

UNIVERSITY POLICE | ENCON POLICE



PARK POLICE | FOREST RANGERS

Written submission to accompany PBA of NYS testimony
By President Manuel Vilar
Public Protection Hearing
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My name is Manuel Vilar and I am the President of the Police Benevolent Association of New York State, the labor union representing the interests of the Agency Police Services bargaining unit. I am a Sergeant in the New York State Park Police and live and work on Long Island.

On behalf of the PBA of NYS and its 1,200 uniformed police officers, I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify this afternoon. I have the honor to appear before you today representing the dedicated uniformed police officers working in the State University Police, the State Environmental Conservation Police, the State Park Police, and the State Forest Rangers.

These hard-working men and women are on duty 365 days a year 24 / 7 protecting our state's SUNY campuses, our environment and natural resources, and more than 60 million annual visitors to our world-class parks and forest preserves. We respond to every peril ranging from natural disasters to dangerous felons.

Each year the New York State budget has a significant impact on the work we do and our ability to carry out our mission. I want to highlight just a few examples of the work our members did in the past year to underscore what is at stake here.

When a man attempted to abduct a woman at a bus stop at the University at Albany, it was the University Police who responded and arrested the man, which ultimately resulted in a conviction for attempted kidnapping.

Last February a plane crash near Lake Placid sent Forest Rangers hiking up an icy mountain, overnight, to reach and rescue the survivors.

Last year Environmental Conservation Officers were alerted to Auto Repair shops conducting fraudulent vehicle emission inspections. The subsequent investigation led to a charge of over 30 felonies and 643 vehicles that were contaminating our environment are now either repaired or taken off the street.

When a suicidal man was about to jump into the rapids of the Niagara River, just above the falls, it was our State Park Police members who saved him from sure death.

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Over the past several years, we have been routinely asked to do more with less, and we have. Deep and consistent cuts to three of our units, Environmental Conservation Police, Forest Rangers and Park Police, have gotten us to the point where we are concerned with our ability to respond quickly to emergency calls.

There are many steps the Legislature can take - such as addressing our top priority of high attrition rates at the State University Police, to mitigate the issues our members face as we struggle to meet our mission.

I am here today to urge the Legislature to prioritize our funding needs so we may better protect and serve our residents and visitors to New York State.

We urge the Legislature to increase non-personnel services lines for the Division of Law Enforcement and Forest Rangers in the Department of Environmental Conservation budget and for the State Park Police in the State Parks budget.

Our units are in desperate need of supplies and crucially-needed equipment. For example, while we recently graduated a new academy of forest rangers, the graduates did not receive winter coats, ATV helmets, gloves or flashlights. New Environmental Conservation Officers were not given rain gear and their radio equipment is so antiquated that it cannot communicate with the State Police. Only a portion of State Park Police Officers have Tasers and Radiation Detection Devices while others go without.

All of our units need new vehicles and while we are pleased the Governor is allocating funding to the purchase of vehicles for DEC, we must confirm that we have all the resources to outfit them for police work.

A few hundred thousand dollars added to each unit would go a long way to meeting our needs statewide.

Over the last several years New York State has seen more than her fair share of Natural Disasters from Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, Tropical Storm Lee, winter blizzards and record breaking deep freezes. Whether we face acts of nature or horrendous crimes including terrorism, State University Police Officers, Environmental Conservation Police Officers, State Park Police Officers, and State Forest Rangers are increasingly called upon to perform many aspects of the State's response and rescue efforts.

PBA members are not only Police Officers but are highly trained with unique special skill-sets they apply regularly in the daily performance of their duties. When a man-made or natural disaster strikes it is those special skills that your constituents depend on.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Manuel Vilar
President