



The Voice of New Jersey Law Enforcement



State PBA hits Gannett and politicians on inciting the public against the police

Anthony F. Wieners, State PBA President

The Gannett News Sunday story on police salaries was disappointing and intentionally designed to turn the public against its police officers.

The fact that the story was written barely two weeks since Officer Chris Matlosz was assassinated while on patrol is insulting to every cop in the State. The article is based on the premise that cops in NJ are "overpaid". Let me ask instead, what's the "going rate" to be a police officer? What's the fair market private sector value of an officer who is killed, seriously injured or who deals with the worst of society? Just because every town doesn't have a cop killed though doesn't mean police don't regularly deal with serious or dangerous crimes the public never hears about. What's the "price" we should be paid to intervene in a chaotic domestic dispute or tell a parent their child is dead or walk up to a car at night not knowing if there is danger behind tinted glass. The crime rate is rising in every region of the State due to the bad economy and a loss of police officers. Plus with the State Police Gang report showing that over 1/2 of NJ towns have gangs a cut in police presence should concern citizens everywhere. These rising crime stats have nothing to do with what the "average" cop in the State makes a year.

And in a further display that this article was intentionally slanted, Gannett did no homework on the data of contract concessions. Gannett failed to research just how many PBA locals have given back salary and benefits to prevent layoffs and even that sometimes isn't enough to save police from being cut. In fact, the Lakewood PBA was finalizing giveback talks with the town at the very moment Officer Matlosz was killed. But Gannett instead would prefer to foment war between the public and police by pointing to Camden's FOP refusal to accept a nearly 20% cut in pay as their main point that cops are simply greedy. While that is a weak basis to prove a point, I'd like to know how many politicians and reporters would care to be a cop working in Camden, Newark or Irvington for a day regardless of the pay.

We recognize that the economy and cuts in State aid to municipalities are squeezing taxpayers. The PBA throughout the State has done its part to help but public safety is a responsibility of government that can't be compared to what happens in the private sector.

You can't blame contracts for layoffs when the State has cut aid, when foreclosures and reassessment challenges are killing tax rolls and when, after a decade of government mismanagement, pension payments have finally come home to roost. The Governor can claim that 3 of every 4 dollars is spent on "employee costs" but he doesn't tell the public that abolishing an average police department would save a taxpayer less a month than lunch at McDonalds.

Politicians and the media who mix and match old contract clauses from multiple towns are merely trying to distract the public that the cure for property taxes has no simple answer. We have asked the Governor to meet with us many times since he was sworn in to work together to find solutions to get past these difficult times. Instead he has ignored our requests and by doing so PBA members feel he has turned his back on every law enforcement officers we represent.

Gannett asks if police unions are the "next target" for the Governor but intentionally making a police officer a public enemy is dangerous and destructive. The fact is that a cop is paid for what he may be asked to do and I find it sadly ironic that cops are only heroes in politics and the papers anymore when they die.