Respect Public Service
By Mario Cilento

Our dedicated public employees put their lives on the line every day to keep New Yorkers safe. They endure excessive overtime, unsafe staffing, and a variety of other poor working conditions. The frustration that our first responders, health care workers and teachers face is well documented. It was already a bad situation, but the pandemic made it unmanageable. These problems and conditions now exist in virtually all our state agencies, local governments, cities, and schools.

The extraordinary amount of overtime and exposure to COVID has caused stress and fatigue beyond anything any of us have ever experienced. All of that, combined with years of underfunding services, delayed contracts and demands for benefit reductions, has made public service an option that is less attractive than ever.

The Tier 6 pension plan makes matters worse. Tier 6 is the significantly reduced level of benefits that many public employees receive in the New York State pension system. Any public employee hired since it was enacted 10 years ago is in tier 6.

The decreased benefits and increased costs borne by everyday working people as a result are making it harder to recruit and retain nurses, teachers, EMTs and other important public employees.

We must fix this injustice and find other ways in the pension system to recruit and retain employees. We should encourage longevity with greater pension benefits for longer term employees; we should change the vesting service from 10 to 5 years so workers will own their pension quicker and be more likely to stay in service; we should reduce the employee contribution so public workers can keep more of their pay and we should review the formula that determines a worker’s pension to encourage entry and longevity in public service.

All of this starts with respect for our public servants and should be addressed in this year’s state budget.

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