

# Lawmakers seek to make State Police its own department

The bill comes during a period of tension between the attorney general and the Legislature.

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The new legislation would make the New Jersey State Police its own department for the first time in 76 years. | Matt Rourke/AP

Amid tensions between New Jersey Attorney General Matt Platkin and the state Legislature, a bipartisan group of senators is seeking to move the State Police out of the attorney general's authority.

The new legislation would make the New Jersey State Police its own department for the first time in 76 years, removing it from within the Department of Law and Public Safety, which is led by the attorney general.

"I don't think a politically-appointed lawyer who does not know anything about policing should be the person responsible for the State Police to report to," said state Sen. James Beach, a Democrat from Camden County who's the bill's prime sponsor.

A spokesperson for the Attorney General's Office declined to comment. While the bill comes during a period of tension between Platkin and the Legislature — as well as between Platkin and the State Police — it likely won't take effect until the end of his tenure at the earliest if it passes, since New Jerseyans will elect a new governor in November.

Beach and state Sen. Mike Testa, a Republican, are the two prime sponsors of the bill, [NJ S4613 \(24R\)](#). Democratic Sen. Linda Greenstein — chair of the Law and Public Safety Committee — and Republican Sen. Bob Singer are co-sponsors.

Platkin has faced criticism from South Jersey Democrats as well as Republicans, including for his decision to press corruption charges against South Jersey Democratic power broker George Norcross and five politically-connected co-defendants. A judge [dismissed the charges in March](#), which Platkin is appealing.

Assembly Republicans in February introduced an impeachment resolution against Platkin that, among many other things, cited a study published by his office that found continued racial disparities in State Police that they said “unjustifiably discredits the State Police, erodes public confidence in the State Police, and violates the public trust.”

There have also been noticeable tensions between Platkin and the State Police. In December, [he launched an investigation](#) into whether State Police severely slowed down traffic enforcement in response to the report on racial disparities. Months earlier, Platkin ordered major reforms to the State Police and took over its human resources department following two investigations by his office that found “deeply troubling conduct and systemic problems” within the force.

Under Beach’s bill, personnel changes could only be made by the State Police superintendent. “The approval of the Attorney General shall not be required,” it says.

However, the Attorney General’s Office of Law Enforcement Professional Standards would still have oversight and monitoring authority over the State Police, according to the bill’s statement.

“I reached out to quite a few stakeholders, and I get the sense that it’s something that would get strong consideration,” said Beach, who said the idea was first proposed to him by a leader of the Former Troopers Association.

The bill also has some support from the state NAACP. Greg Zeff, an attorney for the group, said it supports the general idea behind the bill.

“There is an inherent conflict in any state that has its attorney general’s office and state police joined,” Zeff said.

But Zeff said the bill doesn’t go far enough in detailing how the state police would function independently, including oversight responsibilities. His organization is also pushing for an inspector general to oversee state prosecutors.

“We’re cautiously optimistic that with some modifications, there will be a bill that will bring both transparency and appropriate supervision over the State Police in New Jersey, as most states have,” Zeff said. “Most states don’t operate this way.”

The State Police was its own department from its founding in 1921 until 1948, when it was put under the newly-created Department of Law and Public Safety.

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