



Rhode Island Troopers Association

Post Office Box 1924

East Greenwich, RI

Proudly Serving Troopers Since 1971

April 22, 2025

Representative Marvin Abney, Chair – House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: 2025-H 5999 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – State Police

Dear Representative Abney,

On behalf of the membership of the Rhode Island Troopers Association, please accept this letter to serve as a factual background and support for H-5999. Prior to 2007 any person hired by the Rhode Island State Police (RISP) was subject to working for a minimum period of 20 years and would be eligible to retire with a pension at 50% of salary or service a maximum of 25 years for 65% of salaried pension. There was 3% credited per year between the minimum and maximum if a member decided to leave during this timeframe (i.e. member would receive 56% pension benefit if he/she left at year 22). In 2007, the RISP pension system was reformed by legislative action for only new hires going forward, which extended career service obligations to a minimum of 25 years of service for a 50% salaried pension and a maximum of 30 years of service for a 65% salaried pension benefit. Under both arrangements, members were subject to a "last paycheck" pension calculation (biweekly pay periods). As a result, all classes hired after 2007 would be serving under a 25-year minimum and 30-year maximum span achieving 50% and 65% salaried pension benefits respectively (with 3% credited per year between the minimum and maximum).

Several years later, and as a result of the pension reform legislation of 2011, State of Rhode Island employees, to include the RISP, were subject to further reform which resulted in: introduction of a five year final salary average pension calculation that was applicable to members of the Class of 1994 and all classes hired after 1994, extensions of service from 30 years to 32.5 years for a 65% salaried pension, and suspension of COLAs. It should be noted that during this time, other State of Rhode Island employees were currently subject to a three (3) year final salary average and moved to a five (5) year final salary average as a result of this legislation (RISP has its own separate and exclusive pension fund). In summary, the RISP went from a "last paycheck" pension calculation to a five-year salary average.

This legislation has had a profound negative impact on the overall health of the RISP and has undoubtedly caused severe issues with morale, recruitment, retention, and ultimately staffing. From the years 2000-2010 only four (4) members resigned from the department while from 2010-2025 twenty-nine (29) members resigned from the department. Of those twenty-nine (29) resignations, ten (10) left to join the Massachusetts State Police, six (6) to a federal law enforcement agency, one (1) to a Massachusetts municipal police department, and twelve (12) left for careers in the private sector. The majority of those who depart service with the RISP indicate the overall compensation package as a significant factor, which includes the retirement benefits. Take for instance, a recently hired RISP trooper can serve (4) years in Rhode Island before leaving to join the Massachusetts State Police and would retire earlier and with a substantially higher pension than if they remained serving in Rhode Island (65% vs 75%). Subsequently, service within the RISP is longer in duration coupled with considerably less overall compensation.

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The loss of these twenty-seven employees represents approximately 10.5% of the workforce of 257 currently sworn members. Remarkably, most of the twenty-seven resignations were from troopers with 10 years of experience or less. It is critical for the RISP to retain its members due to the uniquely challenging and costly processes of recruiting, training, and onboarding. Staying competitive with our peer agencies, particularly the Massachusetts State Police, will help reduce departures and alleviate unnecessary economic burdens while maintaining expected levels of service.

To further demonstrate critical issues surrounding the five-year salary average and the loss of compensation, it must be stated that an overwhelming majority of our members achieve promotions to the next rank later in their careers based on the above-mentioned extensions of service. Rank and/or promotion to the next rank is only possible based on vacancies and said vacancies only occur upon retirement from the Division. Such retirements are based on training academy class graduation dates and the following classes listed were substantially affected by the 2011 pension reform: Class of 1994 (no longer serving except for Colonel Darnell S. Weaver), 1997, 2000, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2022, 2024, 2025, and 2026 (recently approved). Based off these graduation dates, a five-year final salary average adversely affects all members, especially given an RISP salaried pension at 65% takes 32.5 years to obtain while a salaried pension with the Massachusetts State Police obtains 75% at 25 years of service coupled with a one (1) year final salary average. Simply stated, most members are not able to obtain a promotion to the next rank and hold that position for five years prior to retirement. Coupled with the fact that peer agencies like the Massachusetts State Police and Connecticut State Police earn considerably higher wages and obtain these step increases earlier in their careers, they also have the opportunity for promotion in as early as five years of service versus that of RISP who are unlikely to obtain promotion until an average of fifteen years of service. Lastly, all sworn members are forced to retire at age sixty-two (62) so there is no way around the above issues facing our membership.

Your support of H-5999, is not only cost neutral to the budget, but in fact, it creates savings to the RISP budget based on the retirement of employees with vested longevity (breakage). Given H-5999 is cost neutral, it is also a benefit to the State of Rhode Island and taxpayers based on the economic impact of troopers departing to other agencies or careers. Passage of H-5999 will ensure that all residents and guests of Rhode Island receive and continue to receive the best possible full-service law enforcement services to meet the needs of the ever-changing demands.

I sincerely thank you for your willingness to discuss these critical issues affecting the Rhode Island State Police and look forward to further discussions with you and remain hopeful that our members will obtain much needed relief to preserve this prestigious institution.

Respectfully Submitted,



Corporal Erik Jensen

President

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