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## CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE UNION

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Good afternoon, Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan, Senator Daily, Representative Jutila and Distinguished Members of the Public Safety Committee.

My name is Andrew Matthews. I am the President of the Connecticut State Police Union and a Sergeant within the Connecticut State Police. The State Police Union represents approximately 1,028 State Troopers, Sergeants and Master Sergeants. We appreciate the opportunity to speak before you and recognize that we would not be here today without your unwavering support in the past for public safety and Trooper safety. We are here to speak **AGAINST Governor's Bill No. 32**, which would remove the mandate of 1,248 sworn Troopers, allows for an unlimited voluntary auxiliary program, and would require the Commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection to submit a staffing report every two years, beginning in 2014.

### **PROPOSED BILL NO. 32 "AN ACT CONCERNING STATE POLICE STAFFING."**

The State Police Union understands that these are difficult financial times and that local, state and federal agencies are seeking ways to cut expenses. However, when considering cuts, we should pause and consider that the primary goal of government is to preserve life and property. Ensuring that there are adequate staffing levels within the State Police is critical to protecting public safety. **The reality is that as agencies and local governments reduce public safety budgets, not only does it increase the risk of potential injuries and deaths, it also increases the potential for lawsuits against the state for failure to protect the public.**

**In 1998, Connecticut General Statutes § 29-4, (which mandates 1,248 Troopers) became law with the unanimous support (180-0) of our legislative leadership.** This was in part due to the brutal domestic violence murder of Heather Messenger in Chaplin, Connecticut. Mrs. Messenger, pregnant with twins, had barricaded herself in her bedroom with her 5-year-old son to secure refuge from her violent husband and frantically called the State Police 9-1-1 for assistance. However, due to the lack of proper staffing, the nearest Trooper was twenty miles away. By the time we arrived eighteen minutes later, Mrs. Messenger was dead. She was killed as her 5-year-old son watched.

The horrifying final minutes of Messenger's life were recorded on the 9-1-1 call. The public rightly expressed its outrage over this incident and as a result, our state legislators called for the mandatory staffing level, to protect public safety and Trooper safety. This was necessary because history has shown that administrations were not willing to devote sufficient resources to adequately staff the State Police and the legislature did not want to wait for another tragic event to remedy the issue.

Now during difficult financial times, the Governor is seeking to avoid staffing the State Police just as the legislature predicted would happen when it first passed General Statute § 29-4. The governor is invading the authority and responsibility of the legislature to provide Connecticut residence with a base level of public protection by proposing Bill No. 32. This Bill will strip the legislature of its ability to ensure the mandate and it will allow the Commissioner to individually determine an arbitrary number. One main purpose of enacting the statute was so that the Governor and Commissioner couldn't simply ignore the 1,248 mandatory staffing level when they had budget issues and wanted to put funding and resources elsewhere. The Governor's attempt to change the statute now is doing precisely what the legislature was trying to safeguard against when it passed the statute in 1998. Connecticut citizens need the assurance that they are protected by the laws against government abuses of power.

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In September 2010, Governor Malloy recognized the importance of the statutory mandate for public safety when he publicly committed to adding 55 State Troopers, which would have brought the staffing levels up to the statutory minimum of 1248. **Governor Malloy publicly stated, "While adding a cost to the budget is difficult, I refuse to place a dollar value on the safety and well being of Connecticut residents."** Now Governor Malloy appears to have changed his position regarding the value of public safety. Ironically, last session he supported the idea of a statutory mandate to increase the number of Majors and Lieutenant Colonels which was done within the Agency. Now, he is proposing a decrease of the front line patrol Troopers.

To now argue that the 1,248 mandate should be eliminated because the law is arbitrary, inflexible, or doesn't improve public safety is being short sighted. If the statistics show a decrease in crime in some areas of Connecticut, a reason for the decrease, might have been as a result of the statutory mandate. The point of the statutory mandate is to ensure that the public is protected at all times and not to fluctuate based on political agendas. No one can predict when a Trooper will be needed, which is the whole point for having the statute.

In 2009, the Connecticut State Police employed 1,283 sworn Troopers. Currently, the State Police has 1,080 sworn Troopers, 168 below the statutory mandate and 203 below our high in 2009. One must ask: Who is now performing the essential duties those 203 Troopers once performed? This Bill now seeks the approval of the Legislature to allow for possibly even further reduction of staffing. **Moreover, as of July, 2012, an additional 206 State Troopers will be eligible to retire.**

In 2010, prior to the Department of Public Safety's merger with the Departments of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, the Department of Fire Prevention and Control and the Police Officers Standards and Training Council, the Department of Public Safety's requested a budget of \$151,816,000 for "Personal Services." In the 2011-2012 budget for all three agencies, the "personal services" line item was \$126,034,999. In fiscal year 2010-2011, the entire State budget was \$19,010,200,000. **Therefore, the State Police budget is approximately one half of one percent of the overall State budget. This is a small price to pay for the safety, security and preservation of life and property.** Also, Governor's Bill #5014 now requests a budget of \$117,439,179 for "Personal Services", which is another reduction of \$8,595,820. We believe will further affect the vital police services the State Police provides to the public.

This committee is being asked to make a decision to reduce a long-standing minimum staffing level of the state police personnel without an adequate study of what the minimum staffing levels should be. Colonel Stebbins has purportedly done an "in-house study" without releasing its findings or a report. The State Police Union believes that an independent study concerning adequate staffing levels is warranted. Without accurate and objective information, it is unfair for anyone to put the Public Safety Committee in this position to choose between a budget and public safety. **Moreover, this bill would give full and sole authority to the Commissioner, who is appointed by the Governor, to determine proper staffing levels, which again is imbalanced against the rights of the legislators, the general public, Troopers and their families and not submit a report until 2014.** Why wait? The Connecticut State Police Union would support a study begin immediately and report the results in January 2013.

In closing, the State Police Union understands that these are difficult economic times. However, ensuring that there are adequate staffing levels within the State Police is critical for the residents and guests of Connecticut. Any attempt to remove the statutory staffing mandate would clearly jeopardize public safety and Trooper safety. We should not wait for another Messenger case or for the death or serious injury of a Trooper, before we admit this is an impulsive decision, at the risk of a preventable tragedy. Connecticut Legislators, their constituents, and State Troopers expect and deserve to be protected.

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