

December 24, 2004

CCCA's Now Included

Gov. Adds Prison Title Into Pension

By REUVEN BLAU

When state Department of Correction employee Tim Wilcox filed for retirement in 2002 after working for 25 years, he made a shocking discovery.

Mr. Wilcox, a veteran Community Correctional Center Assistant (CCCA), found that his obscure title was never included in the service-based 25-year retirement plan which applies to all other uniformed DOC employees.

'He Believed'

"He was astonished, but very patient," said Carl Anderson Jr., a chief steward for the New York State Correctional Officers' and Police Benevolent Association who

spearheaded the legislative effort to incorporate Mr. Wilcox and his 29 colleagues into the retirement plan. "He had confidence that it would be worked out."

Mr. Anderson's union-based lobbying efforts paid off when Governor Pataki signed the bill, finally allowing Mr. Wilcox to retire at half pay last week. The signing of the measure was unusual, because Mr. Pataki tends to reject pension bills that are not the product of a labor-management agreement.

"He just wants to enjoy his retirement in peace and quiet," Mr. Anderson said, referring to Mr. Wilcox, who de-

(Continued on Page 4)

(Continued from Page 3)

clined to comment for this article.

"This was strictly a bill to correct the injustice done 27 years ago," said Chris Leo, the legislative director for NYSOCOPA.

'Asked for Demotions'

"We are happy for the members that they were able to retire," added NYSOCOPA President Richard Harcrow. "Some of them were actually going to go back to Correction Officer."

DOCS Sergeants and Correction Officers, the titles directly above and below the CCCA position, are both included in the 25-year pension plan. "It's so ridiculous," Mr. Anderson said. "How can you be in it, out of it, and back in it again?"

In 1965, the Legislature and Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller recognized the physical and psychological difficulties DOCS uniformed personnel face working in prisons. They enacted a bill granting DOCS officers the right to retire with half pay after 25 years of service, regardless of age.

But the little-known CCCA title, which was created in the 1970s, was never included in the pension plan. Most DOCS employees are not familiar with the title. A senior DOCS official who was asked to comment on the bill last week responded, "Are you sure they work for us?"

The problem didn't arise until Mr. Wilcox filed for retirement, Mr. Anderson said. "We didn't suspect it prior to that," he remarked.

Additional measures passed over the years such as the Heart Bill also never directly mentioned CCCAs.

"We were concerned when other bills were coming out and we weren't included," Mr. Anderson said. "They kept on reassuring us, 'You are the same as officers.'"

Mr. Leo pointed out that this bill will "now include CCCAs in all retirement benefits that Correction Officers currently enjoy."

Program Expanded

CCCA's duties include supervising inmates on work release programs. They also regularly work as the commanding officer in their assigned upstate prisons, Mr. Anderson said. CCCAs were originally only stationed at the Rochester Correctional Facility, but the program has since expanded to the Buffalo Correctional Facility.

To qualify for the promotion title, CCCAs must have one year of experience working as a Peace Officer in a correctional setting supervising inmates. Also, they must have an associate's degree with 12 credits in psycholo-

(Continued on Page 11)

gy, social sciences, or criminal justice.

The bill will have an immediate past service cost of \$255,000, to cover the state's necessary retroactive pension contributions. In addition, there will also be a projected \$48,000 increase in annual contributions this fiscal year. "It's not a big money bill," Mr. Harcrow said.

The measure, Mr. Anderson remarked, has changed his life. "I can't tell you how much better I'm sleeping," he said. "I wake up every day with a smile on my face."

