



FIELD CONTACT

The Official Quarterly Publication of the Florida Correctional Probation Officers Chapter

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Spring 2010

President's Message

By Mark Alfieri

I would like to personally thank all probation officers and their families and friends who called or e-mailed the respective legislators during the March 24, 2010 PBA D-Day event. We know for certain that the barrage of communication caught the attention of legislators and their staffs, and I believe this effort had a major influence on legislative happenings that week, such as **House Bill 1543 (eliminating CPO's from Special Risk)** being withdrawn from further consideration by sponsor **Juan Zapata** from Miami.

While the demise of this bill was positive, along with the withdrawal of House Bill 1319 by **Representative Grady**, which mandated contributions to the Florida Retirement System, we must be ever vigilant that the language contained in the above bills is not implemented as an amendment on some unrelated bill in the final weeks of the Legislative Session. While maintaining surveillance on amendments, we also have to be ready to keep the pressure on all 40 senators regarding **SB 2022**, which passed the Senate Ways and Means Committee on Thursday, 3/25/10. **This bill also mandates contributions to the Florida Retirement System, in the form of a quarter percent of an employee's gross wages, to be paid over the course of an entire year.** While this may be a small amount, I believe it is just the beginning, and it opens the door for legislators to come back year after year trying to mandate

increased contributions, especially if the state's huge pension fund suffers continued losses through market conditions, or losses through just plain bad management of its assets.

Another extremely important matter concerns our brother and sister correctional officers,



"...it is just the beginning, and it opens the door for legislators to come back year after year trying to mandate increased contributions..."

and this is in the ugly form of **Senate Bill 2700**, the General Appropriations Act. Basically what this bill mandates is the closing of three public prisons and transfers the inmates to the Blackwater Correctional Institution in Santa Rosa County; it will also mandate the privatization of an existing public prison. **What all this means is the loss of 640 correctional officer jobs, and we simply cannot allow this to happen. I have already contacted all 40 senators and urged them to support the PBA Amendment removing the**

privatization language, and I urge all probation officers to do the same now before it is too late.

Also, if you have not done so, please take a few moments now and register your personal e-mail address to receive E-PBA alerts. This is accomplished by simply going to www.flpba.org and clicking on the E-PBA tab on the top left section of the home page.

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This action more than anything else will keep all members up to date on current events and is also the fastest way to get out the message that immediate help is needed so a bad bill can be defeated.

NOTE: As a late breaking development, on Wednesday, March 31, 2010, due to the intense lobbying efforts of the PBA, the Senate passed its budget which included closing no prisons and also included no privatization of DC Work Release beds; also, no correctional officer positions will be lost in the process. The Senate and the House will now go into the

conference process where a final budget will emerge in the coming weeks.

As always, stay safe, and let your CPO Board of Directors and me know what we can do to help in any area, whether it be a legislative matter or any working condition in the Department.

Sincerely,



Mark D. Alfieri



Sunshine?

By Gil Fortner, Senior Vice President

As many of you have read, this legislative session is turning out to be potentially the most damaging to our officers and state employees in general that we have ever witnessed. It seems that the House and Senate leadership are using the state's economic shortcomings as justification to make broad sweeping changes that will literally change the course of history for state employees' futures. Amid their promises of transparency in government and government in the sunshine, (as required by Florida statute) we see the opposite being demonstrated by the leadership and members of both houses. It is quite clear that many "behind closed doors" meetings are occurring to lay the groundwork for desired changes.

The Florida PBA finds itself in the untenable position of stressing the importance of every officer's support during the coming weeks to fight the proposed changes. Please understand that this is not a situation like where "the little boy cried wolf," but rather a real emergency potentially impacting the remainder of our careers.

At this point, there have been proposals to remove probation officers from special risk and a proposal to

average your retirement compensation over all years of service rather than the best five years as currently allowed. Fortunately, these two proposals have been withdrawn, but we must remain ever vigilant to fight any injurious legislation that attempts to take away benefits we earned and were promised over our careers. There are still several bills along the House and Senate proposed budgets, that could greatly decrease our future benefits and compensation and we need your help. Yes, the Florida PBA is at the Capitol on a daily basis fighting these

changes on the ground, but the politicians must be made to realize that there will be substantial consequences for them and their parties if law enforcement officers are targeted.

At this point a possible decrease in wages, increase in employee health insurance contributions, employee contributions toward their retirement benefits, capping retirement benefits and several other damaging proposals are SERIOUS threats. Please understand that when we call for your assistance, the challenges are real and

we must respond immediately as never before in our history. While we are mindful of our state's financial woes, we feel there are ways to prioritize the state budget—not at the expense of state employees. We will keep you frequently updated as the session progresses. ■

“Please understand that when we call for your assistance, the challenges are real and we must respond immediately as never before in our history.”

Step Up To The Plate

By Tammy Marcus, Vice President



During the past six years, I have watched my 12-year-old son play baseball. One day I noticed that he was not recognizing the better pitches and swinging at them. I simply told him to “step up to the plate” and want to hit the ball rather than be satisfied with a walk. Finally, and of course every Mother’s dream, he listened to me. He’s now very close to hitting the ball over the fence. So what is the moral to my story? As an officer, step up to the plate and join your union, become more knowledgeable of legislation which affects your job and future, and enjoy the benefits of having protection from unforeseen events. Not having union representation is like not having homeowners’ insurance, and we all know that you can’t get insurance after your house has burned down.

Everyday I hear people comment that PBA doesn’t do anything for them, so why should they pay money to join? I then learn of incidents where officers are caught up in an investigation for whatever reason and having to pay outrageous legal fees because they never thought they would need PBA representation. In most cases, they didn’t join because they thought it was too costly. These days it is quite expensive to get your own attorney, at the tune of about \$5,000 just to get a lawyer to take your case. PBA

membership is a benefit offered to you at very reasonable rate of \$15.00 a pay period. If you carry a gun, you should be a member. If you go out in the field, you should be a member. If you supervise officers, you should be a member. This covers about every position in the bargaining unit.

With that being said, your membership brings you peace of mind, knowledge, and especially during the legislative session, the connection to stay informed of issues that are very relevant to your job.

Please heed my advice. Don’t jeopardize your career for a mere few dollars. I know times are hard, but this is one expense you should not cut back on. Join your PBA CPO Chapter today before it is too late. I will gladly

provide you with an application, along with some PBA trinkets, and personally mail your application to the PBA office for processing. With that, you will be signed up for E-PBA e mail and get updates at the same time I do. Please contact me at ryazch9799@aol.com if I can help help you in any way. Your support to our chapter will be greatly appreciated—more than you know. 🍀

“If you carry a gun..., If you go out in the field..., If you supervise officers, you should be a member.”

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Most officers assume that, when they move and forward a change of address to their personnel office, the Florida PBA is forwarded this information also. This is not the case, however. If you are reading this publication and wonder why you did not receive your copy, or if you know a member that has moved, please ask them to contact our membership secretary, Liz Mixson, at 1-800-733-3722, ext. 412 and give her an updated current address.

Name: _____ Social Security No.* _____

New Address: _____

Telephone Number: (Home) _____ (Work) _____

Cell Number: _____ E-Mail Address _____

*(Your social security number helps us identify you correctly in case of similar names.)

Return to:

Florida Correctional Probation Officers Chapter of the Florida PBA

300 East Brevard St.

Tallahassee, Florida 32301



What Is The PBA Doing For Me?

By Kimber Heddon, Northeast Regional Vice President

What's the PBA doing for me? I hope by now you all have realized that, for probation officers, our biggest advocate, voice, and presence with the legislative body is the PBA. The

PBA fights daily for us while the legislators are in session, and is it a fight! The legislators are scrambling to find ways to balance the Florida budget. As you know, that comes with cuts, cost and who knows what will be next for us. There are a few ways you can stay informed as to the latest events with the session. I suggest that you listen to the Capitol Report. It is usually on all PBS stations on Sunday around 6:00 PM. A slightly different version is on PBS radio stations on Sunday PM as well. You can look online to find out when and what time in your local area. I listen to it, and it tells you what was passed in different committee groups, House or Senate that week. This is not just the criminal justice field, but all other areas and departments, which may affect us as well. Another way is you can read the PBA's Capitol Report, which is set up as a link off the PBA website. The best way to stay informed

about important issues that will affect us directly is to give your personal email address to E-PBA. Call Liz at the PBA and she will make sure you are signed up. You will get information sent to you immediately. I have tried telephone trees and email trees; information is just not getting to you as it should. With the above ways, I hope you will know weekly, if not sooner, what they are trying to do to us.

Today I watched **Senator Lawson** fight for State employees. He stated how we are going onto five years without a raise, and paying for our retirement means a cut in pay for us. If you pay attention, you will know who our friends are in the legislative body and come election time you **MUST** remember what you have learned. We vote for those who try to help us and vote **OUT** those who don't. We are here putting ourselves in danger daily for the citizens of Florida. At 2:00 in the morning when there is a GPS alarm on a violent offender, sex offender or community control offender, it is a probation officer who goes out in the middle of the night to see what's up. I can think of many ways we protect the citizens of Florida. Get involved and try to keep informed. Remember who our friends are, and **VOTE** accordingly. 🍅



Keep Up-To-Date With E-PBA

By Sherri Cole, Southeast Regional Vice President

Are you aware that there are bills pending with the legislative leadership that will eliminate probation officers from special risk, reduce the 3% accrual rates for special risk, eliminate the retiree health

insurance subsidy, increase special risk normal retirement age to 60 or 30 years of service and reduce the retirement COLA below 3%? If you are not aware of these changes, then you must not be registered to receive E-PBA announcements. E-PBA is **FREE** to all PBA members. We will send you weekly PBA Capitol Reports that advise you of bills and items of interest to your profession. You will also receive news bulletins to let you know that immediate action is being requested to help us prevent a layoff, cut in pay or benefits. You can help us by making a phone call, telling a friend or co-worker about the latest developments

or sending an e-mail to your representative.

Each and every PBA member should be registered to receive E-PBA e-mails because knowledge is power and our only hope of protecting our benefits is by taking a stance together and acting as one voice. Your opinion matters and the politicians that you elected should know your concerns. If you are not an E-PBA member, please call Liz Mixson at 1-800-733-3722 to register your personal e-mail address to receive these bulletins.

Now is not the time to let others control your finances. Your PBA staff has been working overtime to counter these financial attacks on our already under funded benefits. The state is having financial problems, so the government decided to go after probation officers yet again. I guess not having had a pay raise in the last four years and a huge cut in personnel has not satisfied them. Help us to help you.

As always, be safe out there. 🍅

We Need To Reach You

By Ron Wilson, Northwest Regional Vice President

In these days of instant e-mail communication, the ability to reach the masses immediately has become a very formidable tool for groups to use. The Florida PBA has recognized this powerful tool and has set up a means of instant communication through our “E-PBA” system and PBA’s Facebook page. If you want to get updates immediately, please provide the PBA with your personal (not state) e-mail address. With E-PBA, we can contact the masses immediately if a situation of interest during the legislative session arises that could impact our officers—our assistance could help. At the present time,

only about 1/3 of our membership receives our E-PBA updates. Please take a moment to e-mail the PBA your name, work location and e-mail address so that we may update our records and keep you posted.

You may also call our membership secretary at 1-800-733-3722, ext. 412 and give her the information if you prefer. Information is power and immediate information helps us combat potential changes that could harm our members. 🍀



Your Membership Protects You

By Jean Leonard, Central Regional Vice President

My last article was about offender-officer relationships and the Department’s policy regarding this topic. What many officers may have missed is that I am not just talking about male/female relationships. This prohibition includes old friends who may now be on supervision or current handymen that you have employed for several years. You can not do business with someone who is on supervision regardless of when you met them. If you have questions, call PBA and ask before it is too late.

This month I wanted to cover the lack of support for our own. We need to fight for our jobs. Everyone needs to keep informed on what is happening with the bills going through the legislature. One way to keep informed is to register your e-mail for the PBA’s E-PBA alerts. Call PBA to get your e-mail registered to get the alerts. The legislature controls our raises, or the lack thereof, and our benefits. We control who is voted into the legislature, so get involved!!!

Recently several officers have given up their PBA membership stating they don’t see what the union is doing for them. Does that mean you have given up your

“Does that mean you have given up your car insurance since you haven’t had an accident in the past few years?”

car insurance since you haven’t had an accident in the past few years? The PBA can’t represent you on an issue after the fact. You must be a member when the situation occurs to use the services of the PBA.

At our last meeting, we discussed the Department’s new guide for discipline. I don’t want to have to pay out of pocket for representation, so I am in the union. If you carry a firearm, just ask how much the officer in the panhandle paid for her own defense. The department didn’t find her at fault, but the family of the offender sued her anyway. It could happen to any of us. Please protect yourself and have peace of mind. I hope you had a great Easter Season. 🍀



Proud, Professional and PBA

It's Time For Action!

By Fred Vasconi, Southwest Regional Vice President

Just when we thought it could absolutely get no worse than last year, it is revealed that various legislators are considering, what can only be described as measures that would catastrophically impact any thoughts of a “normal” retirement—this after putting our lives on the line, daily, for the people of this great State. Had **Governor Crist** not used his veto powers last year, trust me; we'd be seeing an even more emboldened group of these rogues, attempting even more intrusive and evasive steps, to reconcile what they themselves have created. ENOUGH! Go to the phones! Call these people and tell them that we are not going to stand for this and that they will pay for their reckless decision making with their precious jobs and entitlements! Tell them that whatever

they do, that they must not use state law enforcement officers as the scapegoat, that they so want to make us out to be. Fight, fight and then fight some more! Flood their fax machines and e-mail, until they acquiesce. Hold back nothing. This is how it's done and how to get their attention! Request that your family members join you.

We are a proud and strong force of Probation and Parole Officers, led by your Florida PBA Chapter, who will fight for you until East becomes West! Never doubt this my fellow officers. God bless all of you and your families, as we go to battle, this legislative session. 🍀



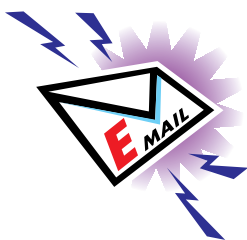
The Importance Of Being “A Union”

By Gil Fortner, Senior Vice President

There are many times when we hear officers complain about the need for our officers to belong to the union. Many have taken the position that since we have not received a pay raise recently that they will give themselves a pay raise by dropping their union dues. What a huge mistake! Unfortunately many have forgotten or never experienced firsthand why unions became a necessity years ago when large employers put their greed above the safety and fair compensation of their employees. Now look at the current state of affairs across our nation and especially our state and be reminded that

our officers are being subjected to damaging changes including lack of pay increases, loss of benefits and safety concerns due to increased caseload assignments and changes being justified by economic conditions. Now, as we have not witnessed in years, joining together with co-workers to fight these abuses is the reason why unions became a necessity years ago. Don't allow these lessons from our country's past become part of our current reality where employees find themselves standing alone against a more powerful foe. 🍀

E-PBA Get Online to the 21st Century!



NOT AN E-PBA MEMBER YET? Become one! Be the first to know about breaking news... direct to your inbox. Don't wait, sign up today for E-PBA. Go to the Florida PBA website, www.flpba.org, and click on E-PBA in the column on the left side of the web page.

Knowledge about PBA issues is the strength of our Association. PBA will be e-mailing members timely news about what's up at the Florida PBA, helpful information regarding legislative issues, quick tips, and best practices for members.

Your e-mail address will not be given to any other group or organization and you will receive no advertising from outside sources. E-PBA is available to PBA members only.



Dade County PBA's Chaplain Al Lopez and CPO Chapter President Mark Alfieri discussing upcoming strategies before a committee hearing.



Mark Alfieri, SCO Chapter President Jim Baiardi, and FDLEAA President Telly Sands at the Capitol on March 16th.



Mark Alfieri and Jim Baiardi discussing legislative bills with former Representative and current House Candidate Carlos Manrique.



The vast majority of people shown attending just one of the committee meetings are PBA lobbyists, board members and representatives.

Florida PBA "Support Law Enforcement" Tag

The Florida PBA "Support Law Enforcement" license tag is a hot item. Over 63,000 tags have been sold so far. The proceeds of this tag are deposited into a charitable fund—Florida PBA Heart Fund—for the Association's members. The intent of the Heart Fund is to provide financial assistance to the families of members killed in the line of duty and disability benefits to officers who are permanently disabled because of an in-line-of-duty disability. The great thing about the contributions made to the Heart Fund, they are tax-deductible! Please ask for the PBA "Support Law Enforcement" tag when you visit your tag office and purchase this tag for your vehicle(s). Keep showing your support for PBA and your fellow officers. 🍀





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300 East Brevard Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-1218
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300 East Brevard Street ❖ Tallahassee, Florida 32301-1218
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