

POLICE BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION

of the NEW YORK STATE TROOPERS, INC.



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2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Testimony
Public Protection

Submitted on Behalf of the New York State Troopers PBA
By Charles W. Murphy, President, New York State Troopers PBA

February 12, 2026

Chairpersons Krueger and Pretlow and distinguished members of the Legislature,

My name is Charles W. Murphy. As the president of the New York State Troopers Police Benevolent Association, I have the honor of representing 7,000 active and retired uniformed members of the New York State Police.

On behalf of my members, my written testimony focuses on policies that our union believes the Legislature should champion as part of the budget process to address an ongoing recruitment and retention crisis that threatens to undermine the critical work of the State Police and the state's public safety mission, writ large.

We are heartened that Governor Hochul has included as part of her executive budget proposal language that was passed with near unanimity by the Assembly and Senate last year to enact a nation-leading critical incident leave policy for the State Police. We cannot successfully address the state's public safety needs if we do not first address the needs of the men and women sworn to protect New Yorkers, and this is policy would be an incredibly important step forward.

However, as important as enacting a critical incident leave policy will be, make no mistake: this is not a panacea for addressing the underlying issues that are driving the recruitment and retention crisis that the State Police – like so many other law enforcement agencies across the state and nation – continues to experience. The NYSTBPA aims to work with the Legislature to deliver a comprehensive support package that our members deserve, including not just mental health supports but also essential recruitment incentives to help bolster our ranks and ensure long-term workforce stability.

We look forward to a collaborative effort during this legislative session to deliver meaningful, positive change for the dedicated public servants who work tirelessly to protect New Yorkers.

Recruitment and retention continue to be a challenge

For 109 years, the New York State Police has served as an elite, disciplined, and dedicated force. While we have consistently adapted to the complexities of modern policing and new technology, our members are under immense strain.

While our mission has expanded exponentially — from high-visibility New York City subway patrols to providing security support at the Canadian border — our staffing levels have remained stagnant for two decades.

Simply put, we do not have a sustainable force. The State Police is losing seasoned veterans faster than it can recruit a new generation of mission-driven members of law enforcement. While 2006 saw a 25-year low of just 49 retirements, the annual rate has since skyrocketed, leaving an ever-growing gap in our ranks.

Last year, by contrast, 205 Troopers retired or resigned — a number that increases to 278 once investigators are included.

Our members are retiring earlier, too. In 2018, the average retirement age and average years of service at retirement both peaked, at 52 and 28, respectively. Those numbers have since dropped, to an average retirement age of 49 with 23 years of service in each of the past three years.

At the same time, we're seeing fewer recruits enter and graduate with each State Police Academy class. The raw number of applicants each year has dramatically declined, from a peak of more than 25,000 in 2013 to a post-Covid low of 8,026 just 10 years later in 2023.

The number of applicants in 2024 — the most recent year for which we have full data — was 11,634. Ultimately, after exams, background checks, and dropouts, just 238 of these recruits graduated and went on to join the proud ranks of the purple and gray.

In short, recent recruitment and retirement trends signal significant trouble in the years ahead if we don't collectively take immediate steps to reverse them.

Morale continues to suffer

Our recruitment and retention challenges are fueled not only by the physical demands of a shrinking force, but by a culture driven by Division of State Police leadership that has failed to keep pace with the needs of the rank-and-file. It is no secret that our members have a profound distrust of agency leadership.

Our most recent workplace climate survey was an initiative the PBA took on this year to fill the vacuum left by Division leaders, who have deprioritized this essential effort despite their assertions to the contrary. The results highlight a rank-and-file that feels increasingly alienated from leadership and is struggling to stay afloat in the face of rising workplace pressures and growing demands that they do more with less.

Among the key findings:

- **Eighty percent of members believe Division does not listen to or act on concerns from our members.**
- **Three quarters of members feel Division is unconcerned with work-life balance challenges facing both our sworn Troopers and civilian employees.**
- **Two thirds of members believe favoritism drives the promotion process, not the merits of their hard work.**

These are not minor complaints. Rather, they represent a breakdown in the relationship between our members and those who lead them. When four out of five Troopers believe their concerns fall on deaf ears, and two thirds see leadership playing favorites instead of fairly recognizing talent and service, something is fundamentally broken within our agency.

The consequence is burnout that forces Troopers out of the profession earlier and at higher rates than ever before. We are losing our most experienced members and their institutional memory. Not only does this have an impact on our mission to protect and serve all New Yorkers, but it means that the next generation loses valuable role models who can have a profound positive effect on their careers.

The results of this year's study were largely unchanged from the first-ever survey conducted by Division in 2024, when Troopers reported issues ranging from feeling unsafe in their patrol cars to lacking the resources and equipment they need to do their jobs efficiently.

In response, Superintendent James had promised a "thorough review of the survey results to identify opportunities where we can change and improve." Yet, nearly two years later, nothing has changed. If anything, the steady stream of negative headlines involving agency leadership — such as the Ryder Cup credential scandalⁱ in which high-ranking members are being investigated by the state Inspector General's Office for allegedly abusing their positions to secure VIP access for family and friends — only further demoralizes Troopers who dedicate themselves to doing right by their colleagues and by New Yorkers only to see a double standard play out in how discipline and ethics are applied at the highest levels.

Addressing the culture of our agency is something our legislative partners can help us advocate for. But more directly, the policies enacted this legislative session will go a long way toward sending an immediate and undeniable signal that the state values its Troopers and stands ready to deliver for those sworn to protect and serve the public.

Critical incident leave policy legislation

To begin addressing the systemic issues identified through both hard data and anecdotal evidence, it is essential that the state prioritizes the pressing underlying stress and mental health challenges that all too often go under-reported and under-addressed across law enforcement.

To that end, we are incredibly pleased to see that legislation to create a critical incident leave policy for State Police — overwhelmingly approved by the Assembly and Senate last year and championed by state Sen. Jeremy Cooney and Assemblyman Patrick Burke — has been included as part of the governor's executive budget. This is a vital first step in ensuring our members receive the support necessary to process the unique traumas of the profession.

Law enforcement officers experience an average of 178 traumatic events over the course of their careers. A 2024 study by the CNA Corporation notes that officers face a 54% higher risk of suicide compared to the general population; in fact, the number of officers lost to suicide frequently exceeds the total number killed in the line of duty.

The state has a unique opportunity to reverse these tragic statistics by first honestly acknowledging that current policy — to the extent that it formally exists at all — is inadequate. The three days of leave currently offered following incidents that lead to the death or serious injury of another person simply perpetuates stigmas around truly addressing one's own mental health challenges. By providing 20 days of critical incident leave, we can ensure our members have the time they need to heal.

Our union believes it is imperative to establish such a policy for our members as part of the FY 2026-27 state budget. Securing this leave for Troopers can serve as a watershed moment for not only our agency, but for our entire profession. Ensuring this policy is put in place initially for Troopers can also send a powerful message about future pursuit of broader critical incident leave for other law enforcement agencies.

Sealing unsubstantiated complaints

We are appreciative of the positive steps forward for public safety included in the executive budget proposal. We also believe the Legislature can take additional steps with the governor to ensure other policy concerns are addressed in this budget.

That includes ensuring that public transparency — which we support — is balanced with the need to protect our members from false or erroneous disciplinary claims made against them. The need for balance is more pressing than ever in an era defined by a 24/7 digital spotlight. The rise of provocative recording by self-proclaimed “First Amendment auditors”ⁱⁱ seeking viral fame has also fundamentally altered the policing environment.

This constant digital scrutiny, paired with shifting public attitudes, has placed our members in an increasingly precarious position. In this environment, a single out-of-context clip can trigger a wave of complaints that, regardless of their merit, take on a life of their own in the court of public opinion, skipping due process in favor of a rush to public judgment.

Unfounded, unsubstantiated, and exonerated personnel complaints should not be used to color the professional reputation of Troopers who perform one of the most highly scrutinized jobs in the state. In any other profession, an exoneration means the matter is closed. Yet, in modern policing, the digital footprint of a false claim remains a permanent stain that can unfairly impede promotions, transfers, and post-service opportunities — to say nothing of their impact on the public's confidence in the very officers dedicated to keeping them safe.

Baseless claims that become part of the permanent record also have a chilling effect on recruitment, particularly as public perceptions of our work have shifted in recent years. It is increasingly difficult to attract qualified candidates when they know a single malicious or unfounded accusation can haunt them for the rest of their lives.

To address this, we support legislation proposed by Assemblymember Sam Berger and Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton (S4117-B/ A2074C) that would seal unfounded, exonerated, and pending claims and require their redaction from disciplinary records. This is a matter of fundamental fairness that ensures that public servants are not unduly penalized by mere allegations that ultimately have no basis in fact.

To build up a State Police force that knows its mission is supported and respected as they enforce the laws that govern this state, we must ensure those same laws afford them proper due process.

Pension reform

Our recruitment and retention efforts must reflect the high value New York places on public service. To successfully attract prospective candidates, we must demonstrate that a career in the State Police is backed by the same stability as is afforded to other public sector employees.

For example, someone who has served in law enforcement with distinction in another state loses every year of that service toward their retirement if they join the New York State Police. It's a flaw that makes New York an uncompetitive destination for the very veteran officers who could immediately boost our ranks.

That is why we are advocating for the passage of legislation that would permit Troopers to purchase up to three years of pension credit for prior service performed with an accredited police agency to be used toward retirement.

When we have a qualified, veteran officer interested in joining our elite force, we should be doing everything we reasonably can to bring them aboard, not asking them to restart their

retirement clock at zero. This legislation is a high-impact way to bring experience into our agency at a time when we need it most.

There also are other steps to be taken to fix other inequities within our retirement system.

New York's military buy-back law is a vital recruitment and retention tool, allowing veterans to "buy" pension credit for their years of U.S. military service. However, the current cap must be increased. New York law currently limits these buybacks to three years, while neighboring states like New Jersey and Connecticut allow up to 10.

We are advocating for the passage of legislation cosponsored by Senator Scarcella-Spanton (S6840) to increase this limit to four years. Beginning to close the gap sends a clear message that New York recognizes the maturity and leadership veterans bring to the State Police. By aligning the cap with a standard four-year enlistment, we ensure that a veteran's previous service does not serve as a barrier to the next chapter in their public service.

We also support Tier VI reforms to rectify the glaring disparity in overtime equity. Currently, Tier VI members face a significantly lower cap on the amount of overtime that counts toward pension calculations compared to their Tier V counterparts. This disparity acts as a financial deterrent, discouraging junior members from taking on the grueling-yet-necessary shifts required to keep our state safe. When a Trooper works a double shift or deploys to a state emergency, their labor should be valued equally, regardless of their date of hire.

Closing this gap is essential to restoring morale and ensuring New York remains a competitive employer for the next generation of law enforcement.

In closing

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for your continued support of NYSTPBA members statewide.

Our union looks forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature during the budget process and the post-budget session on the best path forward for attracting the best and brightest new recruits to the State Police.

We look forward to a productive dialogue that results in real, tangible support for our ranks. Rectifying these inequities is the key to ending our recruitment and retention crisis and keeping our veteran officers on the job. At its core, this is a commitment to the public: A strong State Police means a safer New York, from the busiest city blocks to the most rural communities.

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ⁱ <https://www.timesunion.com/capitol/article/third-new-york-state-police-official-retiring-21231039.php>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/08/07/cop-watchers-auditors-you-tube-police/>