

New York State Police Investigators Association (NYSPIA) Testimony

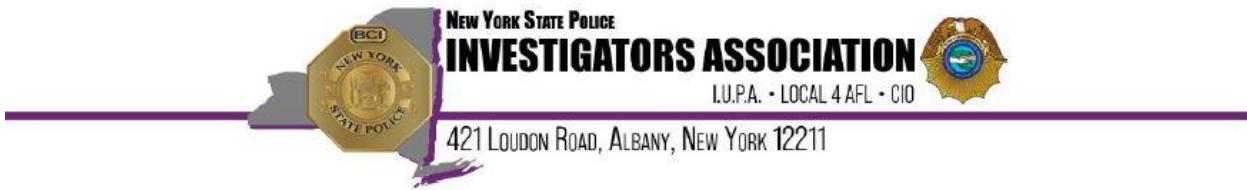
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing

Public Protection

February 12, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger, Pretlow and members of the New York State Senate and Assembly. My name is Kurt Labuda, and I am a Senior Investigator with the New York State Police. I am also the elected President of the New York State Police Investigators Association (NYSPIA). Our union represents approximately 1,300 men and women who serve as active State Police Senior Investigators and Investigators, located strategically throughout New York State. Our members are assigned to the Bureau of Criminal Investigations (BCI) and handle the most serious crimes committed in our communities across the state. These include, but are not limited to, murders, rapes, robberies, child abuse, kidnappings, and human trafficking. We also deal with the most highly specialized and dynamic assignments including counterterrorism, gang and undercover narcotic investigations, forensic (physical and electronic) investigations, and dignitary protection. More recently our members investigated and quickly solved a tragic murder which was covered nationally - the Amber alert and murder of 9-year-old Melina Frattolin by her father Luciano Frattolin from Canada.

Each one of our BCI members began their career as a New York State Police uniform Trooper. The hiring process to become a NY State Trooper is difficult, intrusive, and competitive. The process requires the candidate to take a written test, psychological test, physical fitness test, eye and hearing exam, drug test, questionnaire, and an extensive background investigation before completing a 6-month residential Academy in Albany, NY. For this, the New York State Police are one of the premier Law Enforcement agencies in the country. The NYSPIA membership is comprised of carefully selected, experienced uniform



Troopers that represent the very best of our agency. Their performance must stand out amongst their peers, and they must demonstrate intelligence, integrity, and maturity to investigate the complex crimes mentioned above.

The New York State Police, as an agency, continues to be highly adaptable and continues to take a leadership role in the law enforcement community, while providing the highest quality law enforcement services to the citizens of New York State. To maintain this level of service, I have detailed a few items that deserve recognition and consideration in the pending budget.

One of our highest priorities continues to be the recruitment of new Troopers and retention of our members. Like most law enforcement agencies across the country, we're struggling with recruitment and retention. With the challenges facing recruitment, the NYSP exams are currently being offered on a rolling basis with approximately 38,900 taking the exam over the past three years. There are many challenges facing recruitment including the pension restrictions placed on us from Tier 5 & Tier 6 Legislation, Discovery Laws, Criminal Justice reform, and other rigorous requirements. While the recruitment of qualified applicants remains a challenge, we continue to lose our most experienced members at an alarming rate. The average years in service for retirement has recently dropped from 26 to 22 years. The Governor's recent State of the State Address expressed her commitment to combat organized crime, cracking down on auto fraud, cracking down of 3D printed firearms, expansion of crime analysis centers, investing in crime labs, and advancement in AI Legislation. Although we support the Governor's initiatives, these added responsibilities, in addition to the increase in Red Flag cases and retail theft details, have substantially increased the workload of BCI. With most BCI backroom units and special details in the State running at an understaffed level, we ask the Legislature to continue to support the State Police Academy recruitment classes to help us replenish the ranks and also take the steps necessary to retain our most experienced members. The recruitment classes will allow the Division of the State Police the ability to promote qualified uniform Troopers to fill our BCI ranks.



This session, we encourage the Governor and Legislature to continue to make necessary changes to Tier 5 and Tier 6. Our members fully support budget language that will lower the employee contribution threshold as well as increasing the current 15% cap on our overtime when calculating our final average salary. As mentioned, the retention of NY State Troopers has decreased drastically causing an irreplaceable void in experienced and seasoned BCI members. The added stress and responsibility from the increased responsibilities and workload have resulted in our members retiring on average of four years earlier than in the past. It is critical that there be an incentive to keep experienced BCI members from retiring earlier than in the past. The DROP legislation is one way to address this problem.

There are a number of proposals in the Executive Budget that NYSPIA supports, including:

- Establishing a state police critical incident leave policy that will provide members paid leave if in the course of their official duties, a police officer takes a justifiable action that causes death or serious injury of another person.
- Additional restrictions on the manufacturing of “ghost guns,” including new criminal penalties for the sale, possession or distribution of these weapons.
- New criminal penalties for the unlawful use of drones, including a new drone registry and reporting requirements to the state police, as well as drone-related funding to the state police.

We also believe that the Legislature should continue to fund the mental and physical wellness programs for the NY State Police through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). As the mental and physical wellness of our members is a concern, New York State should also pass legislation that supports the longevity and security of senior BCI members. It is also imperative that we continue to secure funding for the expansion of crime analysis centers, crime labs, and advancement in AI investigations. These specialty details are responsible for some of the most sensitive and complex investigations. Their access to training and equipment is necessary for them to complete their investigations in a timely, complete, and professional manner.



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Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to bring some of these issues to your attention on behalf of my membership. Your assistance with the budget concerns mentioned today will help us to maintain the highest level of professionalism that the citizens of this great state expect and deserve from the New York State Police. I am confident that you will share the same concerns that we hold today while making decisions related to the NYS Budget.