

1,000 lifeguards planning to picket at Jones Beach

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Photo credit: Photo by Gordon M. Grant | State lifeguards are planning to picket over the governor's reluctance to approve a contracted negotiated a year ago. (September 13, 2009)

The union that represents the more than 1,000 lifeguards who protect New York's state beaches are planning to picket Wednesday at Jones Beach to protest the governor's refusal to approve a new contract with higher wages.

The union says that after negotiating for a year, it has reached a tentative agreement with the state, but Gov. [David A. Paterson](#)'s administration won't approve it - even though it has approved new contracts this month for other state employees.

The lifeguards point out that they have been working for eight years without a contract - or a raise - because of problems with their representation by other unions that were not resolved until they affiliated with [New York State United Teachers](#) early last year.

"We're trying to draw attention to the situation and that the lifeguards who have so diligently stepped up and done their jobs for these eight years should be dealt with fairly," said Bruce Meirowitz, president of the New York State Lifeguard Corps.

The lifeguards will picket starting at 9 a.m. at Field 6.

Michelle McDonald, spokeswoman for the governor's Office of Employee Relations, said "we do not comment during negotiations because that would be considered negotiating in the press."

In a letter to [McDonald's](#) agency this week, Meirowitz wrote that after negotiating for a year, "our negotiations are at a standstill for no apparent reason." He added the union was "fully cognizant of the state's fiscal travails."

But Meirowitz said in an interview the state had agreed to other union contracts in two pay bills signed by the governor earlier this month. Lifeguards have a very short season, May through September, so without quick agreement they will lose another year of pay increases, he added.

The union represents 1,087 lifeguards, of whom 485 work on Long Island.

The union said on the Island, lifeguards start at \$12.56 per hour and can earn as much as \$23.13 as captains. Upstate, the range is \$10.35 to \$20.02.

Meirowitz said despite their life-and-death responsibility, some lifeguards could make more working at a fast-food restaurant. And he said current state pay rates were comparable to town lifeguards, who have to contend with far smaller crowds and less challenging circumstances.

As state employees, lifeguards cannot strike but do have an option to file a complaint with the state Public Employee Relations Board.