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## NY State Police have a retention crisis



Early retirements have made it difficult to keep the State Police's existing ranks at full capacity. Credit: AP / Hans Pennink

**By Tim Dymond**

Guest essay

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New York State faces a public safety crisis. Workloads and expectations for police officers continue to increase, while the number of experienced officers continues to decrease. This is a result of the rapid acceleration of police officers leaving the profession and little incentive for new recruits to join. This retention deficit is directly related to legislative changes over the last five years including bail reform, discovery reform, and the repeal of 50-a, which opened up access to police disciplinary records. Add to that general anti-police sentiment fomented by some elected officials and you have the perfect storm for a public safety crisis.

Past state trooper exams would routinely get 25,000 or more applicants, and admission to the State Police was extremely competitive. The most recent exam in October, which was highly publicized, resulted in 12,690

applications with just 8,000 people actually taking the exam.

Hiring has had to increase dramatically to keep pace with retirements and resignations. New troopers are being hired within six months of taking their entrance exam. Previously, it could take five years or more to get hired. Gov. Kathy Hochul budgeted for 1,000 new state troopers in the 2023 fiscal year. While a much-needed addition, most of them will just backfill openings created by retirements and resignations.

Early retirements have made it difficult to keep the existing ranks at full capacity. Before 2020, it was not uncommon to see a trooper work until the mandatory retirement age of 60. However, many are now deciding to retire earlier due to job-related concerns. The repeal of 50-a, discovery reform, and bail reform have had significant unintended consequences, contributing to anti-police sentiment that has poisoned morale and turned many good men and women away from careers in law enforcement.

Experienced police in New York remember when dangerous members of our communities were identified, cases were done, and criminals were removed so they could no longer torment law-abiding citizens. Now, these same offenders are identified, cases are done, and they are arrested and then released back to the street the same day. Do not be fooled by political talking points: The state is less safe due to these reforms. Some will say statistics show crime is down; however, poll after poll show that the vast majority of New Yorkers feel less safe and are highly concerned about crime in their communities.

Most experienced members of law enforcement are still in the profession to make a difference and make their communities safer. When they can no longer do so, morale drops, and they feel a lack of purpose. The race for the door is real in our older members; their experience and knowledge are irreplaceable.

State lawmakers should undo failed legislative changes, and pay and benefits should be increased, to retain experienced officers and attract new recruits.

It takes a special person to do this work. A person who is committed to protect and serve. A person who hunts down the most dangerous criminals — serial killers, child rapists, and violent gang members. The job of a police officer is not for everyone and is mostly learned through hands-on experience, not academy training. A 30-year member is not easily replaced.

We need the most experienced and savvy police to chase the most experienced and savvy criminals. We need them to train the next generation. Those who have spent their career mastering their trade need to be prioritized and retained. Without them, it doesn't matter who is recruited — the ranks of our agencies will falter, and our communities will suffer.

This guest essay reflects the views of Tim Dymond, president of the New York State Police Investigators Association.