

# POLICE BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION

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## of the NEW YORK STATE TROOPERS, INC.



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**CHARLES W. MURPHY**  
President

### **Testimony of Charles W. Murphy, President, New York State Troopers Police Benevolent Association**

**ANDREW C. DAVIS**  
First Vice President

### **Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the 2025-26 Executive Budget Proposal: Public Protection**

**JASON F. SHERIDAN**  
Second Vice President

**MARTIN T. McCLELLAN**  
Treasurer

**Thursday, February 13, 2025**

**JONATHAN P. BRODY**  
Secretary & Troop K Delegate

Chairpersons Krueger and Pretlow and distinguished members of the Legislature,

**MICHAEL P. CATANZARO**  
Troop A Delegate

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.

**PAUL R. SCOTT**  
Troop B Delegate

**ANDREW G. DELMAR**  
Troop C Delegate

**ANDREW R. LODGE**  
Troop D Delegate

On behalf of my members, I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony to respond to pertinent public safety proposals detailed in Gov. Hochul's Executive Budget. In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to outline our ongoing challenges with recruitment and retention and highlight priority areas we believe we can work with you on to achieve significant positive change on behalf of our members — the public servants who are called upon to protect and serve all New Yorkers.

**RICHARD I. CUNNINGHAM**  
Troop E Delegate

**PAUL J. CATRONA**  
Troop F Delegate

**THOMAS J. KUCHARK**  
Troop G & H Delegate

### **Recruitment and retention is our biggest challenge**

**PETER M. NUNZIATA**  
Troop L Delegate/Sgt. at Arms

For the past 108 years, the New York State Police has served as our state's most elite law enforcement agency. We've swiftly navigated changes over time, adapting to societal shifts and technological advancements. As a union, our primary responsibility is to ensure that our members are well-trained, prepared, protected, and supported so they are best equipped to keep New Yorkers safe every day.

**JOSHUA P. KAYE**  
Troop NYC Delegate

**ANTHONY NIGRO IV**  
Troop T Delegate

**JOSHUA A. PACIONI**  
NCO West Delegate

**JOSHUA J. TAYLOR**  
NCO East Delegate

**DANIEL J. HOLLANDS**  
Officers Delegate

**FREDERICK W. SCHEIDT**  
Retiree Liaison

As we have been tasked with taking on newfound responsibilities statewide — from patrolling the New York City subways, to helping cities like Buffalo dig out from deadly blizzards, to patrolling state parks on Long Island — our ranks have increased only modestly over the past two decades. Most alarming is that we are experiencing significant issues with retaining veteran Troopers and recruiting the next generation of highly qualified, dedicated public servants to back fill for those who leave state service. In addition to grappling with new day-to-day demands, changes in how the public views our profession have only exacerbated these issues.

Make no mistake: Recent recruitment and retirement trends signal significant trouble in the years ahead if we don't collectively take immediate steps to reverse them.

Annual retirement rates have skyrocketed. In the past 25 years, 2006 was the lowest single year for Trooper retirements, with only 49 leaving the force. Last year, by contrast, 304 Troopers retired, a whopping 520% increase. Accounting for additional retirements among State Police Investigators, we lost 470 veterans of the force in 2024, the greatest single-year decrease in personnel in recent memory.

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. Even with a rebound to more than 12,000 applicants for classes in 2024 and early 2025 — buoyed by the state opening a new academy at the former Cazenovia College to double the number of classes per year to four — we are still lacking enough graduates to make up for the previous years' deficits.

For example, the Academy class that just graduated Feb. 6 began with only 224 of the 250 total potential slots filled. In the end, 176 recruits graduated. It should be noted that this will be the final class to graduate from the Cazenovia facility, after the state curiously decided the additional space — and the significant investment made to retrofit it for this specific use — is suddenly no longer needed, despite clear staffing trends.

With the state planning to go back to running only two academy classes per year, if retirement and graduation trends hold, we will not be able to back-fill retirements — to say nothing of other separations of service — fast enough to sufficiently maintain our ranks to ensure the safety of both our members and the public at large.

As alarming as that is, these numbers tell only a part of the story. PBA members face a crisis of low morale that threatens to only further challenge any retention and recruitment efforts. In the agency's first-ever workplace climate survey last year, Troopers reported issues ranging from feeling unsafe in their patrol cars to lacking the resources and equipment they need to do their jobs efficiently.

Others identified a lack of transparency and communication around the promotional process and an overall disconnect between management and Troopers when it comes to the increasing demands of the job driven by shifting public attitudes towards policing and technological advances.

In one particularly illuminating survey response, a Trooper wrote, "Allowing the bosses to see how we operate on a daily basis, most often at staffing minimums, would be eye-opening for a lot of them and would probably allow for change that would benefit our agency as a whole."

This is the underlying sentiment that leads to burnout and is forcing Troopers out of the profession earlier and at higher rates than ever before. We are losing our most experienced members and their

institutional memory that is critical to pass on to the next generation. Ultimately, an understaffed State Police facing a crisis of low morale puts my members unnecessarily at risk and undermines our mission to protect and serve. We're facing an untenable situation that requires bold and swift action to address.

### **The Governor's public safety proposals need more analysis**

Gov. Hochul's focus on public safety is appropriate for this moment when crime consistently ranks as a top concern for New Yorkers statewide.

We support the Governor's proposals to increase funding for crime analysis centers and create the New York State Crime Analysis and Joint Special Operations Command Headquarters that will unite over 100 local, state, and federal agencies in effort to strengthen public safety across the state.

However, other proposals require further discussion and analysis, given the staffing challenges we have outlined above. That notably includes a proposed \$8 million allocation to expand the State Police's presence on the Canadian border.

Our members are dedicated public servants who go where they are called upon, whether it's to help police the subways or to serve on the Northern border. But it is essential that any redeployments are executed in a fair and equitable manner and in recognition of the stresses we face. Troopers must not be left under-resourced in other parts of the state and asked to do more with less. The fatal shooting of a U.S. Border Patrol agent near the Canadian border in January only underscores the heightened risks of expanded duties during this uncertain time.

We also have concerns about the Governor's proposal to make the state's Automated Work Zone Speed Enforcement program permanent. To be clear, work zone safety is essential, and we support tools that help us protect work crews and the Troopers patrolling these areas. But any replacement or erosion of Troopers physically enforcing highway safety, replaced by speed cameras only, creates a false sense of security. Again, if we can address underlying recruitment and retention issues to expand our ranks, we can ensure we have proper staffing that is *augmented* by new tools — a best-of-both-worlds solution for both our members and the public they serve.

Lastly, in an attempt to alleviate some staffing pressures, Gov. Hochul has proposed raising the New York State Police retirement age to 63 and removing the 35-year-old maximum recruitment age restriction for all law enforcement agencies.

While we appreciate that the Governor has directly recognized the challenges we face — both in her budget and in negotiating a new contract with our union last year — these changes are unlikely to make a significant enough impact to alleviate our recruitment and retention crises.

The State Police previously raised its recruitment age to 35, yet the average age of new recruits entering the Academy still hovered at 26 in 2024. Similarly, there already are so few Troopers who are aging out of the force annually (just three in 2024 — and only 101 total since 2000), it's unclear how impactful raising the retirement age to 63 years old truly will be in alleviating the pressures on rank-and-file members out on the road.

We believe there are more effective approaches that cut to some of the root issues that make it challenging to recruit and retain dedicated public servants. We've outlined some of our proposals below.

## **Additional solutions**

### *Critical incident leave policy legislation*

On the retention side, reinforcing on-the-job supports — including mental health supports — for Troopers is one essential area of focus. The Governor's recently released mental health needs assessment of all first responders underscores — yet again — the significant level of job-related stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression faced by members of our profession. We appreciate that the Governor undertook this first-of-its-kind assessment and recognizes the need to address this important issue for law enforcement as well as those in the fire and emergency medical, communications, and management services.

Still, under current state policy, Troopers who are involved in traumatic incidents, including justified uses of force, are in many cases eligible to be back on the road the next day. Enacting a critical incident leave policy for State Police is essential for ensuring those who need time to process extreme job-related stress can do so without stigma or economic worry.

As noted earlier, New York already is leading the nation when it comes to addressing mental health challenges. Critical incident leave is a natural extension of the state's \$1 billion multi-year plan to tackle mental health issues statewide and of a recent law to provide workers' compensation benefits for extraordinary work-related stress.

New legislation creating a critical incident leave policy for State Police introduced in January (S2681) would only further make New York a national model. Currently, only Kentucky and Texas have any sort of statewide critical incident leave standard, with few safeguards that ensure adequate leave is offered by individual departments that opt in. By contrast, this legislation would provide up to 30 days of leave for a Trooper whose official actions directly caused serious physical injury or death of another person, and up to 15 days of leave for other Troopers involved in such a critical incident. This would lay down a clear mandate for other state police forces nationwide to follow suit, and for local law enforcement agencies across New York state to model themselves after the State Police, which has long led the way in professionalism and high standards.

State Troopers are highly trained in how to manage stressful situations with aplomb, diffuse tension, and cope with the aftereffects. Not all Troopers may need to take advantage of critical incident leave or utilize the full time allowed as proposed under S2681. But a robust policy would be an extra layer of protection for those who need time to work through their coping mechanisms so they can give their all when they return to the road.

### *Property tax relief and pension credit reforms*

Ongoing recognition of our members' public service is equally important for retention. PBA members aren't immune from the state's mounting affordability crisis, which the Governor has rightly made a focus of her 2025 agenda. To help offset rising costs, we're calling for legislation to enact property tax

relief for active-duty police officers that would provide parity with other first responders, including EMTs and volunteer firefighters, who currently are eligible for tax credits based on their service.

Ensuring New York provides for public servants in retirement is also critical for recruiting highly qualified, well-trained candidates who have already proven their dedication to serving the public.

Four bills introduced during the last legislative session should be re-introduced and taken up in 2025. They include legislation

- to allow former out-of-state police officers who join the State Police to purchase up to three years of pension credit in recognition of their service;
- to allow military veterans to purchase an additional year of pension credit (up to four years total) in recognition of their service;
- to allow public employees with volunteer fire or emergency service to purchase up to three years total of pension credit; and
- to establish a deferred retirement option program (DROP) that would help keep experienced Troopers on the job past the minimum number of years of service needed to retire.

In addition, given that military service has long been a pipeline to a career in law enforcement, active legislation (A4057) that would provide parity for members of the National Guard to purchase pension credits like those with active-duty military service is yet another important step in the right direction.

Taken together, this package is about ensuring that the sacrifices made by Troopers who face significant stress throughout their careers do not go unnoticed and are fairly compensated. This sends a message to both the current workforce and prospective recruits that New York state prioritizes and rewards public service.

### **In closing**

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

The PBA looks forward to working with the Governor and the state Legislature during the budget process and the post-budget session on the best path forward for attracting the best and brightest New Yorkers to the State Police. We are confident that through a collaborative process, we can reach agreement on policies that fairly recognize our members' public service in an effort to retain them and attract new recruits to bolster our ranks. In the end, a well-resourced, high-morale State Police is critical to protecting all New Yorkers and ensuring they feel safe in every corner of this state.