



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George D. Maziarz

WNY legislators seek to stop private lobbyists from getting public pensions

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Senator George Maziarz (R-Newfane) and Assemblyman Sean Ryan (D-Buffalo) today announced their joint efforts to advance legislation that would restrict private lobbyists from obtaining pensions through the New York State and Local Retirement System.

A little-known loophole has allowed employees of certain private advocacy organizations to access benefits from the statewide retirement system that was designed and intended solely for public employees. These organizations include the New York Conference of Mayors, New York State Association of Counties, the Association of Towns of the State of New York, the New York State Association of Town Highway Superintendents, the New York State School Boards Association, and other school board associations.

“Taxpayers have been footing the bill for these lobbyists’ pensions for too long and it has to stop now,” said Senator Maziarz. “These lobbyists may be retained by government groups for advocacy purposes but to be clear they are not public employees and they are not accountable to the public. Closing this loophole is an important step forward in strengthening the integrity of the pension system and easing a financial burden on local governments.”

“New Yorkers are rightfully concerned that well connected lobbyists are accessing New York State pension benefits, and the legislature needs to pass reforms to stop this abuse,” said Assemblyman Ryan. “There is clearly a conflict of interest when these lobbyists set their own salaries, which are often exorbitant, and then expect the public pension system to pay out retirement benefits. There is currently no accountability, and it’s time for the Assembly and Senate to step up to the plate and fix this loophole.”

Specifically, S.5935-A (Maziarz)/A. 8212-A (Ryan) would prohibit any new employees of the aforementioned groups from participating in the state retirement system. Another bill, S.5936-A (Maziarz)/A. 8211-A (Ryan) would entail the same prohibition but also go a step further and prevent any current employees of these organizations from earning any additional retirement service credit immediately.

The legislators clearly pointed out that the organizations affected by their legislative proposals are not subject the civil service system, the Freedom of Information Law, the Open Meetings Law, state financial disclosure requirements, or other tools that would keep their operations transparent and accountable to taxpayers. In fact,

employees of these organizations set their own salaries and some of their executive directors make more than \$200,000 per year and get perks like bonuses and company cars.

Still, taxpayers are paying for their pensions. In 2013, the retirees of these organizations were eligible for state retirement benefits totaling almost \$2 million.

These legislative proposals being highlighted today are currently under review in the Senate Civil Service and Pensions Committee and the Assembly Governmental Employees Committee.

Senator Maziarz also announced that individuals can sign an on-line petition in support of the legislative effort to stop private lobbyists from getting public pensions on his website, maziarz.nysenate.gov.

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