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State University of New York
Police Chiefs Association

State University
Of New York at:

- Albany Central Admin.
- Albany
- Alfred
- Binghamton
- Brockport
- Brooklyn
- Buffalo (Univ. Ctr.)
- Buffalo
- Canton
- Cobleskill
- Cortland
- Delhi
- Empire State
- Farmingdale
- Fredonia
- Geneseo
- Maritime
- Morrisville
- New Paltz
- Old Westbury
- Oneonta
- Optometry
- Oswego
- Plattsburgh
- Potsdam
- Purchase
- Stony Brook
- Syracuse (ESF)
- Syracuse (HSC)
- Utica/Rome

Good afternoon –

February 10, 2015

My name is Gerald W. Schoenle Jr., I am Chief of Police at the University of Buffalo, State University of New York. Today I am speaking with you as the President of the State University of New York Police Chiefs Association. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you regarding the disparity in pension benefits for New York State University Police compared to all other police agencies in the state, along with the significant problems this is causing our campuses regarding budgeting, recruitment and retention.

First, I would like to thank this distinguished committee for the continued support you have shown SUNY and particularly the University Police. As you know, State University of New York (SUNY) campuses are fortunate to have full service police departments to protect our campus communities. This model has been replicated by other states as a “best practice”.

I have been in law enforcement for thirty-seven years, working for 5 different agencies, and this year I will be starting my 10th year as the Chief of Police at the University of Buffalo. I have been an adjunct criminal justice professor at SUNY, attended the FBI National Academy and am currently an Accreditation Assessor and Administrative Studies Consultant for the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA), as well as for New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, Office of Public Safety. Currently, I am the North Atlantic Representative for the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), University Police Chiefs Section.

The NYS University Police consist of 590 sworn Police Officers at 28 campuses. Since 1999, our departments have been full service police agencies. Our police officers attend the same regional police academies as our counterparts in local law enforcement and many of the instructors come from the ranks of our University Police. In fact, a few of our campuses actually run the zone police academy that officers from the surrounding communities attend.

As an example of our structure, the University at Buffalo Police Department has 60 sworn police officers that consist of 43 patrol officers, 4 investigators, 1 investigative supervisor, 9 lieutenants, 5 dispatchers, a deputy chief, an assistant chief, and 1 chief. Our department started the push towards accreditation being the first university police department to be accredited in the state. Currently one third of SUNY Police Departments are accredited by the Division of Criminal Justice Services through its accreditation program. Many more are close or in the process and within the next 5 years, Chancellor Zimpher has agreed that all departments will be accredited.

Currently the major issues facing University Police include mental health issues, sexual assault prevention, training on Narcan to prevent heroin overdoses, and training officers and the campus



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community on emergency management, including active shooter situations. As you are aware we have made great progress as a professional police agency, especially considering we have only been a police agency for 15-years.

The NYS University Police are among the most professional police officers in NYS and recognized leaders among other police agencies. However, we are currently facing a major recruitment and retention hurdle because of a benefits package that is admittedly sub-par compared to other police agencies. We simply cannot compete in the hiring process.

Currently, the University Police Department is the only agency that is not in the State Police and Fire Retirement System. This means that our officers will have to work longer than our counterparts to receive similar benefits, and they do not receive the same disability benefits should they be injured on the job. Not surprising, our highly trained personnel are actively recruited by state and local police agencies who effectively offer a better benefits package.

When we lose an officer, the cost to SUNY now approaches \$85,000 to \$100,000. When an agency is short staffed this results in additional overtime costs to back fill for this officer until another officer is hired and trained. This process takes approximately one year. Larger departments in our System can absorb the shortages better but still suffer the budgetary and operational impact. However, our smaller campuses are already facing a staffing crisis that has the potential to affect public safety. SUNY Morrisville is short 4 officers which is a reduction of over 50 percent. They currently have only 3 officers of which, 2 have less than 3 years of experience. For my department, I already lost one officer this year due to benefit inequities. He contacted me last week noting he previously passed up two job opportunities, but after the recent pension bill was not approved, he felt compelled to go to a local police agency even though the pay and job was not as desirable to him personally.

The bottom line is, in recent years SUNY and the University Police Departments have worked hard to improve our agencies to meet the many challenges of modern day university policing. Our agency is recognized as a leader in our field and we are often looked to as a model for others. Students, faculty, and staff are fortunate to have their own responsive police department to protect our campus communities.

As you can see, we have made great strides in our efforts to make our campuses safe, friendly, welcoming environments for our students, faculty, staff and visitors. The one missing piece is our pension system. Each day we delay solving this problem it is costing NYS money and has the potential to compromise safety on our campuses. For these reasons, I strongly urge the Legislature to add legislation and funding to the 2015-16 budget to correct this situation this year.

Sincerely,

Gerald W. Schoenle Jr.