



LABOR

Assaults on Corrections Officers are on the Rise in Westchester

By Damon K. Jones



Each year over 33,000 Correctional Officers are assaulted and over 20 percent of the Officers assaulted required medical attention. Nationally,

only 10.9 percent of the assaults are actually prosecuted and according to PrisonOfficer.org, a Corrections Officer will be assaulted at least twice in a 20 year career.

In Westchester County, a lone Corrections Officers' operates housing units with up to 60 inmates by him/herself, with no weapons, nightsticks or radios, just a single solitary body alarm. Due to budget constraints, Corrections Management found it more feasible to build dormitories and have decreased the power of the Officer to lock an inmate in his cell for the safety and security of the facility. The Correction Officer faces some

of society's worse criminal element on a daily basis. Other law enforcement agencies wouldn't dare to approach a group of murderers, criminal gang members or drug dealers without their hand on their weapon or night stick but the Corrections Officer does this duty 8-16 hours a day without any weapon or nightstick.

The Corrections Officers of Westchester County have recently seen a wave of assaults on our officers. One of our officers has been hospitalized and is facing critical surgery. Is not the safety of our facility a very serious issue? Where is the outcry from union leaders to address this? With continued post cuts and more violent gang members being incarcerated, there has to be a more proactive stance, or it will only get worse.

How loud would the public outcry be if only 1 in 10 assaults on our city streets, where the assailant was clearly identified, was prosecuted? What would morale be

like in our Police departments if only 1 in 10 assaults on our cops were prosecuted? What would our communities be like if the criminal element knew they had only a 1 in10 chance of being prosecuted, even if we knew who they were and could prove they committed the assault?

With all the accomplishment and danger faced by the Westchester County Correction Officer, the Westchester County government has failed to act fairly in rewarding the hard working officers with a labor contract since 2006. For the county executive to say there must be "Give Backs" I totally disagree. In 07, 08, and 09, raises for Correction officers have been approved in the budget of those years. The monies are sitting in accounts collecting 17% interest. Unless Westchester County will share the interest with the Correction officers, and we know they are not, the only fair thing to do would be to give the officers

their 07, 08 and 09 labor contracts then deal with 2010 and on. Judging by the recent Arbitration Award given to the hard working Correction Officers for 07 and 08, their work continues to go unappreciated.

When County Executive Astorino toured our facility earlier this year, why was the union leadership a no show to explain our dilemma? It's convenient for them to say that they chose not to come. We must ask the question, "Why?" You would think a representative would be there for the benefit of its members. Who better to explain the daily dangers than the labor union representative that was elected to represent the officers' interest?

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