



NEW JERSEY

# Association of State Colleges and Universities

150 West State Street, Trenton NJ 08608

Phone (609) 989-1100

## Testimony on Assembly Bill No. 2842 – Partial Tuition Credit to Police Officers

### Assembly Higher Education Committee May 11, 2017

The state colleges and universities oppose this legislation. While we support law enforcement and the educational goals of individual police officers, we have financial and public-safety concerns over this bill.

First, this bill would impose another unfunded mandate upon our institutions. There are already six tuition-waiver programs, including programs for the National Guard, senior citizens, and the unemployed.

Further, we have very serious public-safety concerns regarding the implementation of this bill. Every police force, including a campus police force, functions as a team. The officers know each other, train together, respond to incidents together. They know the campus, the students, faculty and staff. They are more than just employees; they are more than just “cops” - they are integral members of the campus community. They have earned the trust of the students and the administration, and most important, the officers trust each other implicitly.

Police officers at our institutions receive training on the emergency plans in place at the school for situations such as active shooter, campus crisis, evacuations, etc. They are taught how to properly report campus crimes as required by the Clery Act (note that reporting under Clery is different than reporting crimes pursuant to the New Jersey Code of Criminal Justice under N.J.S.A. 2C). Moreover, the campus police understand Title IX and the requirements for reporting and investigating under that law. These issues are specific to our campuses, and police officers from other departments will not necessarily be familiar with them.

In addition, there is also a significant problem relating to the two categories of active work detail for police officers. Police officers are either “on duty” or “off duty.” They are “on duty” during their prescribed shift and they are expected to carry out their normal job duties with normal supervision. “Off duty” is when they are off shift, but officers are still authorized to engaged in law enforcement activities if the situation requires that they do so. Expecting officers to be “on duty” while in class would, presumably, require them to engage in unspecified job activities *without* the normal supervision. If the officer is recognized as “on duty” by his or her employer, to whom does the officer report? The chain of command at the institution, or the chain of command at his or her own department? There could be further conflicts resulting from different union rules, overtime issues, and liability coverage in the event of actions taken by the officer while “on duty” as a student.

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Most critically, having armed individuals on campus could have the unintended effect of presenting an increased safety risk to students as well as to the officer. Unless every police officer on the campus police force knows the student officer and knows his or her schedule, the student officer could easily be mistaken as an armed assailant during a campus emergency. A misunderstanding like this could put that officer and the students around him or her in unnecessary danger.

Thank you for considering our position.