



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruth Hassell-Thompson

Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson, Chair of Senate Standing Committee on Crime, Crime Victims and Correction calls for Public Hearings on Policies of the Division of State Parole

RUTH HASSELL-THOMPSON March 5, 2010

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Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson, Chair of the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Crime, Crime Victims and Corrections today announced that she will convene a public hearing on the issues raised in the case of Howard Tucker, a 37-year-old parolee released by the Division of Parole who was shot to death by Albany police on February 16th following a traffic stop.

City of Albany police officials say that Tucker was carrying a loaded revolver and nearly ran over a police officer in an effort to flee. Press accounts have indicated that Tucker failed at least seven drug tests last year and that employees of the Division of Parole failed to test him in January because of a purported shortage of drug testing kits.

Hassell-Thompson said “We are demanding clear answers and real accountability from the Division of Parole for the Senate and for the public. A death has occurred under circumstances that demand our full attention. We need a full accounting of policy decisions by the Division of Parole regarding drug testing, funding allocations for drug testing, and policies or practices of so-called ‘graduated sanctions’ that may have led to a prisoner which may have placed citizens in danger, or which may have been unlawful.”

“We cannot tolerate the possibility that public safety was endangered and lives put at risk due to policies and practices that allow paroled individuals to fail multiple drug tests and remain at large. The death of Mr. Tucker is tragic, and the facts are still under review. But endangering the public is simply unacceptable – we need answers and accountability.”

“At the same time, political grandstanding by Senate Republicans on this issue cannot be excused or diminished,” said Hassell-Thompson. “Protecting the public is not a partisan issue – trying to score political points in this matter simply won’t do. The bottom line here is whether or not our front-line parole officers are equipped with the right resources and the right policies to do their jobs and protect the public. Our public hearings will be targeted at getting answers to these questions and to immediately fixing problems – period.”

Hassell-Thompson noted that current New York State statistics demonstrate lower levels of crime, lower numbers of individuals in prison, and lower numbers of individuals under the supervision of parole. “We are doing some things right in this state,” said Hassell-Thompson, “so it’s particularly important to take immediate and effective action when something goes wrong. When public safety is at stake, we won’t accept half-measures or shortcuts – we’re going to find the problems and fix them.”

The Hearing will be held on March 18 in Albany at the Capitol in room 124 from 2:00 – 4:00 PM.