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**2025 Joint Legislative  
Budget Hearing Testimony  
Higher Education**

**Submitted on Behalf of the  
New York State University Police  
Officers, Investigators and Lieutenants Benevolent Associations**

**By: Chris Lacosse, Officers Director**

**State Job Title: State University Police Officer  
State Job Location: SUNY Albany**

**Contact Information**

Email: [pbaadmin@pbanys.org](mailto:pbaadmin@pbanys.org)

Office Phone: 518-433-5472

**February 25, 2025**

Good morning, my name is Chris Lacosse. I am the PBA of New York State director representing close to 400 New York State University Police Officers serving within the State University of New York system. I have had the honor of serving as a New York State University Police Officer for 21 and a half years all of which have been at SUNY Albany.

The New York State University Police System is an oddity among New York 's professional police agencies, especially statewide law enforcement agencies, in that we are the only one that has a decentralized structure. Under the current State Education Law each state university and college is its own hiring entity. While there is a State University Police Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner in Albany at System Administration, they do not direct or command law enforcement efforts on our dozens of campuses. Rather, they can only act as a conduit for information to and from the individual campus chiefs.

Each of our 29 university and college police departments, with a few exceptions, has at least one Chief and at least one assistant or deputy chief. In the case of the larger departments there are multiple chiefs of varying levels.

As we go down the agency hierarchy, we have the classified titles of University Police Officer 1, what would commonly be known as a patrol or police officer; and University Police Officer 2 which are our first line supervisors and are known within the system as lieutenants. We also have university police investigators whose title is self-explanatory. With that brief explanation out of the way we can delve into the heart of the matter.

The lack of centralization is inefficient and deprives some campuses of critical law enforcement resources. The lack of investigators on all campuses is a prime example of where centralization would be very useful. When officers take a criminal report, they handle the entire case beginning to end. While this may work for the majority of criminal cases our University Police Officers encounter, there are cases that are very time consuming and tedious. Without dedicated investigators, our patrol officers are sidelined and not in the field protecting our campuses.

If the State University Police system was centralized and further regionalized like all other statewide law enforcement agencies a department would be able to retask resources from one campus to another as necessary. An added benefit would be the ability to standardize responses for dynamic and sensitive situations occurring on numerous campuses such as the Pro Palestinian rallies many universities witnessed last year. At this time the only thing an individual campus agency can do is ask for assistance from other agencies in the system. These other agencies are under no obligation to assist each other - it is strictly voluntary.

There is a pressing need to standardize operating rules and procedures across the State University Police system. Currently, each agency has its own standard operating procedures for how that particular agency works. At this time, we have 29 police departments with 29 different sets of rules including but not limited to sexual assault response, dealing with persons in crisis, and domestic violence. So, while my agency in Albany does one thing for a sexual assault, SUNY Plattsburgh or Oneonta can and most likely do have different rules for responding.

There is no reason why an officer from one department should document a case or do anything different than another officer at a department 50 miles down the road. One set of rules, policies, and procedures for all New York State University Police Officers to follow just makes sense in every aspect of the word.

To achieve this, we need to develop and implement a statewide accreditation system implemented by the Division of Criminal Justice Services to legitimize professional standards for State University Police departments. Such an accreditation system would be comprised of 130 standards including, but not limited to, fiscal management, training requirements, patrol functions, and training for supervision. Former Chancellor Nancy Zimpher had directed all police departments within SUNY to be accredited by the end of 2020. Because of the bureaucracy and internal machinations of SUNY this goal has not been achieved.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of centralization are the financial benefits of one central purchasing entity. Great fiscal and operational inefficiencies are caused by not being able to purchase the same equipment across the system. Currently, we are having a severe issue purchasing uniforms and patrol vehicles. Unless we order our particular daily uniforms in sufficiently large numbers, our supplier will not make them anymore. Under a centralized system, the funding allocation and streamlined ordering could overcome this hurdle and allow the proper equipping of our officers.

Likewise, every department has a different fleet of patrol vehicles all purchased from different vendors. This leads to our patrol cars having a different paint scheme depending on the vendor, and the equipment within the patrol car is of differing models and manufacture. The body cameras we use are different – assuming the agency in question issues body cameras. A 2019 petition from SUNY students called for all University Police Officers to be equipped with body cameras – more than five years later we have not met that call. As stewards of the taxpayers' money, we need to adopt centralization for the economy of scale it provides.

Last, and certainly not least, is the legitimacy and retention benefits provided by a centralized agency with uniform standards.

Tackling legitimacy first, as previously stated, there are very few rungs to the SUNY Police career ladder. Recently, a University Police Officer 3 (Captain) has been added to the ranks. However, agencies are under no obligation to have a captain's position. Unless we become centralized, only a select few departments will consider and implement this title.

One of the biggest distinctions between University Police Departments, and nearly every other law enforcement agency in the state, is they all have a known and widely accepted rank structure which lends to their legitimacy in the eyes of law enforcement professional. A clear rank structure and path to advancement encourages longevity within the agency. We want our officers to begin and end their careers as University Police Officers – not transfer to agencies with a more defined career path. Sadly, at this time, SUNY policing is a never-ending revolving door – a mere training ground for outside agencies that costs the state of New York millions of dollars a year.

While this evolution would not take place overnight, it holds immeasurable promise both financially and operationally for the future of State University Policing. As I am in the twilight of my policing career, I would be honored to be one of the people that in my own small way helps bring this idea to fruition and I hope you will join us in blazing a new path for the police officers who protect our New York State universities and campus communities. I thank you for your time and endless advocacy of our legislative goals.