

UNIVERSITY POLICE | ENCON POLICE



PARK POLICE | FOREST RANGERS

2020 Joint Legislative Hearing

Public Protection Testimony

**Submitted on behalf of the
Police Benevolent Association of New York State**

By: Troy Caupain
PBA Secretary & Park Police Officers Director

New York State Park Police Officer
Region 9 – Long Island

February 12, 2020

Introduction

My name is Troy Caupain. I serve as Secretary as well as Director of the Park Police Officers for the Police Benevolent Association of New York State (PBA). I have also served for 20 years as a New York State Park Police Officer.

Overview

You may be aware, Governor Cuomo issued an executive memo on December 3, 2019, assigning organizational control and command of the New York State Park Police to the New York State Police. Park Police Officers were informed that they will have a choice to transition to become members of the State Police or remain with the Park Police.

During recent meetings involving representatives of the Governor's Office, State Police representatives, Park Police command staff and the PBA, it was verbally expressed that any Park Police Officers wishing to transition to the State Police must apply to the division and fulfill multiple requirements, similar to what new hires to the State Police would be required. This is despite the fact that these dedicated officers have already served years, and in many cases, decades, as police officers employed by NYS. It is clear that not all veteran Park Police Officers will meet the State Police hiring standards, which we argue would be difficult for veteran officers of any agency, including current members of the State Police. This will leave Park Police Officers in an indeterminate state, unaware of what their future may hold.

To date, hiring standards for the Park Police applicants mirror those which the State Police utilize. Additionally, Park Police training requirements exceed those required by the Division of Criminal Justice Services, as well as those currently in place at the State Police. We ask why should veteran officers be forced, by the very state government that already employs them, to go through this again? This is unfair and disrespectful.

In 1980, the New York State Police absorbed the New York State Parkway Police and then in 1997 absorbed the New York State Capital Police. These mergers went well and the officers served with distinction. For whatever reason, the State Police has devised a new format that would require veteran officers to undergo the very same stringent testing and vetting that is reserved for new hires. The PBA feels this proposal is designed to allow the State Police to cherry pick young officers, saving the division money, while in effect discriminating against veteran officers. Again, the Park Police Officers that I represent feel this is unfair, uncalled for, and an indignity.

Park Police Officers pride themselves on the quality of service they provide to the 74 million visitors and residents who every year patronize New York State's most beautiful places. We feel it's a quality of service far above what any other police agency can provide. Park Police Officers also take pride in the relationships that are fostered with the visitors they encounter, utilizing valuable discretion, all the while adding to their recreational experiences and solidifying the chances that they return for future generations.

Throughout my career as Park Police Officer, I wake EVERY day, excited to get to work, knowing that each day will bring a new experience. These experiences may possibly involve the reuniting of a lost child with a distraught parent; making sure 'quiet hours' are being followed to ensure a family's July 4th camping experience is an enjoyable, peaceful and safe one; or providing vital security to a concert venue at Jones Beach or the Saratoga Performing Arts Center where 10,000 to 25,000 people may be in attendance. In these days of terrorism and mass shootings, at venues certainly including but not limited to concert venues, these duties should not be undervalued. These are essential and critical quality of life matters, which visitors entrust us with providing so they may have an enjoyable and safe atmosphere.

Future of Park Police & Transition

Many Park Police Officers are feeling extremely anxious that the service which they provide, and have been providing for many years, could be on the brink of disappearing.

The choice given to us is a grim one. We can transition to the State Police, submitting to the exact same process used to enter the Park Police Academy when we were originally hired, or remain as a Park Police Officer, with the uncertainty of how long the Park Police will exist and if officers will remain in their current work locations.

We are only a 250-member statewide agency. If half to two thirds of the membership leave the ranks of the Park Police, our future as well as the future of proactively protecting New York's vital treasures, will be in peril. We fully understand the concept of agency consolidation, but this venture could and will put crucial police services at significant risk.

Closing

To be clear, we are asking you to reject the Governor's proposal to change the law to allow the State Police to cherry pick young Park Police members to the

detriment of veteran officers. Instead, we ask for support of legislation S.3676 Gounardes / A.2736A Solages that would merge the State Park Police into the New York State Police, in much the same fashion that the Parkway Police and Capital Police were previously merged.

If you cannot pass the merger bill, then at least help stem the rampant attrition from the Park Police and pass bill S.5556 Gounardes / A6990 Solages, that would provide a 20-year retirement benefit giving Park Police Officers pension parity with their state and municipal police counterparts.

Please, feel free to contact me or my colleague Manuel Vilar at the PBA if you wish to discuss this matter further.

Thank you.