

July 25, 2022

The Honorable Kathy C. Hochul  
Governor of the State of New York  
New York State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
Majority Leader, New York State Senate  
907 Legislative Office Building  
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker, New York State Assembly  
932 Legislative Office Building  
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie:

I feel compelled to write and express my views in a confidential manner regarding the current state of public safety in my community and those around our state and nation.

I grew up on the streets of Rochester and served this community for over four decades, and I have never seen the issues of crime and public safety be as bad as they are today.

There are several causal factors behind this scourge, but so much comes down to the need for stronger policies and leadership to address the lawlessness that is prevalent in so many of our communities today.

I fully support the aspects of Bail Reform that address economic and racial inequities. We were at a point of criminalizing poverty, which is wholly unacceptable and was in desperate need of reform. No one should remain in jail awaiting trial if they are eligible for bail but are unable to afford the cost due to their economic challenges.

Robberies, assaults, car-jackings, and illegal gun possessions plague our streets every day and the perpetrators are being met with appearance tickets. It is commonplace for these individuals to be arrested, booked, and released on an appearance ticket, only to reoffend after which the same process ensues.

There was a time when the possession of an illegal gun brought a mandatory one-year jail sentence. That law was eventually changed because advocates fought for more judicial discretion. Ironically, it is that same group of advocates now arguing against judicial discretion regarding bail. Judges are elected by their communities and certainly deserve to have the ability to exercise discretion and be held accountable for it.

While this issue has now become political foil in the upcoming elections, the fact remains that something must be done to revisit and change those policies that are costing lives and creating havoc in our most challenged communities.

Yes, there should be a “Dangerousness Clause” and it should be viewed by the actions of an individual – and not their ethnicity. We are creating an environment where there are no consequences for bad behavior. This does not work in families – and it certainly does not work in our communities.

I would suggest convening leaders in law enforcement, the judiciary, victim’s advocacy groups, mayors, county executives, along with the other reform advocates, and begin a process to keep what is working and change what is not.

Our poorest communities are the most affected. Here in Rochester we have had kids shot walking to a corner store, occupied houses are hit by gunfire on a routine basis, over 50 shots were fired in one single incident last week, and a 29-year veteran police officer was executed while working on solving a previous homicide. I served with Officer Mazurkiewicz and his death has been very painful.

I could go on but you get my point. As a fellow Democrat, we can’t blame the other party because we are in-charge and we own this situation. We can certainly have safe communities and strong police-community relationships if we are willing to work hard to achieve it. Instead, we have demoralized law enforcement for the inappropriate actions of a few and created more divisions than I have seen in my entire life.

I continually listen to people in our neighborhoods, organizations, and businesses and they are fed up with what is going on. I fear that the upcoming election will be a manifestation of those feelings. People are clamoring for change with public safety and the cost of living being driven up by inflation.

I am constantly urged to take public positions on these issues. I prefer to express those feelings/positions directly and respectfully as opposed to in the media or on social media.

One of my strengths has always been to remain grounded and to listen to people most affected by our decisions and policies. The anger out here is palpable, and it is due to all sides digging on their positions as opposed to coming together and forging a path that works for everyone.

If you could call a special session on public safety and truly listen, debate, compromise, and act on those areas that can begin to turn the tide, you would be performing a great public service.

I am happy to help and support you in any way if asked, but I can’t reinforce enough how important and urgent this is.

Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Duffy  
President and CEO