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## Experts Doubt de Blasio's Police Overtime 'Savings'

*The mayor says the new police overtime cap will be strictly enforced, but budget experts say it's not legally binding—and that overtime is likely to increase.*

By Andrew J. Hawkins

Jun 24, 2015

Mayor Bill de Blasio described his deal with the City Council to hire 1,300 new police officers while capping overtime costs as "extraordinary" and "historic." But budget experts warn that the cap could prove impossible to enforce.

The new hires will cost the city \$170 million in fiscal year 2016, which begins July 1, officials say. And the cap on overtime will be set at \$513 million for that year, and \$454 million for every year thereafter, according to a spokeswoman for the mayor. The city will spend \$550 million on police overtime this year and has averaged \$515 million in overtime spending over the last four years.

"This will be a hard cap that will be strictly monitored with quarterly reviews; if the reductions are not achieved, the NYPD will be required to find the savings elsewhere," the spokeswoman vowed.

Details are still being worked out, but budget watchdogs question whether the administration can achieve such savings.

"I don't see how they can successfully do this," said Carol Kellermann, president of the Citizens Budget Commission. "It's going to take a lot of discipline on the part of the department. The crudest way is to say 'no officer can work more than X hours per week or per month'—cap individual patrolmen's hours."

Ms. Kellermann said she applauds the acknowledgement by the mayor and council that overtime costs need to be controlled if 1,300 new officers are to be hired. But that won't make this proposal any less difficult to enforce.

"Efforts to curb overtime have failed," she said. "Frankly, it's likely overtime will go up. More employees, more patrolmen who work overtime."

Officers reportedly have ways to trigger overtime for themselves, such as by making an arrest at the end of their shift so they can work extra doing the required paperwork. But arrests have plunged and police head count has ebbed over the years, and yet overtime has increased. Special or unexpected events, such as large parades or demonstrations, can also lead to overtime.



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Other variables that could threaten the city's promise to limit overtime include the unsettled contract with the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, the union that represents rank-and-file police officers, and the question of disability pensions for new officers, which is being debated by lawmakers in Albany. The contract negotiations between the city and the PBA have gone to arbitration.

Nicole Gelinas, a scholar at the Manhattan Institute and a frequent critic of Mr. de Blasio's budgeting, agreed that abiding by the cap will be tricky, especially for Police Commissioner Bill Bratton.

"It's a management issue. Bratton will have to manage the schedules to achieve this goal," she said. "This, though, is hard to do in practice, and also depends on events [such as] protests."

(Last December, Mr. Bratton said the city spent \$22.9 million on overtime related to demonstrations against police brutality in the wake of the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown.)

Ms. Gelinas noted that similar attempts to limit overtime costs at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority "haven't gone well." According to the Empire Center for New York State Policy, one in seven MTA employees earned \$100,000 or more in 2013, thanks in part to Superstorm Sandy-related overtime.

Richard Aborn, president of the Citizens Crime Commission, said Tuesday, "I have not heard any real concern expressed" about the NYPD overtime cap, which was made public late Monday night.

Although the pay rate for overtime is higher, and can trigger higher pension payments that last for decades, it can be less expensive to have officers work overtime than to hire an officer to work those same number of hours, because the hired officer's total compensation cost per hour can be higher than an existing officer's overtime pay.

For months, Mr. de Blasio resisted calls by Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Mr. Bratton to hire the additional officers, citing historically low crime and his preference for spending in other areas as the prime reasons. Meanwhile, police reform advocates urged the mayor not to increase head count, arguing that hiring more cops would result in more arrests of minorities for low-level infractions.