

STATE OF NEW YORK

6011--A

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

March 26, 2021

Introduced by Sen. GOUNARDES -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Civil Service and Pensions -- recommitted to the Committee on Civil Service and Pensions in accordance with Senate Rule 6, sec. 8 -- committee discharged, bill amended, ordered reprinted as amended and recommitted to said committee

AN ACT to amend the retirement and social security law, in relation to disability retirement for members of the department of environmental conservation, forest rangers, university police officers and the regional state park police

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. The retirement and social security law is amended by adding
2 a new section 363-ee to read as follows:

3 § 363-ee. Accidental disability retirement allowance for certain
4 members or officers of the division of law enforcement in the department
5 of environmental conservation, forest rangers, regional state park
6 police officers, and university police officers. a. A member may elect
7 to receive an accidental disability retirement allowance as provided
8 under this section in lieu of the benefits provided under section three
9 hundred sixty-three-e of this title if, at the time application therefor
10 is filed, he or she is:

11 1. Physically or mentally incapacitated for performance of duty as the
12 natural and proximate result of an accident not caused by his or her own
13 willful negligence sustained in such service and while actually a non-
14 seasonally appointed member of the division of law enforcement in the
15 department of environmental conservation, a police officer in the
16 department of environmental conservation, an officer in the regional
17 state park police, a forest ranger in the service of the department of
18 environmental conservation which shall mean a person who serves on a
19 full-time basis in the title of forest ranger I, forest ranger II,

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 forest ranger III, assistant superintendent of forest fire control,
2 superintendent of forest fire control or any successor titles or new
3 titles in the forest ranger title series in the department of environ-
4 mental conservation, or a university police officer appointed pursuant
5 to paragraph 1 of subdivision two of section three hundred fifty-five of
6 the education law, and

7 2. Actually in service upon which his or her membership is based.
8 However, in a case where a member is discontinued from service subse-
9 quent to the accident, either voluntarily or involuntarily, and provided
10 that the member meets the requirements of paragraph one of this subdivi-
11 sion, application may be made, either (a) by a vested member incapaci-
12 tated as the result of a qualifying World Trade Center condition as
13 defined in section two of this chapter at any time, or (b) not later
14 than two years after the member is first discontinued from service.

15 b. Application for an accidental disability retirement allowance for
16 such a member may be made by:

17 1. Such member, or

18 2. The head of the department where such member is employed or his or
19 her designee, or

20 3. A person acting on behalf of and authorized by such member.

21 c. (a) After the filing of such an application such member shall be
22 given one or more medical examinations. No such application shall be
23 approved, however, unless the member or some other person on his or her
24 behalf shall have filed written notice in the office of the comptroller
25 within ninety days after the accident, setting forth:

26 1. The time when and the place where such accident occurred;

27 2. The particulars thereof;

28 3. The nature and extent of the member's injuries; and

29 4. His or her alleged incapacity.

30 (b) The notice herein required need not be given:

31 1. If notice of such accident shall be filed in accordance with the
32 provisions of the workers' compensation law of any state within which a
33 participating employer shall have its employees located or performing
34 functions and duties within the normal scope of their employment, or

35 2. If the application for accidental disability retirement is filed
36 within one year after the date of such accident, or

37 3. If a failure to file notice has been excused for good cause shown
38 as provided by rules and regulations promulgated by the comptroller.

39 d. If the comptroller determines that the member is physically or
40 mentally incapacitated for the performance of duty and ought to be
41 retired for accidental disability, such member shall be so retired. Such
42 retirement shall be effective as of a date approved by the comptroller.

43 e. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the retirement allow-
44 ance payable upon accidental disability retirement shall consist of:

45 1. An annuity which shall be the actuarial equivalent of the member's
46 accumulated contributions, plus

47 2. A pension which is the actuarial equivalent of the reserved-for-in-
48 creased-take-home-pay to which he or she may be entitled, if any, plus

49 3. A pension of three-quarters of his or her final average salary. The
50 payment of such pension shall be subject to the provisions of section
51 three hundred sixty-four of this title.

52 f. If the member, at the time of the filing of an application under
53 the provisions of subdivision b of this section, is eligible for a
54 service retirement benefit, then and in that event, he or she may simul-
55 taneously file an application for service retirement in accordance with
56 the provisions of section seventy of this chapter, provided that the

1 member indicates on the application for service retirement that such
2 application is filed without prejudice to the application for accidental
3 disability retirement.

4 g. For purposes of this section, the term "accident" shall have the
5 same meaning and be interpreted in the same manner as such term is
6 defined and interpreted to mean in section three hundred sixty-three of
7 this title.

8 h. 1. (a) Notwithstanding any provisions of this chapter or of any
9 general, special or local law, charter, administrative code or rule or
10 regulation to the contrary, if any condition or impairment of health is
11 caused by a qualifying World Trade Center condition as defined in
12 section two of this chapter, it shall be presumptive evidence that it
13 was incurred in the performance and discharge of duty and the natural
14 and proximate result of an accident not caused by such member's own
15 willful negligence, unless the contrary be proved by competent evidence.

16 (b) The comptroller is hereby authorized to promulgate rules and regu-
17 lations to implement the provisions of this paragraph.

18 2. (a) Notwithstanding the provisions of this chapter or of any gener-
19 al, special or local law, charter, administrative code or rule or regu-
20 lation to the contrary, if a member who participated in World Trade
21 Center rescue, recovery or cleanup operations, as defined in section two
22 of this chapter, and subsequently retired on a service retirement, an
23 ordinary disability retirement or a performance of duty disability
24 retirement and subsequent to such retirement is determined by the comp-
25 troller to have a qualifying World Trade Center condition, as defined in
26 section two of this chapter, upon such determination by the comptroller
27 it shall be presumed that such disability was incurred in the perform-
28 ance and discharge of duty as the natural and proximate result of an
29 accident not caused by such member's own willful negligence, and that
30 the member would have been physically or mentally incapacitated for the
31 performance and discharge of duty of the position from which he or she
32 retired had the condition been known and fully developed at the time of
33 the member's retirement, unless the contrary is proven by competent
34 evidence.

35 (b) The comptroller shall consider a reclassification of the member's
36 retirement as an accidental disability retirement effective as of the
37 date of such reclassification.

38 (c) Such member's retirement option shall not be changed as a result
39 of such reclassification.

40 (d) The member's former employer at the time of the member's retire-
41 ment shall have an opportunity to be heard on the member's application
42 for reclassification by the comptroller according to procedures devel-
43 oped by the comptroller.

44 (e) The comptroller is hereby authorized to promulgate rules and regu-
45 lations to implement the provisions of this paragraph.

46 i. Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter or of any
47 general, special or local law, charter, administrative code or rule or
48 regulation to the contrary, if a retiree who: (1) has met the criteria
49 of subdivision h of this section and retired on a service or disability
50 retirement, or would have met the criteria if not already retired on an
51 accidental disability; and (2) has not been retired for more than twen-
52 ty-five years; and (3) dies from a qualifying World Trade Center condi-
53 tion, as defined in section two of this chapter, as determined by the
54 applicable head of the retirement system or applicable medical board,
55 then unless the contrary be proven by competent evidence, such retiree
56 shall be deemed to have died as a natural and proximate result of an

1 accident sustained in the performance of duty and not as a result of
2 willful negligence on his or her part. Such retiree's eligible benefici-
3 ary, as set forth in section three hundred sixty-one of this title,
4 shall be entitled to an accidental death benefit as provided by section
5 three hundred sixty-one of this title, however, for the purposes of
6 determining the salary base upon which the accidental death benefit is
7 calculated, the retiree shall be deemed to have died on the date of his
8 or her retirement. Upon the retiree's death, the eligible beneficiary
9 shall make a written application to the head of the retirement system
10 within the time for filing an application for an accidental death bene-
11 fit as set forth in section three hundred sixty-one of this title
12 requesting conversion of such retiree's service or disability retirement
13 benefit to an accidental death benefit. At the time of such conversion,
14 the eligible beneficiary shall relinquish all rights to the prospective
15 benefits payable under the service or disability retirement benefit,
16 including any post-retirement death benefits, since the retiree's death.
17 If the eligible beneficiary is not the only beneficiary receiving or
18 entitled to receive a benefit under the service or disability retirement
19 benefit (including, but not limited to, post-retirement death benefits
20 or benefits paid or payable pursuant to the retiree's option selection),
21 the accidental death benefit payments to the eligible beneficiary will
22 be reduced by any amounts paid or payable to any other beneficiary.

23 j. Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter or of any
24 general, special or local law, charter, administrative code or rule or
25 regulation to the contrary, if a member who: (1) has met the criteria of
26 subdivision h of this section; and (2) dies in active service from a
27 qualifying World Trade Center condition, as defined in section two of
28 this chapter, as determined by the applicable head of the retirement
29 system or applicable medical board to have been caused by such member's
30 participation in the World Trade Center rescue, recovery or cleanup
31 operations, as defined in section two of this chapter, then unless the
32 contrary be proven by competent evidence, such member shall be deemed to
33 have died as a natural and proximate result of an accident sustained in
34 the performance of duty and not as a result of willful negligence on his
35 or her part. Such member's eligible beneficiary, as set forth in section
36 three hundred sixty-one of this title, shall be entitled to an acci-
37 dental death benefit provided he or she makes written application to the
38 head of the retirement system within the time for filing an application
39 for an accidental death benefit as set forth in section three hundred
40 sixty-one of this title.

41 § 2. The section heading and subdivision a of section 363-e of the
42 retirement and social security law, as added by chapter 208 of the laws
43 of 1997, are amended to read as follows:

44 Disability retirement allowance for members of the division of law
45 enforcement in the department of environmental conservation, police
46 officers in the department of environmental conservation, forest
47 rangers, university police officers and the regional state park police.

48 a. Every non-seasonally appointed sworn member or officer of the divi-
49 sion of law enforcement in the department of environmental conservation
50 and the regional state park police, every police officer in the depart-
51 ment of environmental conservation, every forest ranger and every
52 university police officer appointed pursuant to paragraph 1 of subdivi-
53 sion two of section three hundred fifty-five of the education law who
54 becomes physically or mentally incapacitated for the performance of duty
55 shall be covered by the provisions of this section in lieu of the
56 provisions of section three hundred sixty-two or three hundred sixty-

three of this ~~[article]~~ title; except, however, any such member or officer who last entered or reentered service in the department of environmental conservation or state park police, as the case may be, prior to September first, nineteen hundred ninety-seven, shall be entitled to apply for disability retirement pursuant to such sections and to receive the benefit so payable in lieu of the benefit payable pursuant to this section. The benefits provided by this section for university police officers shall be in lieu of section three hundred sixty-three of this title.

§ 3. This act shall take effect immediately.

FISCAL NOTE.--Pursuant to Legislative Law, Section 50:

This bill would grant improved accidental and performance of duty disability pensions to certain members or officers of the division of law enforcement in the department of environmental conservation, forest rangers, regional state park police and university police officers. The benefit for an accidental disability would be 75% of final average salary minus worker's compensation. The benefit for a performance of duty disability benefit would be 50% of final average salary.

If this bill is enacted during the 2022 legislative session, we anticipate that there will be an increase of approximately \$280,000 in the annual contributions of the State of New York for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023. In future years, this cost will vary as the billing rates and salary of the affected members change.

In addition to the annual contributions discussed above, there will be an immediate past service cost of approximately \$1.29 million which will be borne by the State of New York as a one-time payment. This estimate is based on the assumption that payment will be made on March 1, 2023.

These estimated costs are based on 528 affected members employed by the State of New York with annual salary of approximately \$52.4 million as of March 31, 2021.

Summary of relevant resources:

Membership data as of March 31, 2021 was used in measuring the impact of the proposed change, the same data used in the April 1, 2021 actuarial valuation. Distributions and other statistics can be found in the 2021 Report of the Actuary and the 2021 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.

The actuarial assumptions and methods used are described in the 2020 and 2021 Annual Report to the Comptroller on Actuarial Assumptions, and the Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York: Audit and Control.

The Market Assets and GASB Disclosures are found in the March 31, 2021 New York State and Local Retirement System Financial Statements and Supplementary Information.

I am a member of the American Academy of Actuaries and meet the Qualification Standards to render the actuarial opinion contained herein.

This fiscal note does not constitute a legal opinion on the viability of the proposed change nor is it intended to serve as a substitute for the professional judgment of an attorney.

This estimate, dated January 21, 2022, and intended for use only during the 2022 Legislative Session, is Fiscal Note No. 2022-51, prepared by the Actuary for the New York State and Local Retirement System.