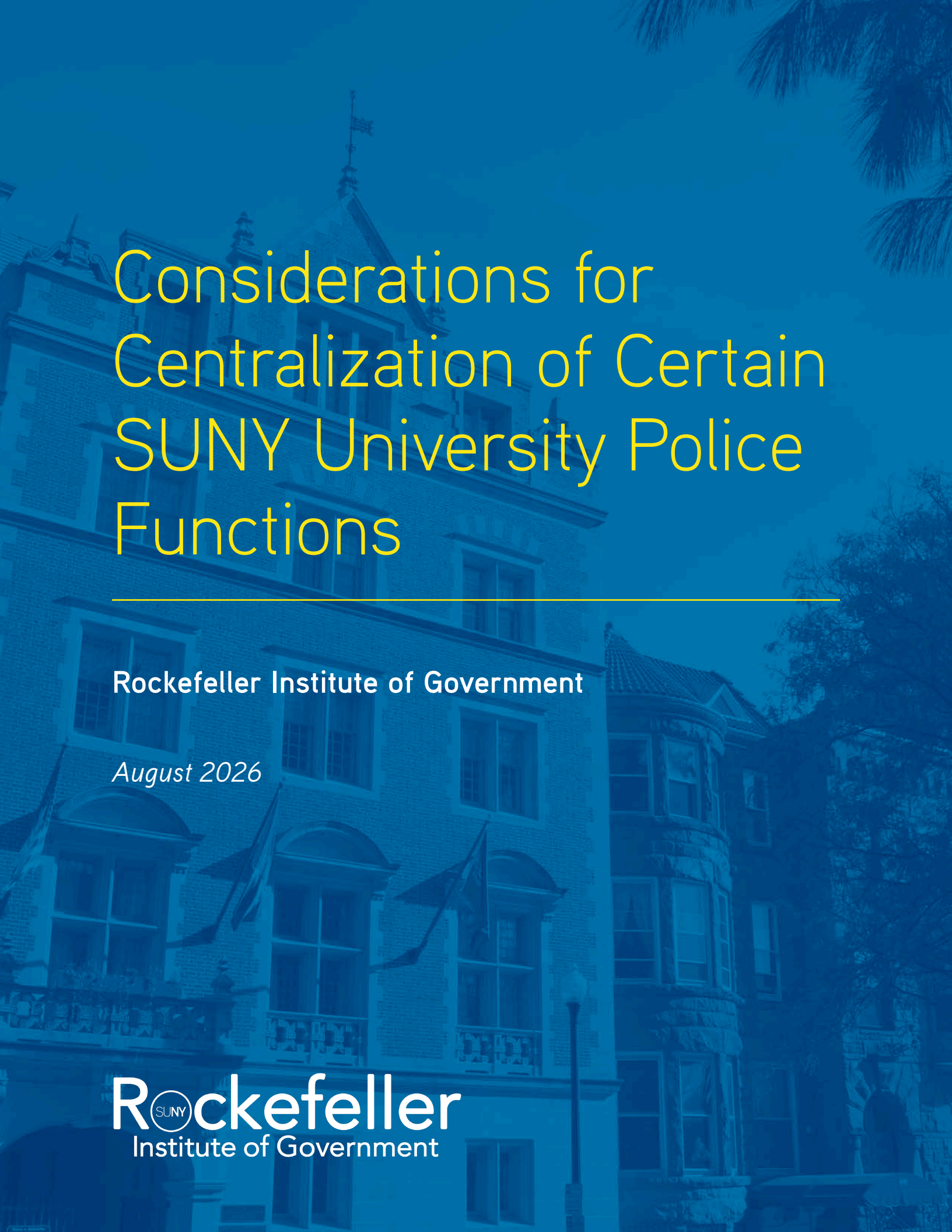


The background of the slide is a photograph of a large, multi-story historic building with many windows and a flag on top. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent blue filter. The title text is in a bright yellow color.

Considerations for Centralization of Certain SUNY University Police Functions

Rockefeller Institute of Government

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Rockefeller
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Photo Source: "University at Albany Police,"
<https://www.albany.edu/police>.

Executive Summary

During the 2025–26 legislative session, several bills were introduced in the New York legislature focusing on changes to the organizational structure of the State University of New York (SUNY) Police that would alter some of its presently campus-based functions with a more centralized administrative model. Currently, each SUNY campus operates a police department under local command leadership and often has locally tailored policies. These proposals and current practices warrant a review of whether centralization of certain functions and policies is feasible and would increase operational efficiency and, primarily, enhance the safety of students, faculty, and staff across the SUNY system.

Those in favor of a more centralized SUNY Police approach have argued that SUNY Police command and control mechanisms could be streamlined, training and procedures could be improved, allocation of resources could be made more equitable, inter-campus coordination could be better facilitated, and shared services could be enhanced overall. However, others, including campus presidents and current police chiefs, have indicated concerns about how legislative changes would possibly impinge on local campus authority and autonomy. They also raise concerns with respect to campus-specific needs, collective bargaining complexities, enacting sufficient statutory authority, and potential disruptions in safety for students and staff.

This report analyzes the impacts of centralizing certain policies, functions, and governance structures for SUNY Police. In addition, it examines whether there are other potential options for reform other than centralization. It also reviews the experiences of other state university systems to evaluate a menu of potential reforms for the SUNY Police system outside of centralization for consideration in future policies. Together, these potential reforms include:

Centralization Options

- Expanded leadership roles for the SUNY Police Commissioner's Office
- Universal shared practices and protocols for campus policing operations
- Centralization of budgeting functions and expansion of systemwide jurisdiction

Noncentralization Options

- Investments into internal oversight, advisory, and technology improvements
- Increased regionalized coordination between campus departments
- Implementing a form of hybrid SUNY Police command structure—regional and leadership roles

Key Findings

As part of our research into this topic, the Rockefeller Institute conducted interviews with SUNY Police officers and their union representatives, campus police department leadership, SUNY campus presidents, and other stakeholders. The key takeaways from those discussions include the following:

1. **Campus presidents and SUNY System Administration generally thought local autonomy should remain a priority to accommodate unique campus needs and ensure responsiveness.** Throughout multiple interviews, the statements of campus presidents and SUNY System Administration staff reflected concerns that centralization of certain policing functions would hinder the ability of campuses to optimally fulfill public safety responsibilities at the campus level. Campus leadership also expressed concern that centralization efforts could jeopardize the relationships with student populations and local communities that each campus has built around the issues of public safety.
2. **There is meaningful support for the centralization of certain functions.** Most participants acknowledged potential benefits from centralizing various functions. This includes systemwide standardization of various policies and procedures, a uniform and centralized accountability system (including an appeals process and internal affairs reorganization), improvements to coordination between SUNY Police and other statewide police agencies, and centralized equipment purchasing and supply processing administration, to name a few.

3. **A multiyear phase-in could further support any potential changes.** Stakeholders noted that operational challenges and logistical uncertainties could hinder any centralization efforts without full-scale strategic planning and preparation. A comprehensive assessment of needs, both at the system and individual campus level, could help categorize and prioritize potential functions for centralization, which then could be phased-in over time. If staffing structures are to be changed, for example, timeframes for any centralization efforts would need to be adequate to accommodate needed negotiations with labor bargaining units. This may be especially important if the SUNY system adopts reforms connected to administrative and support functions.
4. **Potential cost savings—or cost increases—remain variable and unclear.** Some reforms, such as the elimination of certain campus-based command leadership positions, may result in cost savings. However, other changes—such as the development of a robust common IT system, the creation of systemwide specialized public safety response units, and centralizing financing for upgrades to campus facilities—could drive cost increases. Any proposed reform related to the centralization of SUNY PD operations or personnel should be accompanied by a full analysis of fiscal impact before undertaking any actions.
5. **Attainable and practical noncentralized options for reform exist alongside those aimed at centralizing functions.** As we conducted research into the potential centralization of organizational functions, it reflected that there are feasible alternatives that SUNY could consider undertaking instead of or alongside more structural changes. Types of reforms that could be achieved without centralization include standardized policies, budgetary practices, expansion of the commissioner’s office, and potentially generating a hybrid organizational command model for SUNY Police among other areas of agreement.

Introduction

From its origin in 1968 as a security staff under the SUNY Public Safety Program, the State University of New York (SUNY) Police system has evolved into a force of more than 500 police officers of varying ranks—in addition to investigators, command staff, and administrative support—across 28 different campus-based police departments and a department at SUNY System Administration.¹

While the SUNY Police system is guided by a commissioner, located at SUNY's System Administration headquarters in Albany, the day-to-day functions of campus police departments are the responsibility of individual chiefs of police, each of whom is appointed by their respective campus presidents. These include budgeting, recruitment, resource procurement, training, policy implementation, personnel accountability, and assigned duties for officers on each SUNY campus. The operational autonomy granted to campus police departments has allowed them to meet the unique and diverse security and safety needs of their specific campus, students, and communities. Yet, a lack of centralization of various functions could contribute to inefficiencies and, as a possible result, less than optimal effectiveness systemwide.

The Rockefeller Institute of Government was asked to research the topic of centralization of campus policing services, what it may entail for SUNY Police, and whether centralization would be cost-effective, practical, and improve safety outcomes, or whether there are viable alternatives. This analysis incorporated interviews with SUNY Police officers and their representatives, campus police department leadership, SUNY campus presidents, and other stakeholders. In addition, a review of academic literature related to police centralization was undertaken, past and current reform proposals introduced in the State Legislature, and several case studies on the structure and administrative reforms of other state university police departments were studied for comparison.

This report presents the findings of this research as a roadmap of short-term and long-term policy considerations, including both options that are focused on centralization of various SUNY Police functions, responsibilities, and non-centralized ones.

Literature Review

Despite growing attention to campus policing nationally, there remains a notable lack of scholarly literature examining centralized versus decentralized models of university police systems. While broader policing research has explored the impacts of decentralization for municipal police departments on crime rates, officer behavior, community initiatives, and public trust, just to name a few, these findings do not fully translate to the unique context of college campus environments. As a recent comprehensive internal review of the University of Minnesota Police Department noted, "A campus policing agency should be distinguished from an urban city police department. Policing styles and tactics are not the same."² Policing colleges and universities often involve hybrid roles that include not only public and personal safety, but disciplinary enforcement and accounting for the general student welfare as well.³

Much of the existing research on campus police focuses on perceptions of legitimacy, interactions with students, and comparisons to municipal police, rather than department and system organizational structure.^{4, 5} Additionally, many of the existing assessments examine specific practices of campus police and are internal, community-based evaluations in response to specific events rather than systematic analyses of administrative structure. These assessments, such as a 2021 Report on Campus Safety from the University of Iowa or the system response investigation from UCLA, centered on how campus police approach civil disobedience or recommendations on accountability metrics for police officer misconduct.^{6, 7}

For those studies that do explore the effects of different administrative structures, research shows both benefits and drawbacks from centralization of police practices and departments. A 2003 study evaluated police organizational data from the past 40 years, tracking significant differences and outcomes between college campus police bodies and municipal police agencies. The results showcased how college campus policing evolved over the years to embody many aspects of municipal law enforcement agencies, adopting characteristics such as uniform standards, shared use-of-force policies, need-based resource allocation, and standardized oversight mechanisms.⁸ Another, more recent 2022 study on the structure of campus law enforcement reflected that centralization has been reported to facilitate resource efficiency and operability, a structure that supports better communication systems, mutual aid agreements, and unified databases that in turn allow campus officers and departments to coordinate efforts more effectively with other campuses and with external law enforcement agencies.⁹ Another 2018 multistate analysis of police consolidation found that centralization certain operations offered stronger accountability and oversight, particularly when localized police departments lack robust mechanisms for civilian review or state-level evaluation.¹⁰ These studies support the position that developing campus policing services in a centralized fashion to mimic structures and functions of municipal departments could enhance professionalization, coordination, and efficiency.

Other research, however, provides support for a more decentralized campus policing structure. One study on community police practices concluded that centralization of university policing can result in bureaucratic overreach, a lack of contextual sensitivity, and erosion of campus autonomy.¹¹ It noted that university policing is embedded in the specific culture, demographics, and values of individual campus communities, and that a centralized organizational system may overlook important nuances in student populations or institutional missions. Localized, campus-controlled departments that develop a targeted approach often build trust through community-oriented policing models tailored to specific campus needs, something certain critics argue is diluted by more top-down governance.¹² Further research that reviewed police institutional reforms indicated that more campus-level autonomy over policing encourages the development of collaborative partnerships with campus populations to problem-solve, with its greater flexibility attributed to a less rigid hierarchy structure.¹³ A more decentralized approach therein may allow officers, leadership, and policymakers to respond to community needs in more customized and efficient ways, rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach that can come from formal policy.

Key New York State Legislation

Over its 57-year history, SUNY's police operations have undergone several reforms through actions of the State Legislature. The most significant changes include:

- In 1998, a resolution by the SUNY Board of Trustees, and subsequent legislation signed into law by Governor George Pataki, changed the definitional status of many SUNY public-safety officers from “peace officers” to full police officers, including expanding their jurisdiction off-campus in New York Education and Criminal Procedures Laws.¹⁴ This allowed officers and campus departments to undertake criminal investigations off campus, assist municipal police, execute arrest and search warrants, and travel beyond campus property.¹⁵
- In 2011, Bill A5372 was introduced by State Assemblymember Joe Lentol in the New York State Legislature to expand the geographic area of employment (GAE) of SUNY Police officers to allow officers to enforce violations of law, misdemeanors, and felonies in areas directly adjacent to campuses and other state university property throughout the state.¹⁶ The rationale was to allow police officers assigned to SUNY campuses to work in expanded areas to better protect public safety. It allowed these officers to assist other municipalities pursuant to a mutual aid agreement when extra help may be needed. This bill eventually became law and was immediately implemented.¹⁷
- Prior legislation sought to overhaul the internal organizational mechanisms of SUNY police. Assembly Bill A10344A of 2010, for example, sought to amend the role of the Commissioner of State University Police to oversee all campus police forces, standardize operations and training across the system, and be appointed by SUNY.¹⁸ This proposal, similar to more recent legislation (S4707/A5887 of 2024), aimed to enhance administrative efficiency and restructure classification of police leadership on each campus. State Senator Toby Ann Stavisky and State Assemblymember Karen McMahon introduced this bill. It encapsulates some of the key reforms affecting police office personnel favored by those advocating for more centralized and standardized SUNY police operations. Provisions of this legislation include:^{19, 20}
 - ◇ Transferring the authority to appoint campus police officers from the department's police chiefs (currently with the approval of their respective campus president) to the Commissioner of SUNY Police.
 - ◇ Supervisory and administrative authority over campus police officers throughout the state would reside with the commissioner rather than with campus presidents and police department chiefs.
 - ◇ No new appointments to campus department command leadership—chief of police, assistant chief of police, deputy chief of police, inspector—would be allowed under a university president, instead assigning that responsibility to the commissioner. In addition, appointments to unclassified service positions and professional service positions would be prohibited for future vacancies.

- ◇ The geographic area of employment would be expanded to be the entire state of New York. This would allow SUNY Police officers to, among other things, work with other police departments anywhere in the state, including those in communities immediately surrounding their own campus and on other SUNY campuses, with the clear legal authority to do so.

University Police Structure Case Studies

During our initial analysis, we examined eight college campus policing systems that appeared comparable to SUNY in terms of size, structure, student enrollment, and campus police reform efforts. We documented specific criteria about each system and noted any significant policy shifts in recent years that affected how policing is conducted, or potentially replicable structural and nonstructural elements of campus safety governance that exist at these universities.

California State University

One of the largest public university systems in the United States, California State University (CSU) does not have a fully centralized campus police system, with each of the 23 CSU campuses operating its own independent police department, and the presidents appointing their own police chiefs. While each campus police department is responsible for its own safety and security, there are some shared best policies and practices that connect across the system. One example being that CSU officers systemwide are trained and sworn, as are those of the University of California (UC) system, under the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training.²¹ The entire system consists of 23 separate campuses with more than 461,000 students enrolled systemwide in Fall 2024.^{22, 23}

On occasion, CSU has initiated systemwide policy reforms. In 2022, for example, CSU used the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing as a framework to identify areas for reform and execute policy and practice changes in areas related to building trust, improving oversight, strengthening community engagement, and improving training that were to be institutionalized across all CSU campuses.²⁴ CSU also mandated that a Campus Police and Safety Advisory Committee be established on each campus to review policing and safety practices with community input and to update practices that provided policy clarity, legality, and alignment with best practices using the guidance of designated professional standards.²⁵

Still, CSU campuses are empowered to reform and adopt policing policies and practices on their own as they see fit. For example, in 2024, the Fullerton campus launched a Holistic Safety Plan that blended counseling and psychological services with campus policing just for its campus usage.²⁶ This included implementing a tiered response system where campus safety specialists and a mobile response team tend to mental health crises and nonviolent emergencies, rather than first sending uniformed police officers to these incidents.

Ohio State University

The Ohio State University (OSU) police departments are centralized under a single police division, the Ohio State University Police Division (OSUPD). Its agency serves the entire university system, including the main campus in Columbus and regional campuses with approximately 60,000 students as of Fall 2024.^{27, 28} The Ohio State University (OSU) system also has six regional campuses in Lima, Mansfield, Marion, Newark, and ATI (Agricultural Technical Institute) Wooster, adding approximately 7,000 additional enrolled students.²⁹

OSU's Department of Public Safety (DPS), located on the main Columbus campus, serves as the centralized headquarters for all policing operations systemwide. The six regional campuses each have a Supervisor of Public Safety, who reports to OSU's Chief of Police, and these regional supervisors are appointed by the system's Chief of Police.^{30, 31} All public safety policies and procedures are developed and initiated by the centralized DPS, including such things as enhancements to security technology and personal measures enacted as part of recommendations from a 2021 comprehensive University Task Force on Campus Safety and Well-Being evaluation.^{32, 33}

Pennsylvania State University

The first land-grant university in the nation, the Penn State University system consists of its flagship university at University Park with a total student enrollment, as of Fall 2024, of approximately 47,000 students and 25 other campuses totaling nearly 88,000 students at these institutions.³⁴ In 2017, police departments at 22 campuses, including the flagship campus at University Park, consolidated operations into one systemwide police department, University Police and Public Safety (UPPS).³⁵ All policy development and publication are now centralized there, as is all data collection and reporting.

The system's command staff is headed by the chief of police and public safety, and this command staff includes three deputy chiefs responsible for oversight of campus policing operations: a Western District Commander (overseeing 10 campuses); an Eastern District Commander (11 campuses); and a University Park District Commander (flagship campus).³⁶ This change was driven by an internal assessment examining and identifying areas where the system was operating efficiently towards student safety in the aftermath of the Sandusky scandal, and so an overhaul was undertaken to transition to the regional governance model.³⁷ As part of the centralization of responsibilities and authorities under the chief of police and public safety, that position coordinates with additional staff at the headquarters to oversee training, accreditation, oversight, dispatching, records management (RMS), and hiring and appointments of new officers to specific campuses. The designated quartermaster is responsible for equipment deployment and allocation of personnel supplies to each campus department and works in coordination with the other interagency staff at University Park.

University of California

The University of California (UC) system consists of 10 different campuses: Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Merced, Riverside, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz. Fall 2024 student enrollment totaled nearly 300,000 students systemwide.³⁸ The UC Police Department is not centralized under a single system chief or office. Rather, each campus in the University of California system has its own police department, led by a chief of police appointed by the campus chancellor. The chief is responsible for overseeing the organization, operations, internal administration, and discipline of the department. The chancellor also oversees the establishment of a police or public safety department tasked with law enforcement and protecting the lives and property of students, faculty, staff, and the public. Campus police efforts are coordinated with the UC Office of the President and the systemwide Director of Community Safety and Security. The Office of the President is responsible for the university-wide coordination of certain university police services functions. This responsibility is executed through the Office of the Coordinator of Police Services and includes coordination of the development of employee selection, training, and performance standards; collection and dissemination of crime prevention information; liaison with other agencies; organization planning for intercampus mutual assistance; and development of police services policies and standards.³⁹

While there is no single “chief of the UC Police Department,” all campus police officers are recognized as part of the University of California Police Department (UCPD) to provide law enforcement services at each campus, and the campus chiefs collaborate through a systemwide Council of Police Chiefs. The systemwide Council of Police Chiefs is a duly constituted body consisting of the department heads of the 10 campuses. The council meets on a regular basis for the purpose of establishing liaison, reviewing university police issues, and promulgating policy and procedures through the Office of Employee and Labor Relations. In an effort towards reform, in 2021, the UC president mandated an independent review of the entire policing system by the third-party organization called 21st Century Policing Solutions.⁴⁰ The review recommended structural changes to how public safety is administered across each individual campus, and as part of the resulting Community Safety Plan, UC established a working group to update the UC Police Data Dashboard to collect and publicly share safety data as part of its systemwide updates.

Still, individual campuses are granted broad autonomy, including over policymaking and police department structures and policing operations. As one example, in 2024 the University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA) implemented a novel approach to address campus safety and how officers would address conflicts on campus grounds called the Four Point Plan.⁴¹ These policies and procedures currently apply only to UCLA.

University of Massachusetts

The University of Massachusetts (UMass) is a public, land-grant university system with four undergraduate campuses—Amherst (Main Campus), Boston, Dartmouth, and Lowell—a medical school, and law school with a total enrollment of approximately 73,500 students as of Fall 2024.⁴² Each of the five UMass campuses operates its own independent, autonomous police department, led by a campus chief of police, with the presidents appointing this position and chiefs in turn reporting to the campus president. Every campus police department also manages its own operating budgets, including financial planning, training costs, procurement, and other expenditures depending on the specific campus. Yet, while the campus sets the operational budget, large or systemwide purchases may require approval through the Unified Procurement Services Team (UPST). The UPST serves all campuses across every department within the UMass system by managing and conducting large purchasing activities for the university, such as sourcing, contracts, supplier management, and purchase orders, implementing systemwide standards and ensuring compliance with procurement policies.⁴³ For UMass Police, this covers large or regulated items (such as vehicles, tactical equipment, or IT-related systems) that are procured through centralized UPST processes for administrative efficiency, compliance, and cost savings.

Moreover, even though the departments are decentralized, they also coordinate regionally for other operational needs. This is done through mutual aid agreements between campuses and local municipalities. These grant cross-jurisdictional authority so officers can legally act across neighboring jurisdictions without procedural delays.⁴⁴ Furthermore, it helps facilitate collaborative responses to larger events, emergencies, or investigations that span campus and community dispatches.⁴⁵ Finally, many departments conduct regional, joint training programs and accreditation standards under the Municipal Police Training Committee (MPTC), which sets universal curriculum standards for officer training.⁴⁶

The most significant policy change occurred in the aftermath of the 2020 protests of police brutality, following the state's enactment of the Police Reform Bill of 2020. Among the changes to police practices, this law expanded civilian input in the oversight of police departments throughout the Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (MPOSTC).^{47, 48} This civilian-led commission assists in efforts to certify, train, and decertify officers statewide, preventing rehiring of decertified officers. UMass Police, like all other Massachusetts law enforcement, became subject to the new certification requirements, training mandates (e.g., new antibias and de-escalation techniques), and statewide accountability measures.

University of North Carolina

The University of North Carolina (UNC) system is made up of 17 universities with nearly 250,000 students reported for enrollment in 2024 for the entire system.^{49, 50} In terms of governance, the UNC system is a hybrid model with a central Office of Safety and Emergency Operations that provides guidance, oversight, strategic planning, and coordinates liaison work for all campus police departments. This office supports

consistency and communication across the system, especially for large scale planning and critical incident preparedness, but does not command day to day police operations at each campus.⁵¹ Daily operations at each university are done through each campus' own police department, led by a chief of police appointed by each campus's president. Each department is also responsible for allocating funds for their budgets derived from the university's overall operating budget with guidelines from the UNC system.

Although there is not a singular command unit for UNC, departments do interact for joint training and emergency response. Recently, the UNC system enacted policy updates around officer use-of-force practices in relation to arrests and student protests applicable to all campuses through the Office of Safety and Emergency Operations. These came from UNC's "Consensus Policy Working Group," which developed prohibitions of neck restraints during arrests and dictated that officers have a "duty to intervene" in response to excessive force by other officers.⁵² This group provides a venue for collaboration among chiefs of police, legal advisors, and the system's safety leadership so that policy changes reflect systemwide priorities and best practices. Another recent development for campus policing is that UNC Pembroke received a state government grant to establish a Regional Emergency Operations Center to serve as a regional hub for training, coordination during disasters, and collaboration with local, state, and federal agencies.⁵³ This type of facility is intended to strengthen regional response capabilities beyond the campus itself.

University of Texas

The University of Texas (UT) system includes its flagship academic campus at Austin and eight others.⁵⁴ In Fall 2024, UT-Austin reported a total enrollment of 53,864, with more than 260,000 students enrolled systemwide.⁵⁵ UT campus police departments are part of a centralized system for the University of Texas that operates direct law enforcement services at the individual campus level. Each of the nine UT system institutions has its own police department, with every campus chief appointed by the individual campus president and other leadership.

Centralized elements include the Office of the Director of Police (ODOP), which oversees law enforcement and public safety across all campuses, and which, through the chancellor, reports to the UT Board of Regents.⁵⁶ State statute defines the responsibilities of campus policing and outlines the requirements for campus safety as the role of "peace officers." All campus departments operate under policies issued by ODOP, and all campus officers undergo standardized training at the central UT Police Academy.⁵⁷ In addition, officers commissioned through this system have authority to enforce laws on and off UT property where they have jurisdiction by state statutes. Police budgeting and resource allocation for each campus department comes from a specific campus institution's budget as dispersed by the UT System Office of Budget and Planning annually. This office helps set guidelines and finalizes the operating budget for the entire system, including police budgets.

University of Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin (UW) is a public, land-grant university system located across 13 campuses statewide with an enrollment of 164,431 students as of Fall 2024.^{58, 59} Its largest and primary campus, UW-Madison, has a total enrollment of over 51,000 students.⁶⁰ Each campus in the UW system has its own police department or, for some of the smaller campuses, contracts with the local municipal law enforcement department for services. The chancellor of the campus appoints the police chief of its own public safety department and structures the department's budget, staffing, and operations plan. UW has a fully developed police division, overseen by its appointed chief of police and assistant chiefs, and is organized into centralized operational units: Field Services; Special Operations; Professional Standards & Planning; Investigative Services; and Support Services. The system operates under the authority of the vice chancellor for finance and administration, chief of police, and the president of the UW system. From there, the chain of command extends down to campus-appointed chiefs who oversee individual departments in the system.

The UW System maintains decentralized, campus-based police departments that operate autonomously in day-to-day law enforcement functions, while remaining subject to system-wide governance, state law, and Board of Regents oversight. For example, in 2024, UW-Madison adopted new policies on protests and public statements stemming from campus activities related to the Israel-Hamas conflict the year before, and it produced a policing equity dashboard to publicly document statistical differences in police interactions among student population subgroups.⁶¹ While these policy changes were created to set guidance for all campuses, they did not automatically apply to each campus police department, but shows the capability of each campus to implement similar department-level policies.

Key Takeaways Across University Systems

Below is Table 1, which shows the similarities and differences of each university policing system, highlighting several selected characteristics of university policing systems examined above:

TABLE 1 | University Case Studies—Comparative Campus Police System Characteristics

University Name	Campus Appointed Police Chiefs	Centralized Budgeting	Campus Authority to Appoint/Hire	Central Authority Procurement	Statewide Training Hubs	Regional Coordination
State University of New York	✓		✓			✓
California State University	✓		✓	✓		✓
Ohio State University		✓			✓	✓
Pennsylvania State University		✓			✓	✓
University of California	✓			✓		✓
University of Massachusetts	✓		✓**	✓		✓
University of North Carolina	✓		✓	✓		✓
University of Texas	✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
University of Wisconsin	✓		✓	✓		✓

NOTE: The category for “Regional Coordination” is defined as the capability for campus police departments to interact with others in the system, including but not limited to training, resource sharing, information and communication capabilities, or mutual aid agreements of jurisdictions. Our findings show that given the subjectivity of regional coordination, this can occur for university police systems regardless of whether the entire university system is centralized or not.

(*) Represents that the University of Texas has campus-appointed chiefs by the presidents but also coordinates with a centralized authority to finalize these positions.

(**) Indicates the changes made around increased oversight of certification and appointment powers from the Police Reform Bill of 2020 in Massachusetts, which can impact campus officers’ job statuses for UMass campuses under the POST Commission.

The results in Table 1 illustrate that there are common elements for decentralized and centralized university policing systems depending on which governance model is used. It also shows that some systems remain more flexible in their approach, such as the police departments at the University of Texas. At UT, primary governance operations are managed centrally, yet individual campus presidents can still appoint their own police chiefs in tandem with central command leadership guidance. Budgeting for UT campus police also follows this method by coordinating campus budgets with centralized budgeting mechanisms. A common feature across all the systems examined is the capacity for regional coordination and resource sharing between campuses. Although the specifics of what defines regional coordination vary, all systems demonstrate the ability to collaborate regardless of their governance structure. The primary difference is the capacity and approach each takes to do so through jurisdictional agreements or the provision of shared resources.

While all systems had regional coordination and resource sharing, most of the systems considered here also had substantial campus-level police department autonomy and administration. Others, such as the University of California, have initiated systemwide internal reviews and mandated universal policing policies, typically in response to national high-profile incidents which resulted in campus protests. Two systems, including the Ohio State system and Penn State University, offer a more centralized structure for policymaking, standardized training, and administrative oversight for the statewide system.

It is important to note that since Ohio's flagship campus in Columbus comprises nearly 90 percent of the total system's student enrollment, it logically serves as the headquarters for all policing operations, with campus directors at its six regional campuses supervising public safety there for those few thousand students. Pennsylvania is the only state system examined here that, comparable to SUNY, has more than 20 campus police departments under its purview and centralized all supervisory, administrative, and operational responsibility systemwide.

SUNY's current arrangement with not one but four designated flagship institutions—Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, and Stony Brook—does not appear to lend itself to centralizing particular systemwide operations at a single campus, such as Ohio State University or Penn State University. Any consolidation of operations that might be under consideration may therefore occur at SUNY System Administration.

Perspectives on Centralizing Campus Policing Functions

Throughout the course of the research for this report, we identified a wide array of viewpoints on the possibility of centralizing parts of SUNY policing, and which options would be best to consider, if doing so. Those that voiced support for greater centralization of system functions, including members of the Police Benevolent Association of New York (PBA), did so based on the following points:⁶²

- The commissioner's central office could employ a more active role in increased oversight and coordinated accountability efforts over campus department operations. This could include centralized budgeting, hiring, and staff allocation functions to help ensure adequate operational resources across all campuses, and centralized internal affairs and appeals functions. As seen in other university systems that are similar to SUNY, a designated chief of police, or a role of equivalent status, has a level of administrative authority over campus police officers and leadership that could provide a more expanded and unified command structure.
- Policymaking and protocols could be streamlined and made more consistent, including an appeals process, personnel transfer guidelines, and rules for the appointment of personnel within departments. Both officers and SUNY commissioners expressed an underlying need for a universal, applicable set of policies to alleviate 29 iterations of operations to avoid inconsistencies between departments in the case of inter-campus coordination events.⁶³

- The “geographic area of employment” could be expanded to be statewide, allowing campus officers to assist municipal departments and to transfer to other locations more easily. Officers, PBA leadership, and commissioners each conveyed a desire to draft agreements of jurisdiction with other agencies to better assist one another in performing duties and supporting local law enforcement.
- Training programs could be better standardized and determined to meet requirements to serve in these positions. The PBA and officers maintain that the variety of requirements prevents transfers of officers between different parts of the state and undermines their ability to advance in their positions. Campus leadership and administrators contend that individual police departments completing the minimum requirements and choosing to go beyond are tied to the needs of individual campuses but have affirmed a need for greater clarity and direction from SUNY Administration on any updates to officer training necessities.
- Specialized units that could be deployed to any campus as needed, such as drone surveillance operations, could be headquartered at a centralized Albany location.
- Equipment purchasing processes are limited based on available funding and campus determination, which could be bundled and provide more equity across campuses.
- Various administrative functions could be centralized, including information technology systems and support, communications, and accreditation. This would assist in providing equitable access to all officers and departments throughout the system for recordkeeping purposes.
- Centralizing the leadership for campus police departments could reduce redundant management positions, potentially saving millions of dollars annually. A 2009 assessment by the police officers’ union noted that SUNY’s “highly decentralized university police department... employs 65 managers at a cost of \$6.2 million for 400 officers” compared to “New York’s three other police agencies combined (State Police, Environment Conservation, and Park Police) that manage nearly 4,500 officers with only 24 managers at a cost of \$3.8 million.”⁶⁴ A more recent internal assessment estimated that SUNY University police leadership numbers and compensation are disproportionately larger than statewide police agencies.⁶⁵
- The PBA also advocates for a reclassification of SUNY Police titles to make them all union-represented positions, eliminating Management Confidential and Professional Service appointments. This, the PBA contends, may eventually eliminate the use of temporary position appointments or appointments requiring a waiver of applicable hiring rules.

In contrast, the campus presidents and department chiefs supported maintaining the autonomy they possess to oversee operations, while moving towards a more targeted approach to systemwide improvements. They asserted that:

- Student culture unique to each campus requires the ability to independently tailor approaches to security. Security staffing needs typically are different at each campus and are best determined by campus leadership. This includes both command staff and officers. The SUNY Police website notes that “The size of the Command Staff on any campus reflects the responsibilities the department has and the ‘span of control’ necessary to manage the activities of a 24-hour-a-day police operation.”⁶⁶ As the individuals ultimately responsible for student safety and security, campus presidents should be the ones to determine leadership positions at their institution’s police department.
- Community relations are different around each campus, and effective campus policing relies heavily on trust, visibility, and collaboration with every community member. SUNY administration and police chiefs repeatedly voiced unease about whether any changes to the current administrative model would weaken those connections with added layers of bureaucracy and procedural burdens.
- Good personal and professional working relationships with local law enforcement leadership are required for effective on- and off-campus policing. This often requires not a standardized, centralized approach but rather workability to design and engage relationships with individuality. Campus leaders and presidents at certain SUNY institutions also stated that their current connections with local law enforcement have also provided substantial benefits, including free training, pipelines to talented and experienced officers, and more things they are concerned would be jeopardized if all training and staffing functions were centralized at SUNY System Administration in Albany.
- Longstanding fiscal, practice, and personnel issues can be addressed without wholesale adjustments to the current administrative model. They contend the initial transition costs of migrating data systems, unifying technology platforms, equipment replacement, and compliance with new personnel roles will outweigh any potential future cost-savings as claimed by the PBA. Furthermore, they contend any potential equity of resources would not be applicable to campuses that are more financially secure than others that have settled streams of support.

Considerations for Centralization of Certain Campus Policing Functions

Drawing from numerous discussions with SUNY Police leaders, SUNY System Administration staff, campus presidents, and other key stakeholders in campus policing policy, and supported by a review of academic research, legislation, potential challenges, and the experiences of other state university systems, several areas of university police operations were reviewed to determine the feasibility of and benefits from potential reform. Such reforms could take the approach of structural centralization and an expansion of centralized authority in some areas,

but improved efficiency and effectiveness also could be achieved through smaller steps, such as increased regional coordination among campuses, modifications in practice and policy, and shared services arrangements without sweeping alterations to existing policing command structures.

1. Regionalized Coordination and Shared Services

SUNY Police could enhance operations and ensure that each campus gets access to high-quality services without modifying existing command structures or adding new leadership positions through increased campus coordination. This approach draws on practices from UMass campuses and UNC system institutions that focus on increased interagency collaboration, mutual aid streams, shared resources, and formalized coordination mechanisms. Both universities have designated programs to facilitate communication, creating regional task forces for specialized services, and implementing multi campus training programs while preserving local operational control. Furthermore, UMass and UNC have successfully implemented shared services models for administrative functions, including university police, that cover HR, IT, procurement, and finance, to avoid redundant services and potentially cut costs.

2. Training Protocols

While preserving the ability for each campus to partner with local municipal agencies for training SUNY Police officers, ensure that training standards, requirements, content, and manuals are consistent across campuses. The relationships campus police departments have established with their local municipal public safety offices are valuable in many ways, not the least of which is the training local city police departments provide to university police. While all campuses adhere to Division of Criminal Justice Services' minimum training requirements, the system may benefit from a singular set of standardized, centrally issued policies that lay out a structure for each campus to follow regardless of location. Standardized protocols would ensure that this localized training process includes all the components needed to ensure a consistent foundation for SUNY Police statewide. Campus officers and chiefs repeatedly cited the convenience and quality of training they receive alongside fellow community-based police units. The costs of campus departments and officers to attend training sessions at a centralized site contributed to the discontinuation of these efforts in the past. If there are any components of standardized or specialized training agenda that a campus is unable to provide, whether on its own or in partnership with local municipal police departments, the SUNY Police commissioner's office could consider covering the travel costs for campus officers to attend these system-provided sessions.

3. Equipment Purchasing Equity

The SUNY commissioner's office could coordinate central purchasing of equipment. Campus police departments currently purchase several types of equipment for the same purpose, ultimately leading to a patchwork of tools

available systemwide. For example, some campus departments use body cameras made by Panasonic, while others use Axon, requiring varying storage devices, charging equipment, capabilities, and other supporting technology. Uniforms, patrol vehicles, carriers, ballistic vests, batons, firearms, patrol rifles, sights, holsters, and ammunition also lack systemwide standardization. Some campuses provide equipment such as TASERs while others do not. Campus police departments also use a variety of mobile data terminals, radar units, lights and sirens, and records management systems, each provided through differing vendor contracts. Finally, some campuses have replacement schedules for aging equipment, but others do not. Centralizing or expanding authority for equipment purchases through the commissioner's office could result in cost savings from bulk purchasing, ensure that all departments have the most up-to-date equipment, and allow for a seamless exchange of surplus equipment among campuses, including, and importantly, on an emergency as-needed basis. Another option is the appointment of a quartermaster to oversee the allocation and updating of supplies and equipment across all campuses, which could assist all SUNY Police departments in having equitable access to quality resources. By adding this function, it could also enable protocols for equipment use to be standardized statewide with or without structural changes.

4. Staffing and Budgeting

Given the need to accommodate the unique needs of individual campuses, including the priorities and role of campus leadership within the budgeting process, further research will be necessary to determine whether a different approach could alleviate any fiscal and staffing needs. In our examination of other universities, most utilized a process that incorporated coordinating campus budgets with centralized budgeting mechanisms. One consideration could be a larger role for the commissioner's office in reviewing annual staffing plans and operating budgets. An additional approach could involve expanded annual funding with specified spending requirements for the SUNY UPD budget towards individual campus departments to be determined by future analysis.

5. Central Data Management System

A single, centralized data collection and dissemination system could be developed and operated within the SUNY system. The SUNY commissioner's office could invest in an integrated technology platform to support incident reporting, personnel tracking, human resource information, records management, shared analytics, and other data collection mechanisms for use across all campuses. Analysis of data both systemwide and for individual campuses also will serve to better inform policy development and to support accountability measures.

6. Systemwide Internal Oversight Board

A permanent centralized internal oversight board could be established to address individual officer complaints and appeals. State law currently requires that all SUNY campuses maintain an advisory committee on campus security to review practices and procedures of campus safety and to recommend reforms when needed.⁶⁷ Each committee is intended to provide information as part of the annual review of the SUNY system, but the establishment of a permanent oversight board, chaired by the chancellor and composed of multiple perspectives (e.g., students, faculty, police command staff, campus leadership, and external experts, etc.) could help to monitor department performance and guide systemwide policy development. Such functions could be established as a systemwide responsibility of the commissioner's office yet still include representatives from each campus.

7. Public Safety Policymaking and Communications

SUNY could develop and apply certain public safety policies systemwide. Policies such as codes of conduct, rules for student demonstrations, and similar policies could be made systemwide, developed and issued by the central commissioner's office. Having consistent policies would make the training of officers in these areas and the expectations of enforcement consistent among all SUNY campuses. A provision for allowing requests by individual campuses for exceptions or enhancements to the statewide policy could be adopted to provide some accommodation for specified needs. In addition, the SUNY commissioner's office could be the official source for all communications regarding student and campus public safety issues, if desired by both the SUNY chancellor and campus presidents.

Risks and Challenges of Centralization at SUNY Police

Operational Implications

In the formulation of our conclusions around this topic, it is important to acknowledge the potential risks that accompany these policy considerations. These challenges span cultural, legal, operational, and fiscal areas for SUNY that are particularly salient in the context of university policing given the complexity of their possible implementation. First, as previously mentioned, each SUNY campus police department has developed its own institutional culture, operational norms, and decision-making processes over decades. Any centralization efforts risk clashing with these established practices, potentially generating resistance from faculty, staff, and campus leadership who are accustomed to localized autonomy. Differences in campus size, operations, and community relationships can make uniform policies difficult to implement in practice. If not carefully managed, centralization could constrain local participation and reduce flexibility in responding to campus-specific needs. Moreover, given the desire by many campus presidents to continue their role in selecting campus police leadership, it is

vital to seek solutions in coordination with these stakeholders. Any effective change-management strategies will need to include transparent communication, sustained engagement, and incentives that respect distinct campus identities to mitigate the transition to new administrative responsibilities.

Second, given that SUNY's police and public safety workforce is governed by a layered legal and civil service framework that constrains the scope of potential centralization. Functional changes or full centralization will likely trigger negotiation and regulatory compliance challenges, particularly if it involves changes to reporting structures, job duties, or deployment models. Key statutes include Education Law § 353 and § 355, which vest the SUNY Board of Trustees with the power to appoint and remove university police officers and define their law enforcement authority.^{68, 69} Policy changes that shift appointment, command, or supervisory authority to the commissioner's office may require amendments to these laws to explicitly authorize new governance structures or transfer authority. Civil Service Laws, including Article 14 (The Taylor Law), which protects collective bargaining rights related to wages, staffing, job classifications, and work rules, could necessitate examination of provisions of the current collective bargaining rights agreement.⁷⁰ Additional statutory provisions, such as Civil Service Law § 64 governing temporary appointments and applicable 211 waivers, which allow reemployment of retired public service employees to fill vacancies, would also need to be reexamined to illustrate how any reforms will affect the role with respect to appointing and hiring powers.^{71, 72}

Finally, moves towards centralization also enable shared operational tools that could improve response coordination. A unified dispatch and communications framework—whether fully centralized or regionally organized—could improve call triage, situational awareness, and cross-campus mutual aid, allowing the closest available SUNY Police resources to be deployed regardless of campus boundaries. A centralized data collection and performance monitoring database would make response time disparities visible and actionable, supporting targeted staffing adjustments, pre-positioning strategies, and surge capacity during peak periods or major incidents. When paired with standardized training, technology, and clear deployment protocols that account for local needs, these policy ideas may reduce inequities in response time while preserving the local knowledge and presence necessary for effective campus policing.

Fiscal Implications

Regardless of what approach is taken on this topic, a comprehensive fiscal analysis will be essential prior to implementing any structural or functional changes to university policing. Previous studies and legislative proposals have consistently cited cost savings as a key rationale for transitioning to a more centralized model. However, a complete and precise assessment of the financial requirements for any of the potential reforms considered in this research was challenged by the limitations of publicly available data and the complexity of estimating costs across multiple SUNY campuses. Although we were unable to draw any direct estimates, we can generalize

on the costs of these changes based on actions taken at other universities or policing municipalities.

With regard to staffing and budgeting, we were able to obtain rough estimates of staffing numbers and salary information for SUNY campus police leadership positions. It would be expected that reducing the number of leadership positions, consolidating responsibilities, or modifying appointment powers and classification definitions may generate some savings. Yet, it is not clear whether these changes would significantly reduce overall spending for SUNY.⁷³ Gradual implementation of other options would incur costs associated with establishing new administrative roles such as quartermaster or new regional leadership that could potentially nullify any initial cost savings per officer for SUNY Police.

Other financial commitments would likely arise from any policing reforms related to investments towards greater equity of resources. These initiatives include the replacement of existing equipment, investing in upgraded facilities across campuses, crafting new vendor contracts, supporting a potential pool of resources, using new data management technology, creating a central training hub, and implementing expanded administrative functions, such as enhanced roles in the commissioner's office. Such actions may require legislative support if assessment indicates additional budgeting would be required to invest in new costs. On top of that, discussions would need to include whether changes need to be made to the SUNY General Procurement Policy 7553, especially if any reforms involve materials and equipment considerations.⁷⁴

Equity and Access Considerations

Our findings also demonstrate the need for any new policies to address ongoing concerns around equity across SUNY campuses in the outcome of policing reforms. One approach is the application of uniform, shared policing standards to provide a framework for improving safety, community-building, and student well-being without necessarily relying on a centralized university policing structure. This can help bridge any gaps in department protocols by guaranteeing minimum expectations for officer training, use-of-force policies, crisis response practices, and other engagement practices. These policies must be flexible enough to meet these diverse needs of each campus, differing demographics, infrastructure, and capacity—while ensuring fairness and system-wide equity. This balance can allow reforms to be adapted to each campus' context while holding all departments to the same high standards. These more uniform standards are not meant to homogenize campuses, but to provide a consistent baseline of quality for SUNY Police.

Conclusion

There are both opportunities to incorporate aspects of centralization into policing functions, as well as attainable noncentralized alternatives for SUNY System and SUNY Police to consider. Any significant changes to the procedures and operations of SUNY Police would incorporate a different, likely significantly expanded role for the current SUNY Police commissioner and the commissioner's office. This could include—but may not be limited to—the enforcement of systemwide policing policies; monitoring staffing levels, the reassignment and reallocation of officers; creation of new office positions; maintaining and publishing systemwide policing data; becoming an equipment purchasing and distribution hub; and overseeing and maintaining a strong regionalized command structure. Many of these modifications would be a complex undertaking, and would require a substantial commitment of effort, resources, and time. As noted earlier, a comprehensive assessment of needs, both at the system and individual campus level, could help prioritize potential functions for centralization that could then be phased-in over time. Ultimately, as policymakers determine the next steps, know the policy considerations outlined here are aimed at continual improvement of SUNY Police, furthering the goals of campus safety.



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