



Testimony on the FY 2027 Executive Budget Proposal Public Protection

The Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) represents public employees who provide critical services across New York State, often in high-stress and high-risk environments. As the State considers proposals in the FY 2027 Budget, it is essential measures are included to strengthen workplace safety, support fair compensation, and ensure retirement security for the workers who keep our communities safe and our institutions operating.

- CSEA **supports ELFA Part J** to authorize the use of body scanners in OCFS youth facilities. CSEA recommends **amending** the proposal to include certain facilities operated by OMH and OPWDD, in addition to OCFS.
- CSEA **supports the inclusion** of legislation (**S.7635/A.9162**) to establish an optional **25-year retirement plan** for 911 and Emergency Dispatchers.
- CSEA **supports the inclusion** of legislation (**S.8207/A.8801 of 2024**) to allow Court Officers and Peace Officers employed by the Uniformed Court System to retire **at age 55 with 30 years** of service.

ELFA Part J – Body Scanners in OCFS Facilities

The increased presence of weapons and other contraband in OCFS, OMH, and OPWDD facilities has contributed to a rise in assaults and other serious safety incidents affecting staff, clients, patients, and residents. In fact, these agencies have the **highest rates of workers' compensation incidents** among all state agencies after DOCCS. These facilities operate in congregate environments where even a single prohibited item can jeopardize the safety and stability of the entire setting. While CSEA supports Governor Hochul's proposal to authorize the use of body scanners in OCFS Youth Detention and Justice Facilities, certain OMH and OPWDD facilities operate under similar conditions and face the same safety concerns.

OCFS Youth Detention and Justice Facilities are congregate settings with frequent movement in and out of the facility due to admissions, transfers, visitation, staff shift change, and court appearances. Each point of entry presents a potential opportunity for contraband to be introduced. In environments where staff and youth live, work, and participate in programming in close quarters, preventing the introduction of weapons and other prohibited items is essential to maintaining order and protecting everyone inside the facility.

Certain OMH and OPWDD facilities share these same operational realities. For example, OMH forensic facilities are secure settings for justice-involved individuals who require mental health treatment, and certain OPWDD facilities operate secure units that

handle court-ordered admissions for competency restoration. As in OCFS facilities, the introduction of contraband in these environments can quickly escalate into broader safety concerns. Expanding the use of body scanners to OCFS, OMH, and OPWDD facilities would help safeguard staff and the individuals receiving care in these settings.

Enhanced Pension for 911 and Emergency Dispatchers

Emergency dispatchers are the first point of contact in moments of crisis. They answer 911 calls, assess rapidly evolving situations, provide life-saving instructions to callers, and coordinate police, fire, and emergency medical responses in real time. Dispatchers must remain calm and decisive while handling calls involving violence, medical emergencies, accidents, and fatalities, often listening to traumatic events unfold live and without knowing the outcome. Their work requires split-second judgment, constant multitasking, and absolute accuracy, as a single error can have life-or-death consequences for both the public and responding personnel.

The extremely fast-paced, stressful environments inherent to this work take a significant toll on employees' well-being. In fact, studies show that roughly **one in five** emergency dispatchers report symptoms of PTSD, and approximately **one in four** report depression. New York State has long recognized that prolonged exposure to high-stress emergency response work is harmful, which is why police officers and firefighters are permitted to retire after 20 years of service. Emergency dispatchers are exposed to many of the same traumatic stressors over the course of their careers yet are often required to work more than 30 years before becoming eligible for retirement.

Working in these conditions for more than 30 years is untenable. The existing retirement plan, paired with immense trauma and stressors inherent to this work, makes it difficult to recruit and retain qualified emergency dispatchers. Providing these workers with the ability to retire after 25 years of service would recognize the sacrifices made by these first responders, ensure the retirement system reflects the demanding nature of their work, and strengthen recruitment and retention across the workforce.

Fair Retirement for Court Officers and Peace Officers

Uniformed court officers and peace officers play an essential role in the daily operation of New York State's court system. They are responsible for maintaining order in court facilities, protecting judges and court staff, ensuring the safety of attorneys, defendants, jurors, and the public, and securely transporting defendants within courthouses. Their work routinely places them in volatile situations, including emotionally charged proceedings and individuals in crisis, requiring constant vigilance and rapid response to ensure safety.

Despite the law enforcement nature of their duties, court officers are not afforded the same retirement benefits as other law enforcement personnel. Tier 6 court officers must work until age 63 or face significant pension penalties, while many other law enforcement officers are eligible to retire after 20 years of service. This disparity undermines recruitment and retention efforts and has real operational consequences. Courts cannot function without court officers present; a judge cannot preside over proceedings without an officer in the courtroom, and

officers are required to move defendants safely throughout court facilities. Persistent staffing shortages therefore directly impede the court system's ability to hear cases and administer justice efficiently.

The Unified Court System has acknowledged these challenges and, in 2025, advanced legislation to allow court officers and peace officers employed by UCS to retire at age 55 with 30 years of service. Including this proposal in the FY 2027 State Budget would be an important step toward achieving parity with other law enforcement personnel, strengthening recruitment and retention, and ensuring the safe, efficient, and continuous operation of New York's courts.

Conclusion

New York's public employees carry out demanding responsibilities every day in service to our communities. The State budget should reflect a clear commitment to supporting these workers through policies that promote safety, fairness, and long-term stability in the workforce. CSEA urges the Legislature and the Governor to prioritize measures that strengthen recruitment and retention, protect employees on the job, and ensure that public institutions can continue to operate effectively for the people of New York.

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