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## PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY Senate Civil Service and Pensions Committee

October 11, 2023, Albany

Mark Heefner, C.M., Commissioner of Aviation, Greater Binghamton  
Airport

## Retention and Recruitment for Civil Service Jobs in New York State

Good afternoon, Chairman Jackson, and members of the Senate Civil Service Committees. I am Mark Heefner, President of the New York Aviation Management Association (NYAMA). I'd like to express my appreciation for this opportunity to speak with you today regarding the need for civil service system reform as it relates to the operation and management of airports in New York.

### New York Aviation Management Association

NYAMA represents over 13,000 members and affiliate members, comprising over 400 commercial service and general aviation airports, fixed based operators, consultants, engineers and various aviation industries and professionals who are focused on enhancing customer service and economic development efforts at the state and regional level. To pursue this mission, our publicly sponsored airports must attract the best and brightest manager and aviation operations supervisor candidates to fill critical airport positions.

### The Hiring and Promotion Problem

Municipal Airport Managers throughout the state are facing daunting challenges with hiring and retaining qualified aviation professionals and promoting from within the organization. The airport/aviation industry is highly specialized and competitive, with critical positions such as Airport Operations Specialists, Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) Chief, Airport/Aviation Finance Director, Commercial Development Officer, Chief Operating Officer, etc., that must be filled by persons knowledgeable and experienced in aviation policy, practices, safety, and Federal and State regulatory regimes.

## **Provisional Basis Employment**

A “surplus” of qualified airport professionals is not typically present in most localities, especially in Upstate New York, so airport professional positions normally require a candidate to be willing to risk relocating from another portion of the state, or outside of the state on a “provisional” basis as required by Civil Service Law. This practice puts New York State airports at a disadvantage compared to Airports outside our State. We’re also concerned that efforts to pursue diversity initiatives may be limited by the provisional appointment requirements and arbitrary testing.

## **Options to Bypass the Civil Service System**

New York Civil Service Law does not apply to six of the top ten commercial service airports in the state because of special exemptions or by the outsourcing of certain airport operations. Restructuring the airport as a public authority with permanent appointment authority, for example, or privatizing certain airport operations, as some airports have done—both actions can result in exemption from the Civil Service system—may not be possible or preferable for an airport or municipal sponsor. NYAMA’s public airports are not looking to bypass the Civil Service system, but rather they are seeking the legal authority to hire on a permanent basis, instead of provisionally for certain titles.

## **Syracuse Hancock International Airport Model Legislation**

Luckily, there is a solution. The Senate this session unanimously passed legislation, S.6335-A (Mannion)/A.7657 (Magnarelli), to allow Syracuse Hancock International Airport to appoint or promote to a permanent position in the exempt class for titles that are critical airport management and supervisory positions. While NYAMA supports this legislation, we urge that all airports in the state that are facing these barriers be included. Rather than adding just one airport to the list of those already exempt, legislation should extend this option to all airports in the state, as Assemblyman William Magnarelli’s bill, A.6736, would do.

### **Request Action**

NYAMA requests that legislation be introduced in the Senate and approved by both houses next session to authorize all airports in the state who may need this option to hire qualified aviation professionals for a variety of on-airport positions on a permanent basis. Because the present problem appears to be worsening, we are hoping such a bill can be signed into law by the Governor as soon as possible.

### **Thank You!**

Thank you for your support for the Syracuse approach and for your consideration of reforming the Civil Service Law to address these hiring issues facing many public airports throughout the state.