



POLICE CONFERENCE of New York, Inc.
Union of Police Officers

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Founded in 1925

Hello and thank you for this opportunity to testify on an important issue that impacts State University of New York campuses.

My name is Richard Wells and I am the President of the Police Conference of New York (PCNY), a labor organization that represents 25,000 police officers in this state. I speak to you today with nearly 40 years of police experience including 34 years with the Hempstead Police Department and 29 years of involvement with the union including 8 as PCNY's president. I am also the vice-president of the National Association of Police Organizations, a member of the New York State Law Enforcement Accreditation Council and a member of the New York State Comptrollers Advisory Council.

The issue I am focusing on is benefit equity for the State University Police Department. Currently, the State University Police Department is the only police department in New York, out of 564 in existence, without a police retirement.

The Legislature worked diligently to correct this inequity last session by passing a bill that would have allow SUNY officers the option of transferring into the New York State Police & Fire Retirement System (P&F) from the New York State Employees Retirees System (ERS). PCNY thanks you for this action.

Unfortunately, the Governor vetoed the bill noting that, due to its cost, he could not take up the issue outside of the budget. PCNY was then very disappointed when the Governor failed to include the measure in his recent budget. It is therefore, once again, up to the Legislature to lead on this important issue.

With the passage of the Tier 6 retirement bill in 2011, all newly hired State University police officers are required to work until age 63. Now, I'm 63 years old, and I can still handle myself, but, with campus safety so paramount, would I be the best choice at 40+ years of service to serve a community of students in their teens and early twenties? Tier 6 requires a newly hired 21-year-

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old to work 42 years - or at least twice as long as officers in all other police departments. Police in the P&F were exempted from this change, and with good reason.

Furthermore, death and disability benefits for SUNY officers alone, are inferior to those received by other cops. It is indefensible and highly offensive to assign inferior death and disability benefits to one department of police. SUNY officers frequently work side by side their state police and municipal counterparts doing the same job, at the same time, protecting the same people. Why should the benefits be different?

Unequal pension and disability benefits are the main contributing factor to turnover in the SUNY system. The crisis is so bad on some campuses, SUNY administration officials have fully supported legislative efforts to create pension and disability parity for their officers.

SUNY is currently losing millions of dollars recruiting, hiring and training officers who quickly leave for other police employment around the state, and who can blame them? More than 95% of municipal police departments allow their officers to retire after 20 years. The remaining percentage allow retirement after 25 years. SUNY needs a 25 year plan in order to stay competitive.

SUNY officials have used the term 'critical' when talking about police staffing levels at numerous campuses. They know they have to deal with the attrition problem now because the problem is only going to get worse as Tier 3 and 4 officers hit retirement age.

Compounding that problem is the fact that the improving economy will lead to more municipal police departments lifting hiring freezes that had been in place for the past several years.

The SUNY system is the perfect place for local departments to recruit. State University Police Officers receive expensive, high quality training and experience at SUNY's expense making it the perfect training ground for other departments. It is a ridiculous waste of State resources.

Inclusion of parity legislation in the budget would put an end to an enormous amount of fiscal waste at an already under-funded system. It costs SUNY more than \$85,000 per officer to recruit, train and equip someone who stays on the job for only a few years. Schools are also spending

additional dollars back-filling empty positions by paying overtime to the officers they manage to keep. The cost of retirement equity is offset by these crucial savings.

There are two other points I'd like to make before concluding my testimony. First, the Governor has routinely mentioned the importance of diversity in law enforcement, and I applaud him for that. This is particularly important on SUNY's multi-cultural campuses. The University Police Department strives for diversity in its ranks so the force reflects the population they serve.

However, many police departments are seeking qualified women and minority officers and SUNY police officers are often targeted for recruitment by municipalities because they are well trained and disgruntled by the lack of parity with their fellow officers.

Second and more importantly, the measure would mitigate the increasingly untenable campus safety issue created by fewer officers being able to staff shifts. It is a simple fact that campuses are much safer with a stable police force.

The Governor has shown that he clearly believes in the strength and ability of the men and women policing SUNY campuses. In recent years he's not only added a new sexual assault policy but many new responsibilities to the force including serving new businesses that are a part of Start-Up New York, an expanded role in fighting the heroin epidemic, new sexual assault reporting measures, mandatory active shooter training and the deployment to natural disasters.

The attrition crisis these campuses face and the growing instability of the police workforce, has the potential to upend these new policies and programs.

Please take affirmative action to correct this gross inequity. I am here today to request your full consideration of adding legislation and the appropriate level of funding to the final enacted budget to correct this problem once and for all.

Thank you for your time.