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To: Members of the Joint Budget Sub-Committee on Higher Education

From: The PBA of NYS

Re: Budget Testimony on the Need for SUNY Police Pension Parity

Date: February 13, 2015

The Police Benevolent Association of New York State (PBA of NYS) is the certified collective bargaining representative of the approximately 1,200 members of the New York State Agency Police Services Unit.

The PBA of NYS submits this testimony requesting that the Legislature include S.3221 (Robach) / A. 4519 (Abbate) and the appropriate funding in the 2015-16 budget. This legislation would allow State University Police Officers the option of transferring into the New York State Police & Fire Retirement System (P&F) from the New York State Employees Retirees System (ERS). 563 police departments have a police pension and only one, the University Police Department, does not.

With the passage of the Tier 6 retirement bill of 2011, all newly hired State University Police Officers are required to work until age 63. This would require a newly hired 21-year-old State University Police Officer to work 42 years as a police officer; twice as long as officers in other departments and into his or her sixties servicing a community of students in their teens and early twenties. All other police officers in the P&F were exempted from this Tier 6 change.

Tier 6 also changed death benefits and disability benefits for SUNY Police Officers, alone. It is indefensible and highly offensive to assign inferior death and disability benefits to one department of police officers in New York State.

The State clearly believes in the strength and ability of our men and women. In recent years you've added many new responsibilities to the force including the creation of Start-Up New York. It is also important, as we invite world-wide enterprise to further develop our campuses into state-of-the-art business and technology hubs, that we maintain the strongest, most effective and capable police force.



Other new responsibilities include an increased role in fighting the heroin epidemic, new sexual assault reporting measures and rules, mandatory active shooter training and the deployment of officers to respond to natural disasters.

Pension disparity between University Police and other police agencies has created a serious turnover and stability issue for the State University System. It is a simple fact that campuses are much safer with a stable police force. SUNY's officers are highly and uniquely trained for their environment.

We strive for diversity in our ranks so their force reflects the population they serve. However, young State University Police Officers are receiving training and experience at SUNY, only to leave that department for a different state or local police agency offering the P&F plan.

The fact is *many* police departments are seeking qualified women and minority officers and SUNY police officers are often targeted for recruitment by municipalities because they are well trained and disgruntled by the lack of retirement parity with their fellow officers.

We have become the training ground for other departments and SUNY is eating the cost. It is a ridiculous waste of resources and, as the economy improves, municipal police agencies are seeing their hiring budgets increase. SUNY Police Chiefs have indicated that they expect to see the number of resignations from SUNY police officers to increase. After all, 95% of municipal police departments offer a 20 year plan with appropriate disability benefits and the remaining 5% offer a 25 year plan.

Attrition rates on some campuses top 100%. The situation has gotten so bad that SUNY administration officials are using the term 'critical' to describe police staffing. Those same officials estimate that it costs between \$85,000 and \$100,000 to properly recruit and train a police officer for duty, and this figure does not include the intangible cost of losing continuity and experience. According to SUNY officials, the system has lost well over \$5 million since 2008 and they project to lose another \$10 million in the next five years.

Additionally, a recent survey found that only about half of State University Police Officers are expected to opt into the P&F retirement system, likely reducing the actual cost to less than \$1 million in annual contributions. The vast majority of those who would transfer are in Tier 6.

It is significant that this issue has long received the support of both labor and management, namely SUNY and the Police Benevolent Association of New York State. Chancellor Zimpher's own written budget testimony includes the need for pension equity, and calls on the legislature to help

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her system compete with other police entities. Both sides recognize the problems the SUNY pension disparity causes with police morale, campus safety, and ultimately disruptions and fiscal implications caused by turnover.

New York State is on a path to making our State University system not only a leader in academics, but also a leader in economic development. We must ensure that those tasked with protecting the students, faculty, visitors and businesses located on and around our campuses are the best, most well trained and experienced force that they can be.

The inclusion of parity legislation for SUNY police officers in the budget would put an end to an enormous amount of fiscal waste at an already under-funded SUNY system. For all of the above-stated reasons, I strongly urges you to include this legislation in an Article VII budget bill and add the appropriate funding to your 2015-16 Executive Budget.

