



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

1 Centre Street, 19th floor
New York, NY 10007
(212) 669-8300 p (212) 669-4306 f
www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov

Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Testimony on Behalf of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association
of the City of New York, Inc.
Public Employment Relations Board Arbitration Panel
May 7, 2015**

My testimony today echoes many of the concerns I raised at the 2007 Public Employment Relations Board Arbitration Panel. But there are important new points to make in regard to worsening salary disparities, reduced benefits, increased job demands and hazards, and mounting recruitment and retention challenges for New York City police officers.

1. Perspective and demographics

When I testified in 2007 it was from the perspective of an elected official—a City Council member representing District 6—as well as a community resident and a family person.

As Manhattan Borough President, I have responsibilities to a borough of 1.6 million residents, and commuters and tourists who bump the daily population up to more than 3 million. Thus I speak today with no less conviction than in 2007, but from the standpoint of a greater stakeholder in the safety and well-being of the people of Manhattan.

All of them rely on the safety and security provided by the NYPD, and one major change since my last testimony has been the steady drop in crime. As Borough President, I am acutely aware of how the record low crime rates achieved by the NYPD have helped spur tourism, economic growth, new business ventures, recreational options and property values.

The United Nations and other global institutions that call Manhattan home also draw large international and national audiences, and these events—along with parades, demonstrations, marathons, and street fairs—present special security challenges, and as we know all too well New York is in the crosshairs of terrorism. For all these reasons the challenges faced by the NYPD in safeguarding New York dwarf those of other U.S. cities.

2. NYC police are not adequately compensated

If asked how they thought NYC police officers' salaries and benefits stacked up against those of the Port Authority police and departments in neighboring jurisdictions, most

people—residents and tourists alike—would expect the NYPD, with its unique responsibilities and challenges, to be highly compensated.

And, sadly, they'd be wrong.

Our officers are paid less than many of their peers, and the gap is widening. We must take steps now to catch up. It can be done, and it must become a top political and budget priority.

At the end of the two-year contract period in 2012, NYPD officers rank last in basic maximum and 20-year average salaries compared to nearby jurisdictions—the counties of Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester; the cities of Yonkers, Newark, Elizabeth, and Jersey City; and the Port Authority, the New York State Troopers, and the Metropolitan Transit Authority police.

When I last testified, the starting salary for NYC police officers was \$25,100; now it is \$41,974. But the salary after 5.5 years is only \$76,488—the LOWEST among nearby jurisdictions.

Although the very low starting salary set in 2007 has been addressed somewhat, we still have a serious problem of lagging salaries at the 5.5-year mark—the very point at which an officer's value to the city begins to dramatically increase due to greater experience. For that experience we are paying our best officers \$16,513 below average—and “average” is what the Port Authority officers earn. Many in other local jurisdictions earn more.

3. Low pay is disincentive to a policing career

I share the NYPD's concern about recruiting and retaining the best people. But to attract the best talent and retain it significant increases are both merited and required, and this continuing loss of well-trained, experienced officers to other departments is harmful not only to the NYPD but to the well-being of the city.

Recruitment has also suffered. The number of applicants taking the NYPD exam in 2014 was down almost 18% from 2013, and, as I understand it, has been steadily declining since 1996. Fortunately, once recruits enter the Academy they stay; 1,500 graduate from every Academy class. Unfortunately, as noted above, many do not intend to remain with the force throughout their career due to their starting salaries and low incremental pay.

When addressing inadequate compensation for officers, one often hears the argument that many people have very tough jobs in the city— school principals, firefighters, sanitation workers, DHS caseworkers all have very stressful and demanding jobs. The police officer is different, however, because he or she is on the street where all the problems funnel down. In tense and often dangerous situations of the kind they face every day, there's no one to whom an officer can defer responsibility.

Reduced pensions

Substantially reduced pension benefits for officers hired on or after July 1, 2009 is another reason officers are resigning or not signing up.

We know that police work is a career that runs in families. Brian Moore, the 25-year-old officer fatally shot in Queens last weekend came from a police family; not only his father, Raymond, but his uncle and cousin also wore the uniform.

It is a small irony of Officer Moore's death that he had attended a Long Island public high school whose athletic field was named for Edward R. Byrne, another alumnus who followed his father into the NYPD and was fatally shot on duty, also in Queens, as a 22-year-old rookie in 1988.

The equity of the pension system matters because if courageous young men and women cannot expect benefits like those received by their NYPD parents, the tradition of multi-generational police families- one of the backbones of the Department, may be lost.

Police can't afford to live here

It is deeply disheartening that most police officers cannot afford to raise a family in the borough they risk their lives to protect. That this is now one of the most expensive cities in the world makes the challenge to affordable housing more difficult, but it should not be an excuse. We need to overcome a more basic problem in attitude- a kind of feudal mentality where officers, and other city employees, must labor on behalf of people whom they can't afford to live among and are much better off economically than they are.

I would like police officers to be able to afford to live in the city, and especially in the boroughs that they serve. We want our officers to be coming from the communities where they grew up—the communities they know intimately, understand, respect, and continue to care about.

Risk to diversity gains

Another big change since I last testified is the look of the force: we have more officers who are black, Latino, Asian, and of other ethnicities, as well as many more women in uniform. These officers now number close to half the force and their number and proportion are increasing. We're getting residents from East Harlem and Jackson Heights and Chinatown and Bed-Stuy into the force, and that's going to be very good for our increasingly diverse communities.

We don't want to lose this momentum, and we want to begin traditions of service within new ethnic groups and communities of color. But uncompetitive salaries and reduced benefits threaten this new diversity, and they implicate wider societal issues of gender and racial equality in compensation. It would be tragic to impair growing lineages of police service before they've had a chance to take root because we were short-sighted about nurturing them.

4. The many challenges of policing in NYC

There are other challenges to ensuring a competitive and robust pool of applicants from which to hire, and who can be retained. New recruits are expected to carry out the same duties as their predecessors in arguably more complex and demanding times, under greater scrutiny, with changed performance measures, new technologies, and the high expectations for increased public safety created by a long, national and local decline in crime rates.

Crime-fighting

Despite stronger State gun laws, the “Iron Pipeline” of guns from Pennsylvania and the Southern States continues to fill our neighborhoods with illegal firearms. Stolen pistols from Georgia were responsible for the deaths of Officer Moore and of Officers Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos last December, and lucrative firearms trafficking and gang activity continue to frustrate the NYPD’s efforts to get guns off the street and place officers in increased danger every day and night. We are also in the midst of another wave of drug addiction and the organized and street crime that goes with it, as well as the destruction of families by drug addiction, leading to new cycles of youth delinquency, crime, and gang affiliation.

The Department also faces new and growing challenges in combatting terrorist cells, cybercrime and cyberterrorism, identity theft, sexual predation on the internet, and other types of computer crime. These challenges not only require new strategies, ever-more sophisticated and costly resources, but also the recruitment and training of individuals with new skills.

Social issues

One of the most difficult roles for a police officer is intervening in family disputes and functioning as a front-line social worker. I know from personal experience that NYPD has worked closely for many years with the Administration for Children Services, and that when violent or emotionally disturbed individuals are in crisis it is the police who are called. Such fraught situations have led to tragic outcomes, and have certainly exposed officers to many emotionally wrenching encounters with demented individuals and abused or murdered children.

Similar roles are played by officers when they intervene in housing disputes, neighborhood quarrels, and many other so-called “quality of life” incidents such as noise issues, street vendor conflicts, bike riding infractions, and a host of others. Untangling the boundaries of lawful behavior in such situations is difficult, and often places officers in uncharted territory where over-reaction and a failure to act share a narrow boundary.

Our multi-lingual city poses special challenges to effective policing—not only the problem of communicating with non-English speakers, but the absence of knowledge about the laws and the role of the police among newly-arrived residents. These problems carry over from the street to the home, the school, the hospital, the courts, and all the other places where officers have a role.

Traffic safety

With the launch of Vision Zero last year, there are new regulations for the police to enforce. I recently spoke at a press conference demanding more crossing guards around schools. Until these positions are adequately filled, it's the police who have the responsibility of enforcing traffic safety for our schoolchildren, in addition to their other duties, and at a time when many precincts are understaffed.

Community relations and social media

With the advent of social media and the cell phone camera officers are under the microscope as never before. NYC was already the media capital of the world before the age of Twitter, and in our image-driven society photos or videos swiftly become the measure by which complex situations are judged and understood.

We are all familiar with the reputational damage done to the NYPD when officers are seen acting violently or abusively. Such incidents generate grievance, distrust, suspicion, and fear in communities, and damage the potential for constructive police-community relations. One of the casualties is the likelihood of recruiting officers from communities that fear and suspect the police—and yet these are often the very communities which most need to be represented on the force.

Another community problem in the wake of the execution-style murder of Officers Liu and Ramos is the negative opinion of family matriarchs toward the police force. In some communities, mothers are looked upon to give their nod of approval to a son's or daughter's career choice. If the high perceived risks of being an officer are not counterbalanced with a good salary, these nods won't be coming.

While there are important steps to improving police recruitment and retention that are within the scope of this arbitration panel, improving community-police relations will take sustained honest difficult dialogue across multiple stakeholders and sectors over a period of time.

5. New Yorkers deserve the best and the brightest

Every day, NYC police officers do remarkable work to keep our city safe and secure—even more remarkable when you factor in the complex policing challenges they must address.

NYC police officers are so well-trained, vigilant, and “people-smart” that some of my diplomatic friends prefer NYPD detail coverage to the Secret Service because they're more effective in dealing with people and large crowds and are more alert to situations requiring sound judgment and diligence.

Discretion is paramount in disputes between tenants and landlords in addition to domestic disputes; these are difficult, volatile situations into which police officers must walk and try to restore order while offering comfort to the aggrieved.

We need an educated and effective police force—individuals with a cool head, good judgment, and the ability to apply both firsthand and secondhand experience. It is absurdly incongruous that NYC police officers should not be paid accordingly.

The police I know feel strongly about public service just like many of us do who get into this business. Friends who have retired from the force have told me in all honesty that if any officer is offered the opportunity to leave, he or she usually does so because the salary is so much higher.

Policing should not only be a decent-paying career but a lifetime career. NYC police officers need wages that keep them being career police officers. Like any other public service, the police department should be a lifetime job with growth potential and adequate rewards.

6. Conclusion

Much of the stress and burden from law enforcement policy pressures fall disproportionately on the rank-and-file NYC police officer—the beat cop—and it is precisely here the Arbitration Panel can make a significant difference.

As Borough President, I have begun dialogues and forums between Manhattan police officers and the community. Last January we brought various levels of law enforcement officers to the table with members of the community, including many teenagers.

What we heard at our community-police dialogue was an overwhelming desire by the community to give officers the help they need to be visible in the community. That is perhaps the most important argument I can make for fair and adequate compensation for our police force: This is what Manhattan residents want.

- More foot patrols
- Continuity in beat officers
- More police living in the city—and this means incentives for affordable housing
- Improved marketing of the police force to young people
- A way to identify students looking for a career in the Academy
- Self-defense classes in schools taught by police officers

The Mayor sets priorities for the city, and this can be done.