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FOR RELEASE: Immediate
Friday, April 27, 2007

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STRATTON NAMES WAYNE BENNETT PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSIONER

Former State Police Superintendent to Lead Police, Fire Operations in Schenectady

SCHENECTADY -- Mayor Brian U. Stratton today announced the appointment of retired New York State Police Superintendent Wayne Bennett to the position of Public Safety Commissioner in and for the City of Schenectady, effective immediately.

As Commissioner, Bennett will oversee all public safety operations in Schenectady, with direct management and supervisory responsibility for the city's 160-member Police Department and the 117-member Fire Department. Commissioner Bennett will report directly to Mayor Stratton. He will be paid an annual salary of \$115,000.

In announcing the appointment, Mayor Stratton issued the following statement:

After careful consideration, and in response to the City of Schenectady's critical public safety needs, along with the dynamics of the ongoing criminal investigation by the District Attorney and State Police into the Schenectady Police Department's vice unit detective division, I have made the decision that our city can be best served at this time with the return of the position of Public Safety Commissioner.

Today, I am pleased to announce that retired State Police Superintendent Bennett has accepted my offer to become Schenectady's Public Safety Commissioner. I am confident that the people of Schenectady will benefit greatly from his immense experience in law enforcement and criminal investigation. We could not ask for a more qualified or experienced individual to lead our public safety needs at this time.

In making this announcement, I also want to announce that I have asked Michael Geraci to remain as our Chief of Police. He will work directly with Commissioner Bennett to administer the day-to-day operations of our police department. Chief Geraci will report directly to the Commissioner, as will Fire Chief Bob Farstad.

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When I became Mayor in January 2004, at a time of incredible financial challenge and uncertainty in our city, I made the decision that our public safety operations could be ably sustained without the added financial burden of the cost of the position of Public Safety Commissioner.

During the past three years and four months, I believe Police Chief Mike Geraci and Fire Chief Bob Farstad have served the needs of this city in a highly professional and capable manner. On a financial level, I am proud to again point out that for the last two consecutive fiscal years – 2005 and 2006 – both Chief Geraci and Chief Farstad have finished well below budget.

As Chief, Mike Geraci has instituted number of fundamental changes to make the police department operate more effectively and efficiently. Working with District Attorney Bob Carney, Chief Geraci has overseen Schenectady's active participation in the State's Operation IMPACT Program, bringing the benefit of uniformed Troopers, technology and hundreds of thousands of dollars in state funding to help us fight crime on our streets.

Today, Schenectady's Operation IMPACT program is heralded by state officials as one of the best in the State – an achievement largely due to Chief Geraci's leadership. During his time as chief, Mike Geraci has gained the respect of the city's residents, restoring integrity to the job of chief of police through his outreach to neighborhood groups and his personal commitment to cooperative relationships with law enforcement and community agencies.

But since the beginning of this year, the overall integrity and image of our police department has once more been called into question by the discovery of criminal evidence reported missing from the custody of the department's Vice Squad.

For the Schenectady Police Department, a department with a well-documented history of controversy and scandal, this latest news seemed to most of us almost unfathomable. For that reason, I agreed with the District Attorney that a full-scale criminal investigation be launched at once, and that it be led by an outside agency with integrity beyond reproach to eliminate the potential for compromise or suspicion.

That investigation is still ongoing. To date, one Vice Squad investigator has been arrested and a sergeant has been placed on administrative leave. Although the State Police have not completed their work, I believe that it is prudent to act now to address the strong need for the kind of leadership that can bring the management and supervisory reforms needed to change the culture of our police department.

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Superintendent Bennett has proven himself to be a strong disciplinarian, and an effective leader who will bring a greater level of accountability to every member of the Schenectady Police Department. In his 38 years with the New York State Police, Wayne Bennett served in various leadership ranks before being named Superintendent by Gov. George Pataki in 2003. As Lt. Colonel – Assistant Deputy Superintendent, Bennett oversaw the 900-member State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI), responsible for investigating criminal activity.

I have directed Commissioner Bennett to establish several immediate priorities:

- **Conduct an immediate review of all personnel assignments and responsibilities in the Police Department to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency;**
- **Conduct a risk assessment of protocols for informant management and evidence handling, including all narcotics evidence, currency and weapons;**
- **Review police personnel and patrol deployment methodologies to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency;**
- **Assess Police and Fire overtime expenditures and procedures for approval of overtime;**
- **Review the Police Department's level of interaction and cooperation with the Schenectady County Sheriff and other law enforcement agencies to ensure maximum use of available outside law enforcement resources;**
- **Evaluate internal complaint investigation procedures to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness; and**
- **Review the status and goals of the city's ongoing contractual negotiations with the Schenectady Police Benevolent Association (PBA).**

I have also directed Commissioner Bennett to meet in the coming weeks with various neighborhood groups and other organizations to discuss localized public safety problems and assess strategies.

In closing, I am confident that Commissioner Bennett will work well with Chief Geraci and the members of the Police Department and Fire Department to restore the public's sense of faith and integrity in our public safety operations.

Wayne E. Bennett

Former Superintendent, New York State Police

Biography

Superintendent Wayne E. Bennett was nominated by Governor Pataki on July 23, 2003 to become the 12th Superintendent of the New York State Police. He was confirmed by the State Senate on September 16, 2003. Superintendent Bennett served the division for 38 years.

Prior to his appointment as Superintendent, he served as the First Deputy Superintendent, second in command of the New York State Police, since April of 1984.

Superintendent Bennett previously served as Lieutenant Colonel – Assistant Deputy Superintendent in charge of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI), overseeing the operations of the 900 members of that unit. In that capacity, he oversaw the Joel Rifkin serial murder investigation, as well as the investigation into the disappearance of Sara Anne Wood and the related Louis Lent task force operations in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

From 1992 to 1993, he served as Lieutenant Colonel – Assistant Deputy Superintendent in charge of the Division's 3,100 member Uniform Force.

The Superintendent, who has held all but three titles in the State Police Uniform Force and Bureau of Criminal Investigation, began his career with the Division as a Trooper in 1968. He rose steadily through the ranks to Investigator (1973), Sergeant (1974), Zone Sergeant (1978), Lieutenant (1982) and Captain (1985) and has served throughout New York State as well as in New York City with the DEA Joint Drug Task Force.

In 1987, he was promoted to Major and Troop Commander of State Police personnel in the ten-county area of Troop G, encompassing the Capital District and southern Adirondacks. This was followed in 1990 by his promotion to Staff Inspector in the Employee Relations Unit at Division Headquarters in Albany.

A native of Castleton, New York, Superintendent Bennett holds a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration from the State University of New York at Albany, and an Associates Degree in Banking, Insurance and Real Estate from Hudson Valley Community College in Troy. He and his wife, Patricia, reside in Clifton Park, New York.