

Eliminating Police Academy '09 Class 'Penny Wise, Pound Foolish'

BY JOHN TOSCANO

City Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr., who in his seven years in the council as Public Safety Committee chair has always been a staunch supporter of a high complement of officers in the NYPD, has come out strongly against Mayor Michael Bloomberg's proposal to eliminate the entire 2009 Police Academy class to save \$36 million.

Vallone said at a recent joint public hearing held by his and the Finance Committee that public safety must be the city's primary concern, even in these difficult times marked by high budget deficits.

"Safe streets are the catalyst by which every other aspect of the city flourishes, and to cut this area would only add to financial troubles in the city," Vallone declared.

Emphasizing this point, he stated, "The NYPD always says it can do more with less, but at this point, Batman would have trouble doing more with the amount of resources we have allotted. If public safety suffers, everything suffers."

Reviewing a recent series of budget modifications, he said the Bloomberg administration had proposed cutting the entire class of 1,200 recruits, a move that would bring the current force to a 15-year low of 33,325 officers.

The Astoria lawmaker noted the city Office of Management and Budget has proposed a plan in which those lost recruits would be gradually replaced over the next four years, adding two classes of 2,000 recruits each year. That plan, he said, would bring the department's strength back to the desired head count of roughly 38,000 officers in Fiscal Year 2013.

But, Vallone recalled, he has seen similar promises "ring hollow" for many years. "Essentially, they are taking out a loan of officers that they owe to us, and are using our public safety as collateral," he pointed out. "They have set up a payment plan to get those officers back to us, but if things go from bad to worse, I have a feeling they are going to default."

According to Vallone, with fewer officers on the street, crime has shown signs of creeping back up after years of record lows. He said that year to date, murders are up 6 percent and rape and burglary are each up roughly 2 percent. Meanwhile, overall crime declined 3.4 percent, the smallest reduction in crime for a year since 2001.



"Even in difficult economic times, this decision may be penny-wise and pound foolish," Vallone said, referring to the proposal to eliminate the 2009 Police Academy class.

Vallone said Police Commissioner Ray Kelly testified that while his officers have brought crime to historic lows, they are facing increasingly large workloads. Radio runs increased by 250,000 this year and expanded counter-terrorism patrols continue to deplete department resources, he said.

Vallone said while Kelly insisted the NYPD would continue to maintain an excellent standard, he did admit it would be more difficult with fewer officers.

Kelly stated, "I don't want these cuts to go forward. I can do a more effective job with more officers. I don't want to lose any."

At a hearing the previous week, Vallone said he had asked city Budget Director Mark Page if he had a theory about the correlation between crime levels and the city's economic health. He said Page responded that he did not, a statement that shocked Vallone.

The lawmaker said he believed that tourism, retail and real estate industries, among others, all depend highly on safe streets, which means cutting cops could end up costing the city more money than it saved.

"Even in difficult economic times, this decision may be penny-wise and pound foolish," Vallone said, referring to the proposal to eliminate the 2009 Police Academy class.

"Some say you can't put a price on public safety, but this year it turns out it's \$36 million," he concluded.



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