

The Daily Mail: New hires draw cheer from union

103 corrections officers 'step in the right direction'

By Ryan Anglim

COXSACKIE — The union representing corrections officers at Coxsackie and Greene state prisons said it is encouraged by Gov. Andrew Cuomo's announcement to hire more than 100 new COs this year.

However, the spokesman for the union said there is still much to be done to stem violence behind prison walls.

Governor Andrew Cuomo said at a press conference on Thursday that an additional 103 corrections officers will be hired throughout the state before the end of this fiscal year.

During his tour of the Greene Correctional Facility in Coxsackie, union members of the New York State Corrections Officers and Police Benevolent Association had the opportunity to share with Cuomo the difficulties, challenges and hazards that stand in their line of work, according to Michael Powers, the union's president.

"With the release of non-violent drug offenders in recent years, the state's prison system is left with a more violent, more volatile inmate population," Powers said.

"During the past several years we have seen the violence against our officers increase by more than 50 percent. During that same period, the violence against other inmates has increased by more than 60 percent — this all occurring at a time that the prison population has declined," Powers said.

Powers said that the rise in synthetic drug use among inmates, an increase in gang activity and the reclassification of inmates are all components to the rise in violence.

James Miller, the union's director of public relations, said that the additional corrections officers expected is a "step in the right direction" in combating the violence, but will not completely remedy the situation.

"At this point, the rise in violence is at an all-time high, looking at the past five years," Miller said. "Hopefully, those additional members will help stun that violence going on."

Miller listed staffing and technology as major obstacles to keep the violence at bay, assuring that staff training in security measures for corrections officers is completely up-to-date.

“Training, like any kind of law enforcement, obviously has to be upgraded along the way because as we move along, things change,” Miller said.

Powers thanked Cuomo, on behalf of the union, for his commitment to hiring more than 100 new officers.

“We are hopeful that the Governor will continue to recognize the need for additional staff in future years to ensure a safer work environment for the men and women of NYSCOPBA, as well as a safer environment for the state’s prison population,” Powers said. “We look forward to working with the Governor on this crucial endeavor.”

Cuomo’s push to change the age of responsibility for 16- and 17-year-olds isn’t relevant to the union’s agenda at the current time, said Miller.

“Regardless of the age, corrections officers have to secure the facility and rehabilitate the people that incarcerated there,” Miller said.

Cuomo is calling on the state legislature to raise the age of criminal responsibility before the end of its legislative session. The reform specifically demands that 16- and 17-year-olds won’t be in the process through the criminal justice system as adults.

New York and North Carolina are the only states in the nation to process 16- and 17-year-olds as adults regardless of the crime committed.

“When it comes to the corrections system in New York, it is truly a system in transition and it is a system where we are continually learning,” Cuomo said. “As one of two states to treat 16 and 17-year-olds in the system as adults, this is something that needs to be changed.”