

# Union officials appointed to arbitration panel

Written by

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**TRENTON** — Two major public safety unions opposed new arbitration caps on the raises that can be given to their members, but union representatives will play a key role in deciding whether those caps, designed to give taxpayers a break from skyrocketing public worker salaries, remain in effect beyond 2014.

Senate President Stephen M. Sweeney, D-Gloucester, appointed two union officials to the panel that will study the effect of the cap and whether it should remain in effect after 2014.

The two are Ronald Bakley of Erial, a retired police officer who is director of the New Jersey Fraternal Order of Police labor council, and William Lavin of Woodbridge, president of the New Jersey Firefighters Mutual Benevolent Association. Both said the arbitration changes signed in December by Gov. Chris Christie limiting raises that can be awarded by arbitrators at 2 percent a year weren't necessary.

Lavin said he wants to make sure the task force considers his union's concerns about timeliness, the selection of arbitrators and the accuracy of the depiction of raises

being received by public-safety employees.

"The fair interpretation of those numbers is critical to us," Lavin said.

Bakley said he isn't certain about specifically what the panel, which has not yet organized, intends to accomplish. He said the law will get arbitrators to decide cases faster, because their pay is capped at \$7,500 and they face \$1,000 per day fines if they take more than 45 days. But he predicted other impacts of the law won't be as drastic because it keeps conventional arbitration on the books.

Sweeney didn't respond to a request for comment.

The Police and Fire Public Interest Arbitration Impact Task Force was established as part of the arbitration reform. It is to study the impact of the award cap on property taxes, union contracts, municipal services and expenses and changes in crime rates, response time

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and police and fire staffing.

The task force will consist of eight members. The four being appointed by Gov. Chris Christie and the two being named by Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver had not been identified by Monday's deadline.

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