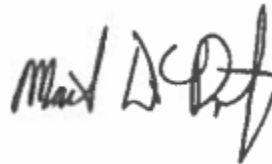
David Hayes
Supervisor of Romulus



Mitch Rowe
Seneca County Manager



Stephen Parker-Zielinski
South Seneca CSD



Marty Rotz
Romulus CSD

