

A victory for police reformers



Attorney Frederick K. Brewington at Islip Town Hall in August. Credit: John Roca

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Daily Point

Police reform leaders gain ground

The Nassau County activists who sued to stop a new county contract with its Superior Officers Association from going into effect got a shot at their wish Thursday when a Supreme Court judge issued a temporary restraining order. The county must respond to the suit by Dec. 24.

The 8 1/2-year deal, approved by the County Legislature last month on an emergency basis, forestalled both committee scrutiny and a public comment period. It provides 15% raises over the life of the deal, a \$3,000 annual stipend in exchange for adopting body cameras and \$8,000 salary increases for those who have been supervisors for more than six years.

The activists' attorney Frederick Brewington argued in the filing that the situation does not meet the legal definition of an emergency that would allow skipping steps, and that Chief Deputy County Executive Helena Williams did not have the legal right to sign the letter setting out the emergency.

But Brewington's reason for wanting the deal stopped is bigger than a technicality: He told The Point Thursday that he and fellow activists fighting for policing changes in Nassau County feel their position is significantly weakened by the county ratifying new police labor contracts without first securing needed reforms.

Under a June directive from Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo that came after George Floyd died at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis in May, municipalities with police departments must develop plans for reforms by April 1. Brewington and his allies in the advocacy group Long Island Advocates for Police Accountability say giving the police new contracts while reforms have not been instituted ends the possibility of getting some changes via contractual bargaining and removes an incentive for officers and police unions to accept changes in county policing.

The county's union contracts all ran out on the final day of 2017. The detectives got a new deal earlier this year and the PBA now has an agreement in principle with the county.

The SOA contract, approved in the legislature by a 16-3 vote, was on the agenda for Thursday night's meeting of the Nassau Interim Finance Authority.

Legislature Presiding Officer Rich Nicoletto told The Point Thursday, "To me, if the county executive says it's an emergency, and she convinces a supermajority of legislators it's an emergency, it is."

Nicoletto added that Curran and her team made a strong case.

According to county officials, it was an emergency because the deal in the last contract that allows officers hired after 2014 to either be insured under the New York State Insurance Plan

and pay 15% of the cost or take a lesser policy and pay no contribution, was about to be blown up by a price increase in the Aetna coverage that would force the workers to start paying in for that plan. This option is only in effect as long as Aetna coverage costs at least 15% less than NYSHIP.

The county argues that there was a clear intent in the last ratified deal to offer a free plan, as well as in the deal just approved, that also makes employees hired before 2014 begin paying a small contribution for NYSHIP next year, or take a lesser plan for free.

Now county officials say they have to pass the new plan before the beginning of 2021 because it deals with the problem of providing officers with a non-contributory plan.

As for Williams signing the emergency declaration, county officials say she signs such things frequently and has the authority to do so.

Brewington disagrees, and said what he sees is the county playing fast and loose with the rules. "This is not the first time they have tried this," he said.

And now it's up to a judge to sort it out.

—Lane Filler [@lanefiller](#)