



## State Law Enforcement Officers Labor Alliance

March 8, 2022

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: SB – 673 – Natural Resources Police Force – Employees – Authority of Secretary  
SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Smith and distinguished members of the Committee:

I am Veronica Bruns, a Corporal with the Maryland Natural Resources Police, and the Treasurer of the State Law Enforcement Labor Alliance (SLEOLA) which is the exclusive representative for approximately 1,800 active state law enforcement officers, including the Maryland Natural Resources Police.

In SLEOLA's role as the exclusive representative in collective bargaining for the pay, benefits, and working conditions of the Maryland Natural Resources Police, we are in Support of Senate Bill 673.

The promotional process is a mandatory subject of collective bargaining, and SLEOLA has the sole responsibility to negotiate in the best interest of all of our represented members. During the negotiations of our current Memorandum of Understanding, the promotional process was referred to the Labor Management Committee for disposition. This referral was the result of numerous complaints from our represented membership and various employee groups that the previous promotional processes lacked transparency in the promotional process and tests were not occurring regularly. Those employee groups include: the Black Officers Association, Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 8 – Southern Maryland Natural Resources Police, Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 130 - Central Maryland Natural Resources Police, Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 16 – Eastern Shore Maryland Natural Resources Police, and Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 77 – Western Maryland Natural Resources Police.

In the interim, SLEOLA has continued to negotiate with management to make improvements to the promotional process. As a part of these negotiations, both Natural Resources Police management and SLEOLA agreed that they were hindered in creating a more fair, transparent, and unbiased promotional process by the provisions of the State Personnel and Pensions Article that dictate the scope of the Natural Resources Police promotional process.

Senate Bill 673 would allow SLEOLA to directly negotiate with the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources to create a fair, transparent, and unbiased law enforcement-specific promotional process for all of its membership. This is similar to other agencies within the State of Maryland including the Maryland State Police, Maryland Transportation Authority Police, and Department of Government Services Police.

Currently, under the negotiated promotional policy, officers test for the next rank through three portions of a test: a written exam, resume, and oral portion. After the test is completed and scored, the

scores are sent to the Department of Maryland Natural Resources – Human Resources for additional preference points to be added based on years of service and in-state living. The names are then banded into “best,” “better,” and “qualified” based on scoring. Those bands are then randomized. This means that someone who scores a one-hundred and possibly ranks as number one on a ranked system could ultimately rank as the last person on the “best” band.

Once promotions are made from the “best” category the current policy states that if there are five names left in the “best” band they can then be randomized into the “better” band. That same person who scored a one-hundred could then possibly rank at the last of the “better” band; the same could occur for the “qualified” band. Under the “qualified” band, people who do not pass on the scoring of the written exam are also included, even though State Personnel and Pensions 7-208(a)(1)(iv) has an “unsatisfactory” band that currently is not used in our promotional process, due to the interpretation of the language by Department of Natural Resources – Human Resources.

In most other careers, a person, whether in government or the private sector, who scored as the best all-around candidate for a position may fall to the bottom of a promotional list. In some instances, the best candidate could rank below an individual who failed to meet a passing score for one portion of the exam. SLEOLA and NRP Management do not believe that this is the best practice.

In addition, under the State Personnel and Pensions Article, officers who take the promotional test are denied the ability to review their scores and any notes that may indicate why they did not score high enough to be promoted. The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) provides that the written portion of the test may be reviewed, but since there is no mention of any other portion, the State has not allowed other components to be viewed. SLEOLA and NRP management have agreed that this is a hindrance to all of the members who take the promotional exam.

Currently, an officer cannot know their weaknesses, where they need to improve, or information that they have interpreted wrong for future promotional exams, or even at their current position. This can create a liability for not only the officer, but for the agency who would know where an officer is lacking in knowledge or understanding of a portion of the job, but it cannot be addressed.

SLEOLA is aware that another employee group may be proposing amendments regarding specific demographics being promoted on the last promotional list. To correct the current hinderances and to create the most fair, unbiased, transparent, and effective promotional process, SLEOLA believes that Senate Bill 673 must be passed unamended.

The Maryland Natural Resource Police consists of approximately two-hundred and seventy officers of multiple demographics which include 50.8% female, 49.2% male, 73% white, 8.6% African American, 1.6% Hispanic or Latino, 1.6% which identify as two or more races, 1.1% Asian, and other various demographics to include various religions, LGBTQ+, and protected classes. As the exclusive bargaining representative for the Maryland Natural Resources Police, SLEOLA recognizes and has attempted to rectify many issues that our members face in relation to discrimination. However, due to State Personnel and Pensions issues, SLEOLA has been met with resistance on attempting to negotiate the best, fair, transparent, and unbiased promotional policy for all of its members. For example, on November 10, 2021, the current promotional list took effect. Under the promotional process described above, the list consisted of one-hundred twelve officers, of which 27% consisted of a protected class. The list included 18% female officers, 11% of ethnically diverse officers, and 4% of officers who identify as LGBTQ+. The promotional list which took effect on January 12, 2022, consisted of forty-three officers, of which 25% consisted of a protected class. This includes 18% female officers, 9% of ethnically diverse officers, and 2% of officers who identify as LGBTQ+. SLEOLA believes that if Senate Bill 673 is passed that these numbers will significantly improve.

On behalf of the State Law Enforcement Officer's Labor Alliance, I would like to thank the sponsor of this bill, and ask the Committee for favorable support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Veronica Bruns  
Treasurer

cc: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee