
Committee Meeting

of

SENATE LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE ASSEMBLY JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

“The Committees will receive testimony from invited guests, including senior staff members from NJ Transit, Amtrak, PATH, and New York Waterways.

The meeting will focus on the summer renovation project at New York Penn Station, its impact on commuters, and the status of the Gateway Tunnel and Portal Bridge projects”

LOCATION: Committee Room 4
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: July 19, 2017
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEES PRESENT:

Senator Robert M. Gordon, Chair
Senator M. Teresa Ruiz
Senator Thomas H. Kean Jr.
Senator Joseph M. Kyrillos Jr.

Assemblyman John F. McKeon, Chair
Assemblyman Gordon M. Johnson, Vice Chair
Assemblyman Joseph A. Lagana
Assemblywoman Elizabeth Maher Muoio
Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker
Assemblyman Robert Auth



ALSO PRESENT:

Miriam Bavati
Sarah A. Fletcher
*Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aides*

Mark J. Magyar
Senate Majority
Kate McDonnell
*Assembly Majority
Committee Aides*

Theodore Conrad
Senate Republican
Glen Beebe
*Assembly Republican
Committee Aides*

***Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey***

MR. SANTORO: Agreed.

SENATOR KYRILLOS: Right; okay.

Thank you, Mr. Director.

SENATOR GORDON: Thank you, Senator Kyrillos.

Senator Kean, and then Senator Ruiz.

SENATOR KEAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to follow up on Senator Kyrillos' questions.

You talked about July 16 and 17, where there were 26 and 14 people. What happened yesterday, would you anticipate happening tomorrow? I mean, do you have any new-- What's happened today?

MR. LAVELL: Yesterday we had one annulment, for no engineer, coming out of New York in the morning. The rest of the day was filled. Today, we do not have any annulments because of any shortage of crews.

SENATOR KEAN: Do you anticipate-- So you have a total of 350 -- 350 engineers? What is the total number of engineers you have?

MR. LAVELL: We have budgeted for 383 engineers, sir.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay. So when you're talking about 26 and 14, that is an extraordinarily high percentage of people who simply walked away from their responsibilities.

MR. SANTORO: That is extremely high.

SENATOR KEAN: And irresponsible. And irresponsible.

MR. SANTORO: And irresponsible.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay.

How many engineers have actually, over the time, exercised the 48-hour leave over the period? Is it--

MR. LAVELL: I don't have that information at this point.

SENATOR KEAN: Can you get it to us -- this Committee?

MR. LAVELL: Yes, we'll try to get you that.

SENATOR KEAN: Also, in 2010 to 2011, this Legislature passed, over my objection, an instate residency requirement for State employees and individuals to work in the education system -- higher ed and otherwise. Has that impacted your ability to hire engineers?

MR. LAVELL: No. We've had -- we've been hiring engineers since 2011. We usually have a class of, like 24, 26. But I can just tell you that the failure rate is somewhere up in the 60 and 70 percent range.

SENATOR KEAN: Sixty to seventy percent of the applicants fail the engineering--

MR. LAVELL: That's the failure rate; the failure rate of the students in the classes.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay. So was there a higher level of application? I mean, if you're talking about each class, were there more applicants before this law was put into place? I mean, it has to have an impact; you're limiting applicants.

MR. SANTORO: So let me answer that. We can get you those numbers; I don't think we have them -- those numbers available. But I did testify, at one point a couple of sessions ago, that in many departments within New Jersey Transit that particular law did constrain us a little bit, in terms of getting qualified individuals to fill vacancies.

SENATOR KEAN: And perhaps -- through you, Mr. Chairman, and to you, sir -- perhaps it's actions like that that have led to commuter experiences we're all talking about.

MR. SANTORO: We'd have to verify that.

SENATOR KEAN: Well, I'm saying -- because limiting the number of people you can hire because of a--

MR. SANTORO: In a broad sense, yes. I can't specifically talk, as I said, to the locomotive engineers; but yes, in a broad sense it has created situations where we can't get the qualified people who don't live in the state.

SENATOR KEAN: We should be attracting the best and the brightest in the State of New Jersey to work on behalf of the people of the State of New Jersey. And I think that we should be focused on this as one of a possible solutions -- is to repeal that law.

Thank you.

SENATOR GORDON: Thank you.

Just to follow up on that; and then I'll turn to Senator Ruiz, who has been waiting patiently.

We just heard 383 positions are budgeted; there are 350, approximately now, in service; 17 in training. And we also just heard that there's a 60 -- possibly a 60 percent failure rate. So I don't know whether those 17 are ready to graduate or not. But you know, I just want to reinforce what we just heard. It sounds like we're not able to, for whatever reason, attract the number that we need. And maybe it's a money issue, a salary issue; and maybe that's something we need to take a look at.

MR. SANTORO: Just for clarification. Our numbers are the three -- three budgeted; and we have 370 employees, locomotive engineers as employees.

SENATOR GORDON: Okay.