

LONG ISLAND

Lifeguards blow whistle

■ **Paterson refuses** to OK new pact with higher wages

■ **More than 1,000** set to picket at Jones Beach

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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 dili-

gently 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's other union contracts and pay bills signed by the governor earlier this year. Lifeguards have a contract that expires in May, though so without a new contract they will lose their pay increases.

The union represents lifeguards, of which there are about 1,000 on Long Island Sound.

The union says lifeguards start at \$23.13 an hour and can earn up to \$35.13. The range is \$10.35 to \$35.13.

Meirowitz said the state's life-and-death work is some lifeguards are more working