



Testimony on the FY 2026 Executive Budget Proposal Public Protection

The Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) proudly represents the firefighters employed by the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA). These highly trained professionals provide essential fire protection and emergency response services at three Air National Guard Bases (ANGBs) across the state:

- **Stratton Air National Guard Base (Scotia)**
- **Stewart Air National Guard Base (Newburgh)**
- **F.S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base (Westhampton)**

These firefighters play an essential role in supporting military missions while also responding to local and national emergencies. Their responsibilities are equivalent to those of municipal firefighters, yet they do not receive equivalent benefits, leading to severe recruitment and retention challenges.

Same Work, Different Benefits

Despite undergoing the same rigorous training as municipal firefighters and frequently assisting local fire departments, DMNA firefighters are denied equal benefits, including disability and illness presumptions, and importantly, pension benefits.

Currently, approximately **65% of DMNA firefighters are Tier 6** members, meaning they must **work until age 63 to receive full retirement** benefits. Given the physically demanding nature of their profession, requiring firefighters to serve until this age is both impractical and unsustainable. This plan is even more stark when compared to professional firefighters employed by municipalities, who are entitled to retire after 20 years with 50% of their final average salary.

Staffing Crisis and Financial Impact

The disparity in benefits has directly contributed to a staffing crisis across fire houses at these Air National Guard Bases:

- **Stratton ANGB:** Authorized for 27 firefighters but currently has only **16**, with **two additional retirements** expected in the coming months.
- **Total overtime costs** for understaffed firehouses at the three bases exceed **\$3 million annually**.

This shortage not only places an excessive burden on existing firefighters but also jeopardizes the Air National Guard's mission readiness. The U.S. Department of Defense mandates minimum staffing levels for firefighting personnel during aircraft movement, maintenance,

and flight operations. If recruitment and retention trends persist, the state risks being unable to staff these bases for these critical missions.

Budget Solution: A Cost-Effective 25-Year Retirement Plan

CSEA strongly supports the inclusion of legislation in the **FY2026 state budget** to establish a **25-year retirement plan (S.3655)** for DMNA firefighters. Under this plan, firefighters would be eligible for a pension equal to **50% of their final salary after 25 years of service**. This proposal aligns with past state actions, such as the 20-year retirement plan granted to Rochester International Airport firefighters in the 1990s (Chapter 228 of the Laws of 1996).

Cost Analysis and Savings Potential

According to estimates from the **New York State Comptroller**:

- **One-time past service cost:** \$2.17 million
- **Annual recurring cost:** \$280,000

However, these costs would be **partially or fully offset** by reduced overtime expenses and federal reimbursements:

- Reducing the current **\$3 million annual overtime burden** through improved recruitment and retention
- Leveraging **federal reimbursement** for a substantial portion of DMNA firefighter salaries and benefits

Conclusion

CSEA is committed to ensuring fair and equitable treatment for DMNA firefighters. We urge the **New York State Legislature** to include a **25-year retirement plan** in the FY2026 budget. By addressing this disparity, the state can:

- Enhance recruitment and retention efforts
- Reduce excessive overtime costs
- Ensure mission readiness at New York's Air National Guard Bases

Supporting this measure is a cost-effective investment in public safety, military preparedness, and workforce equity. We urge you to act now to provide these dedicated professionals with the benefits they deserve.

For more information:

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