



## **Why Did PEF Oppose the 2025-2026 NY HELPS Extension?**

- HELPS was never meant to be longer than one year. It was presented as a temporary solution to a crisis in 2023.
- NY State told PEF they would protect promotion opportunities. Data from the Department of Civil Service proves they did not.
- The program's continuation threatens the integrity of our merit and fitness commitments.
- Recruitment and retention issues have not been resolved as promised. Attrition rates remain high and pay low.

In lieu of NY HELPS' end date of June 2026, The Department of Civil Service has presented a NEW plan to "transform the merit system." We believe this plan is to the detriment of PEF members, the stability of the public workforce and State services.

## **What are PEF's Concerns About the Proposed 2026 Merit System Transformation?**

The Department of Civil Service has proposed expanding the use of evaluations of Training & Experience (T&E) in July 2026. A T&E is a questionnaire that assesses your resume. It does not directly assess skills or competencies.

Historically, PEF has opposed T&E's highlighting issues with the process.

- Applicants can misconstrue their professional and educational experience by providing un-verifiable details to appear more suited for the position,
- Examinees are responsible for reviewing and appealing grading, effectively policing the efficacy of the subjective rating system,
- Higher scores are relative to the ability to attain expensive degrees, take unpaid or seasonal work creating barriers for disenfranchised examinees.

As an alternative, PEF has proposed skill-based assessments to shift from credentials to demonstrated competencies, creating a bias-free assessment, defining clear skills criteria that candidates can meet, and supporting internal mobility pathways grounded in proven abilities. PEF has welcomed new membership and mobility through the HELPS program but the concerns of inequity and fairness as members seek promotion opportunities continue to resonate with many. PEF is committed to preserving the merit and fitness measures that protect New Yorkers from cronyism.

**The timelines and data to support our concerns are below.**

The Department of Civil Service (DCS) proposed the Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement (HELP) as a temporary program due to pandemic labor loss which exacerbated the existing staffing crisis. PEF did not oppose as limitations discussed, including the program duration being no more than one year. HELPS has since expanded and extended, allowing an appointment mechanism that is not codified in law, to become routine.

- **HELP Program proposed** April 2023-June 2024, allowing appointments to competitive state direct care, health, and safety titles without examination
  - DCS said their goal was to fill 10,000 vacancies
- **Expansion creating HELP Statewide** was proposed March 2024-June 2025
  - Extended appointments for titles outside of direct care, health, and safety
- **Second extension** proposed March 2025-June 2026
  - About 48% of state titles are designated HELPS
    - 1,443 titles of approximately 3,000 titles statewide
  - As of February 2025, 24,000 HELPS appointments made
    - Only 8,000 were already in state service, 2,000 of those were provisional appointments made permanent<sup>1</sup>
  - As of August 2025, 32,589 HELPS appointments made<sup>2</sup>
    - DCS Workforce Diversity Reports show an overall growth of 8,631 employees (6.21%) from January 2023 to January 2025<sup>3</sup>

Understanding emergency staffing impacting member workloads, PEF did not oppose the program because DCS told PEF leadership they would protect promotion opportunities.

- PEF did not want members to be passed over for promotion, DCS specified that only promotion titles that have competitive and open-competitive (OC) minimum qualifications (MQ's) could be HELPS designated
  - Throughout the program, DCS has added OC MQ's to titles without oversight making more titles eligible than first proposed
  - Some entire title series, salary grade 14 to 67, are HELPS designated
- DCS originally proposed suspending examinations during the program, PEF opposed and DCS agreed to increase promotion and transitional exams
  - DCS data provided in July 2025 show a decrease in these exams

Year	# of Promotion Exams	# of Transition Exams	Total
2022	556	12	568
2023	489	38	527
2024	435	13	448

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<sup>1</sup> February Civil Service Commission Meeting, <https://www.cs.ny.gov/commission/Webcast/webcastlinks.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cs.ny.gov/help/pdf/monthly-appointments/aug\\_2025.pdf](https://www.cs.ny.gov/help/pdf/monthly-appointments/aug_2025.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cs.ny.gov/pio/archived-reports.cfm>

The necessity of HELPS was due to the lack of examination and eligible lists to appoint, yet conditions have been created for HELPS to continue indefinitely. In addition to the protections sought through discussions with DCS, PEF did not oppose the program with the understanding that HELPS would allow DCS to focus on restoring existing systems to strengthen examination, classification, and compensation structures.

- Creation of 12 statewide regional computer-based testing centers to increase exam accessibility, improve examination and scoring processes
  - May 2025 DCS claimed all 12 sites will be open in March 2027, four sites will be open for prototype testing at the end of summer 2025
  - As of September 2025, no testing sites are open/operating
- Increased 2023-2024 Budget for DCS staffing, compensation and job studies
  - PEF advocated greater DCS staff funding to increase examinations
  - PEF advocated for \$2.2 million for DCS to study the civil service structure
    - Deloitte began the compensation study March 2025, expected publication was pushed past the October timeframe DCS provided
    - DCS remains in the procurement process for the job evaluation study
    - DCS is under no obligation to act on advice or recommendations

Unilateral approval for program extensions, inconsistent/manipulative adherence to PEF's program agreements, and little to no progress to enhance competitive examinations has created a "new merit system." As PEF pressures an end to HELPS, DCS has presented a new "transformation" initiative expanding Training and Experience exams (T&E's) in 2026.

- T&Es are questionnaires, a resume screening tool, which provides scoring based on examinees backgrounds compared to responsibilities of the title
  - Cannot assess proficiency/competencies, unlike competitive examination
- Historically, PEF has opposed the use of T&E's identifying the following:
  - Applicants can misconstrue their professional and educational experience
    - Common issue in the private sector, candidates provide un-verifiable details to appear more suited for the position
  - Challenge of creating and rating such exams
    - Examinees are responsible for reviewing and appealing grading, effectively policing the efficacy of the subjective rating system
  - Potential for discrimination against marginalized examinees and barriers for new entrants in the job market
    - Higher scores are relative to the ability to attain expensive degrees, take unpaid or seasonal work

HELPS must end to avoid further erosion of merit and fitness measures defined in the State constitution. DCS has framed the merit system transformation around "the best of NYHELPS." Replacing HELPS with T&E's evades the structural deficiencies of civil service, ignoring retention issues, state inclusivity goals, and the morale of those who have remained dedicated to state service without the mobility and promotion opportunities promised them.