

Senate Prison Safety Chair Completes Tour Of State's 53 Prisons

By Administrator

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Sen. Bob Steinburg (R-Chowan) completed his tour of all of the state's 53 prisons. Sen. Steinburg serves as the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Prison Safety. He led the charge for prison reform after five prison employees -- Meggan Callahan, Justin Smith, Veronica Darden, Wendy Shannon, and Geoffrey Howe -- were killed in facilities in his district. Since then he's personally taken on the Herculean task of traveling across the state to talk with prison staff about the issues plaguing the system and address staff shortages and low pay.

"Politicians often say they've traveled from Murphy to Manteo. For me, it's been from Craggy to Tyrrell. It has been my mission to meet the hardworking men and women in our prisons to learn firsthand what support they need. Those five deaths should have never happened, and I want to make sure we can do our best to ensure no one else loses their life," Sen. Steinburg said.

Sen. Steinburg's statewide tour gained the notice of longtime prison employees.

"In my 47 years being involved with corrections, I have seen people come and go who provide lip service to the cause of the staff working behind the fences and walls to protect society and hopefully provide opportunities for offenders to lead law-abiding lives. However, I have never seen a public figure the likes of Bob Steinburg, who has tirelessly worked to make prisons better," Art Beeler, a retired complex warden for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, said. "It did not take me long to figure out Sen. Steinburg's heart is in the right place."

Since the attacks in prisons in Bertie and Pasquotank counties, Sen. Steinburg has authored the "Prison Reform Act of 2019," which authorizes studies into the management system of the state's prisons. The bill passed unanimously by both the House and Senate and became law last year. Since then he's continued to traverse the state talking one-on-one with prison staff and holding frequent meetings of the Senate Select Committee on Prison Safety.

"In all of my travels throughout this country, I have never witnessed any legislative member in a state with more than fifty prisons, conduct detailed site visits in every prison," Gary C. Mohr, the 106th president of the American Correctional Association said. "Sen. Steinburg did and I am pleased he is being recognized for that accomplishment. There is no doubt he is aware of what is happening in your state's prisons. The North Carolina Correctional System is safer for the hands-on leadership of Commissioner Ishee and the direct in-person attention Sen. Steinburg has demonstrated."

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While his tour was in progress, the state closed two of its facilities. He was set to finish his tour of prisons early this spring, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he had to put the visits on hold until it was safe to allow visitors back into those facilities.

“Sen. Steinburg’s dedication to improving the working conditions in our state prisons is commendable,” Senate Leader Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) said. “It’s not an easy task to crisscross the state, but his time and effort will lead to real change that benefits our state employees that put their lives on the line every day.”