

The Chief-Leader

Sergeants union, city at odds over pay scale

Some in the rank make less than the cops they supervise, SBA says



The president of the Sergeants Benevolent Association, Vincent Vallelong, and Mayor Eric Adams shook hands following the city's announcement of a tentative 5-year contract agreement with the Uniformed Officers Coalition in June of last year. The SBA has yet to agree to salary terms with the city during the subsequent unit bargaining portion of the contract deal.

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BY RICHARD KHAVKINE

The head of the NYPD sergeants' union says the city's latest contract offer is significantly unfair given that its pay scale in many cases provides newly promoted sergeants a lower salary than the officers they supervise.

Additionally, the salary ladder is skewed such that some recently promoted sergeants are earning more than sergeants who have years in the rank, according to the Sergeants Benevolent Association.

Taken together, those aspects have the potential to sow discord and strain relationships among members, the union said in a note to SBA members. It could also negatively impact police work.

The union's president, Vincent Vallelong, said the SBA has conveyed to the Office of Labor Relations how the lag in pay is impacting morale among its members. City labor officials, though, have refused to budge as unit bargaining drags on without a resolution, he said.

Of the roughly 4,500 sergeants on the force, about 1,400 are making less than a police officer, Vallelong said. "Why am I going to settle a deal when they're not looking to correct the problem with at least 1,400 members," including many who scored high on their promotion test, he said.

The disparities in pay between sergeants and those they supervise happen because those sergeants were promoted before the ratification of some NYPD contracts. Conversely, nearly 900 newly promoted sergeants are paid more than those who ascended to the rank before them because they were placed on a higher step on the salary scale when they were party to the enhanced terms of a new contract for police officers.

According to Vallelong, newly promoted sergeants will only surpass police officers making top pay when they themselves reach max pay for the rank. It can take four full years, or five salary steps, for sergeants to start earning more than the detectives and officers they are supervising, according to the salary chart compiled by the union.

Vallelong said the city's labor negotiators were not bargaining in good faith. The deal was presented as "a take it or leave it" offer at the end of July, he said. Vallelong added that Renee Campion, the commissioner Office of Labor Relations, has said that what the SBA is requesting would break the established wage pattern.

"You basically need to get to the fifth step in order to be making more than a police officer," he said in an interview last week. "All I'm asking you for is to correct these steps and put the people where they should be."

Citing the ongoing negotiations, a City Hall spokesperson, Liz Garcia, declined to comment in detail on the union's arguments. "We hope to come to an agreement with the SBA that is fair to both the workers and city taxpayers," she said by email.

The SBA was among 11 uniformed unions that concluded negotiations on the economics of a tentative five-year contract agreement in June of last year. The deal's compounded 17.77-percent raises matched the pattern negotiated by the city and the Police Benevolent Association the preceding April.

According to the union's salary chart, a newly promoted sergeant with five years as a cop will earn \$117,528, including longevity, service differentials and other payable benefits, and \$6,359 more than the contract that includes the uniform pattern raises. But an officer, the rank below a sergeant, with five and half years on the job will earn \$119,845, a difference of \$2,317 when compared to the new proposal.

It's not until the fourth step according to the proposed salary chart, when sergeants, in this case with less than 10 years on the force, would begin earning \$123,021 and eclipse the salary paid to officers.

Sergeants would then earn progressively more as they accumulate time on the job before topping out at \$147,370 after 20 years.

As part of the subsequent unit bargaining, the city, in exchange for salary bumps, is asking the SBA to agree to delay a retroactive raise of 3.25 percent initially due in December 2021 for about 20 weeks to late April 2022. That would translate to about \$1,526 for sergeants and \$1,755 for detective squad supervisors.

Among the other givebacks requested by the city are no retro pay for sergeants promoted after January 2023, a two-month extension of the SBA's contract and the forfeiture of two "chart" days each year for the first five years.

Vallelong met with the union's delegates last week to go over the city's offer and that, to a person, they supported the union's continued negotiating effort. "They are angry with the city," he said of the delegates. "They feel as if there's no respect on that end for all of the work that they've done day in and day out.... They're out there breaking their ass every single day. They're not willing to give up anything. They want to stay the course."

Vallelong last year penned a letter he addressed to "prospective sergeants" cautioning officers to think hard about whether they should delay or even accept promotions to the supervisory rank given salary differences the union said could add up to as much as \$20,000 over the course of a few years.

Vallelong wrote that as "frontline supervisors" sergeants are called to make "split second decisions" that can have profound and long-lasting consequences for their charges, the public and themselves, but that that accountability is not reflected in starting salaries for the rank.

"You would assume that the City would compensate you accordingly for achieving this hard-earned and well-deserved promotion," he wrote. "Sadly, and inexplicably, that is not the case."