



NYS Public Employees Federation, AFL-CIO

Wayne Spence, President

**Senate Hearing Joint Committees on Civil Service
and Pensions**

Committee on Higher Education

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**Written testimony submitted by Ademola Oluwo,
Council Leader & Executive Board Member, Public
Employees Federation**

Good morning, my name is Ademola Oluwo and I am here today on behalf of my union, the Public Employees Federation (PEF) where I am both a Council Leader and Executive Board Member. I am also a state government employee at the Department of Financial Services. I have worked in public service for 32 years.

Thank you very much Senators Gounardes and Stavisky for the opportunity to testify today on the idea of establishing a “civil service pipeline” in which graduating students are trained for and recruited directly into public sector jobs.

As a long time public servant and a member of the public sector workforce for more than two decades, I’m certainly aware and agree that a public sector career with the State of New York can be rewarding, both financially and in the nature of the work, as well as offering job stability, security, flexibility and the ability to retire with a good pension in dignity.

PEF represents over 52,000 professional, scientific and technical employees in the state’s workforce. Many PEF members are reaching retirement age and we agree that as the state workforce ages out, it is important to attract young people and give them a reason to consider public sector employment.

For example, PEF represents over 9,000 public sector RNs who work in SUNY hospitals, OMH, OPWDD, OCFS and DOCCS facilities. Most folks have likely heard about the nursing shortage in the state and the need for patient staffing ratios. The RN recruitment & retention problem is even worse for public sector nurses due to low salaries compared to private hospitals and poor working conditions.

Specific RN pipeline programs targeted toward recruiting students out of high school and college that offers tuition

reimbursement benefits, loan forgiveness and the opportunity to pursue advanced nursing degrees at a lower cost could help attract more young people into the nursing profession. However, increasing public sector RN salaries and improving work conditions is essential in restoring nursing as a desirable career path.

While we welcome creative pipeline, ideas targeted to increase the ranks of the civil service and state workforce, we must go on record adamantly opposing any plan that would circumvent the civil service system. (Non-Competitive appointments should only be made when competitive exam is not practicable. Exempt placements should only be made when positions cannot be competitively tested, or a confidential relationship exists.)

Several years ago, Governor Cuomo implemented a program known as the Empire State Fellows Program. The program was essentially a two-year fellowship for young professionals and recent college graduates, where at the end of the two-year program the Fellows would be given the opportunity to serve as public policy leaders in New York State government without having to take a civil service exam.

We believed then and still believe now that programs such as the Empire State Fellows disregards the long-standing New York State constitutional safeguard that civil service positions will be made according to merit and fitness by way of a competitive exam. We've seen the negative impact this has on current, diligent, dedicated, competent, knowledgeable and hard-working employees' morale. Due to the complexity and evolving nature of the business, it takes an average of four years before anyone can have a basic understanding and knowledge of the work we do.

PEF represents dedicated, highly-skilled public servants who are proud to have earned their positions through the competitive process – free from the taint of cronyism and nepotism associated with non-competitive appointments.

While we welcome new, younger workers to our union ranks, any plan that circumvents the civil service system would further erode the very system we as public servants are supposed to be working under.

The leadership of PEF has looked at ways to bring young people into the state workforce by educating them about what it means to be a member of a union and the value unions bring to all the communities in New York State. We are the people who provide vital public services to all New Yorkers!

In closing, we would welcome partnering with you in your efforts to attract young people to the state workforce, as long as it is through the established civil service system.

Thank you again to the Chairs and Committee members for your time.