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Executive Director

September 8, 2021

Hon. Kathy Hochul
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12223

RE: Sign S.4523/A.6457 PBANYS 20-Year Retirement Legislation

Dear Governor Hochul,

Protect the Adirondacks urges you to sign into law the S.4523/A.6457 PBANYS 20-Year Retirement legislation. The Forest Rangers have primary responsibility for the Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) care, custody and control of five million acres of State-owned land and conservation easements across New York, the vast majority of which is in the Adirondack Park. Today, the average Forest Ranger is responsible for patrolling over 53,000 acres. In 1970, it was 28,000 acres.

To compound the challenge of a vast acreage to supervise, there has also been a major increase in public outdoor recreational use of these state lands, and the number of search and rescue missions has doubled in recent years. In the last year, Forest Rangers conducted 492 search and rescue missions, which at times involve a dozen or more Rangers. That's more than one search and rescue per day. Search and rescue operations take up the majority of a Ranger's time. Additionally, the Rangers extinguished 192 wildfires and issued over 3,000 tickets in 2020.

The Forester Rangers are facing recruitment problems and seeing their ranks reduced. Ranger staffing for the entire state is currently around 135 positions, but with vacancies there are only around 120 Rangers on the job. Over 10% of the Forest Ranger positions are currently vacant statewide. This must change.

Protect the Adirondacks is an organization dedicated to the protection and stewardship of the public and private lands of the Adirondack Park, and to building the health and diversity of its natural and human communities for the benefit of current and future generations. Enforcement of environmental laws

Protect the Adirondacks

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and public education are the main tools used to help preserve the natural environment and to help keep the people of New York safe.

S.4523/A.6457 will allow Forest Rangers to recruit and retain a diverse pool of officers. This legislation would help all of the state agencies in the PBA of NYS, Forest Rangers, NYS Park Police, SUNY Police Officers and Environmental Conservation Officers. No state agency can afford the continuous cycle of recruitment, training and replacement generated by the loss of officers due to this current unequitable retirement and compensation package.

For these and many other reasons, Protect the Adirondacks strongly supports the 20-year retirement bill that will help the PBA of New York State's commitment to fielding a robust and diverse roster of officers who are properly staffed, trained and equipped to manage and oversee the vital interest of the protection and management of our environment and ensuring the safety of the public using the states natural resources.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please accept our gratitude for the opportunity to share our concerns about strengthening our state's Forest Ranger program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Bauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Peter" being more prominent than the last name "Bauer".

Peter Bauer,
Executive Director

Cc: Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie
Senator Andrew Gounardes
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