

VETO MESSAGE:

VETO MESSAGE - No. 76

TO THE SENATE:

I am returning herewith, without my approval, the following bill:

Senate Bill Number 6829, entitled:

"AN ACT to amend the civil service law, in relation to members of the state police with injuries or illness incurred in the performance of duties"

NOT APPROVED

This bill would grant members of the State Police who suffer injury or illness in the line of duty the right to full salary and payment of medical expenses for the length of their disability, until they reach the age of retirement. During his period, the State Police may require that the affected individual perform light duty "consistent with his or her status as a member of the state police." This legislation, the sponsors argue, would give State Police employees parity with local police officers, who receive similar benefits under General Municipal Law Section 207-c.

The members of the State Police carry out some of the most dangerous and important law enforcement missions of this State. I therefore have great sympathy for a proposal that protects injured members of that force. As the Chief Executive of a State in the midst of an enormous fiscal crisis, however, I cannot ignore the significant costs that this legislation would impose. This bill, in essence, gives members of the State Police the right to unlimited sick leave at full pay - a leave

that could last for decades. Officers who receive this benefit would have a significant financial incentive to delay retirement, at which point their compensation would diminish. Further, the State Police would need to hire additional personnel to make up for the work that officers on "light duty" cannot perform, or operate at less than full effectiveness. The State would also need to pay the injured trooper's full medical expenses, without the cost controls placed on the workers' compensation benefits they receive at present if injured on the job. The result would be a significant drain on the State's fisc - one it can ill afford at present - and a negative impact on the operational ability of the State Police.

The State owes a great deal to the members of its police force who are injured in the line of duty. To that end, a trooper is presently entitled to full pay for a period of up to two years when disabled by a work-related injury. If unable to return to work, such an individual may be entitled to a line-of-duty or accidental disability retirement, the later paying 75% of final average salary. The representatives of the affected employees can also seek to extend the two-year period of salaryed leave further through collective bargaining, or by presenting the issue to an interest arbitration panel. Indeed, this bill unwisely circumvents the bargaining process, and the tradeoffs and compromises it would entail.

In sum, as much as I admire the fine work of the State Police, given the State's extraordinary financial difficulties I simply cannot allow the extensive and costly expansion of benefits provided for in

this
legislation.

The bill is disapproved.
PATERSON

(signed) DAVID A.
