

NY 1 News

Bronx Nonprofit Supports Governor's Proposed Changes to State Corrections System

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In recent weeks, Governor Andrew Cuomo has announced his support for changes to the state corrections system, changes that a Bronx nonprofit says would dramatically decrease the number of people in New York prisons and greatly help the former prisoners it tries to assist. NY1's Erin Clarke filed the following report.

Ohenio Meyers said it wasn't long ago that he was on the wrong track.

"I was arrested for a non-violent robbery," he said.

That landed the 19-year-old in a detention center upstate for nine months. It was during that time that Meyers realized he had to change.

"Being away from the ones that I loved, it really affected me," he said.

Change started when he was introduced to the Osborne Association, a nonprofit that aims to reduce repeat crime by giving people who have had trouble with the law alternatives and support.

Now, Meyers is closer to his goal. On Friday, he was one of 35 Osborne students who graduated from various educational, job-readiness, training and mentoring programs that the nonprofit offers.

The graduation comes on the heels of announcements by Governor Andrew Cuomo to reform the state prison system. Cuomo wants state-funded college education for inmates and is backing a push to raise to 18 the minimum age at which teens can be charged as adults for non-violent crimes. Right now, it's 16 in New York and in only one other state, North Carolina.

"People who go to prison and get any college education have a recidivism rate that is a quarter of everyone else's," said Elizabeth Gaynes, executive director of the Osborne Association. "The idea that 16-, 17-, 18-year-olds would be taken out of our adult system, and they should be in a system that's appropriate for their developmental age."

It's young men and women like Meyers that the proposed changes to the criminal justice system will affect.

"We hire them," Gaynes said. "We have a lot of people at Osborne Association who came here qualified to do the jobs that we have because they got associates', BAs and masters' degrees coming to us from prison."

Gaynes said that the proposed changes are wins for the state and the individuals affected.

"You're spending less money, ultimately, on a prison system because they're not going back in those kind of numbers and they can do the jobs," she said.

They are huge steps towards reducing recidivism in the state and the effects it has on New York families.