Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 27, 2024

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

We are writing to your office to call attention to the excessive demands and widespread abuse which corrections officers across New York State are currently experiencing. They have conveyed grave concerns to our offices regarding unsustainable working conditions which are contributing to ongoing retention struggles in their profession.

Correctional law enforcement officers routinely report for 8-hour shifts, only to clock out 16 to 24 hours later, because of the overtime required to keep facilities safe. These officers endure the immense physical and psychological demands of their work, combined with unpredictable hours and crippling overtime. They are often working excessive hours, even on days when they were scheduled to be off-duty.

These officers have been subjected to unprecedented levels of workplace violence. This year is on pace to shatter previous years' records of confirmed violations. In at least one instance, officers have had their fingers bitten off. They have been beaten to the point of permanent disability. Many are convinced that a fellow officer will eventually be killed on account of the policy failures which have allowed the situation to deteriorate to this point. Current staffing shortages have led to an increase in violence between inmates, which poses a threat to officers seeking to intervene.

It is clear that the consequences of Albany's misaligned priorities have been catastrophic.

More than half of New York's correctional facilities are over 40 officers below their Budgeted Fill Level (BFL), indicating an acute staffing shortage. Some facilities are over 70 officers below their BFL. In response to these conditions, corrections officers are leaving in droves, and there is little relief for those who have chosen to remain.

The men and women who have not yet sought employment elsewhere are now forced to work up to four mandated 16-hour shifts each week, deprived of the ability to see their families while the facilities they oversee hold "family festivals" for criminal inmates. Their commitment to New York State is met with neglect. The New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association's letter to your office, dated July 11th, outlined many of these concerns and still has yet to receive a response.

We, the undersigned, request a response to the following inquiries on or before October 4th:

- COVID-era emergency protocols restricted programming to mess hall, recreation, visits, and the use of facilities' law libraries. In light of the ongoing, statewide staffing shortage, what is preventing Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) from reimplementing these protocols?
- Since the HALT Act was fully enacted in 2022, instances of physical violence inside corrections facilities have skyrocketed. What is preventing a suspension or repeal of HALT, in the interest of protecting both officers and inmates?
    - Have you communicated with the New York State Legislature regarding action?
- What is preventing DOCCS from guaranteeing officers' regularly scheduled days off (RDOs)?

We are encouraged by the faith and loyalty of our state's corrections officers, who have endured regular hardship while receiving little acknowledgement from their elected officials. These men and women, and their families, deserve a response and the full support of the New York State government.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Brandon Williams
Member of Congress

Claudia Tenney
Member of Congress

Elise M. Stefanik
Member of Congress

Andrew R. Garbarino
Member of Congress

Michael V. Lawler
Member of Congress

Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress

Anthony D'Esposito
Member of Congress

Nicholas A. Langworthy
Member of Congress