

THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



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March 24, 2026

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

Dear Governor Hochul,

We write to respectfully urge you to consider repurposing closed or partially closed state correctional facilities into fully serviced emergency shelter and supportive housing for individuals experiencing homelessness. As a bipartisan coalition of local and state government officials from Chautauqua County, we believe utilizing existing state infrastructure would provide a safer, more effective, and more sustainable approach to addressing a rapidly growing crisis in our region and across upstate New York.

### **Homelessness is a Growing Problem**

While this letter focuses on the situation in Chautauqua County, we recognize that many communities across upstate New York are experiencing similar trends. In recent years, homelessness in Chautauqua County has increased dramatically, rising by more than 100 percent between 2022 and 2024, according to the New York State Comptroller. As shelter capacity has been exceeded, the county has increasingly been forced to place individuals in hotels and motels as a temporary solution. While this approach may provide short-term shelter, it has created a number of serious challenges for communities.

### **Public Safety Impact**

One of the most immediate impacts has been on public safety. Hotels used as emergency shelters have generated frequent 911 calls and disturbances, placing additional strain on already stretched local police departments. Because there is no requirement for these hotels to provide security, police effectively become the default security presence, increasing demands on departments and their budgets. Many individuals seeking emergency shelter are recently released from jail or prison or struggle with mental health or substance abuse issues. Placing them in hotels or motels in small rural communities without structure or services creates chaos, repeated emergencies, and growing risks for both the individuals involved and the surrounding communities. These concerns are not hypothetical; they are already playing out across the region.

In Fredonia, a hotel housing homeless individuals generated nearly 600 police calls in about 18 months and more than 100 fire calls in a single year. Similar concerns have arisen in Falconer, where individuals housed at a nearby hotel have trespassed on the grounds of the nearby elementary school, threatened a school bus driver carrying students, and left needles on school property, incidents that in one case led to an arrest and a subsequent threat that prompted a police investigation.

## **Out of State Migration**

Local officials are also increasingly concerned that many individuals seeking emergency shelter originate from outside New York State, including neighboring states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio. New York's generous public assistance programs and lack of long-term residency requirements to access them can create incentives for individuals to relocate here in search of benefits and housing support.

## **The Financial Burden on Local Taxpayers**

Finally, there is the issue of cost. Under the current system, counties bear the majority of the financial responsibility for providing emergency shelter. As reliance on hotels and motels grows, so too do the costs associated with housing individuals in this way. Ultimately, those costs fall on county taxpayers at a time when affordability remains one of the most pressing concerns facing New Yorkers.

## **A Better Path Forward: Structured Transitional Housing Models**

There are, however, better models available that provide both structure and services for individuals experiencing homelessness. One example is the Albany County Sheriff's Homeless Improvement Program (SHIP), which repurposed a wing of the county jail into transitional housing. Unlike hotels and motels, this facility includes common areas where services such as case management, addiction counseling, mental health treatment, and job training can be delivered, critical components in helping individuals move toward long-term stability.

Chautauqua County and the surrounding region have existing state-owned facilities that could potentially serve similar purposes, including the vacant annex at the Lakeview Correctional Facility, the closed Gowanda Correctional Facility, and partially vacant space at Collins. These properties already contain infrastructure such as meeting rooms, commercial kitchens, and secure facilities that are far better suited to providing structured supportive housing than roadside hotel rooms.

Governor, we are appealing to you to help our rural community, and potentially many others across upstate New York, to address this escalating challenge. The problem has grown to an extent that local governments can no longer manage this problem alone. We respectfully ask the state to take a more active role in managing, funding, and coordinating solutions that provide both effective services for individuals in need and protection for the communities being asked to shoulder this burden.

We stand ready to work with your administration to identify solutions that are safe, effective, and sustainable for all involved.

Respectfully,



Senator George M. Borrello  
57<sup>th</sup> New York State Senate District



Assemblyman Andrew M. Molitor  
150<sup>th</sup> New York State Assembly District

County Executive Paul 'PJ' Wendel  
Chautauqua County

Mayor Kimberly Ecklund  
City of Jamestown

Mayor Michael Ferguson  
Village of Fredonia

Supervisor Janet Bowman  
Town of Ellicott

Mayor James Jaroszynski  
Village of Falconer

Superintendent Stephen Penhollow  
Falconer Central School

Supervisor Shari Miller  
Town of Dunkirk

Sheriff James B. Quattrone  
Chautauqua County

Chief Daniel Ingrao  
Town of Ellicott Police Department

Chief Matthew J. Bentley

Chief Matthew Bentley  
Lakewood-Busti Police Department

Sgt. Marcus Spinuzza  
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