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INSIGHT

A Letter of Thanks

by Christopher Nwankwo, MA

Probation Officer, Essex Vicinage

The opportunity to thank someone for doing something really helpful is one of the little things that gives great pleasure in this life. When there are two things to be thankful for, the pleasure is doubled and when there are nearly 7,000 people to thank it approaches the infinite. That describes the pleasure I have in writing this letter to thank the Judiciary Family of the State of New Jersey; especially the family of Probation Officers across this great state for their generosity to me during my illness. I cannot stress enough how much I was deeply touched by the outpour of love and well wishes I received and have continued to receive throughout my ordeal.

During the past year, Essex Vicinage Trial Court Administrator's Office, Chief William Hughes, Assistant Chief Frank Marino and Walter Joyce, Probation Association of New Jersey under the leadership of George Christie, and a host of others who chose to remain anonymous made a great effort to see that my ordeal was manageable. **Thanks again.**

I wish to also acknowledge the special support I received from the following individuals who paid detail attention to my concerns during these dark days of my life: Bouyant Enyiorji, Hawah Siryon, Charles Onyegbule, Nathan Enwerekowe, Peter Savage, Ken Sundberg, Doris Bittar, Sal Vitiello, Chilly Uzoho,

Marilyn Kuntz, Caroline Ilogienboh, Kerline Noelcin, Rosalyn Williams, Alwyne Barratt, Cy Okuzu, Clifford Achonye, Brendan Akeru, Henry Boamah, Rudy Murray, Humphrey Igwe, Cornell Mends-Cole, and Peter Tartanella. **Thanks again for everything.**

PANJ Executive Board Members, especially Greg Martin, John Morton, Stuart Martinsen, Stephanie Hennessey, John Smack, John Mooney, Peter Tortoreto, David Yennior, and all those not mentioned here. **I love you all.**

Legislative Update

by Stuart Martinsen, Co-Chair Legislative Committee

The PANJ Legislative Committee has recently been very active promoting our interests. Our legislation is Senate Bill 313 and Assembly Bill 492 which give Probation Officers the authority to arrest, detain, and transport probationers and enforce the criminal laws in the State of New Jersey. The Senate version is pending a full Senate vote and the Assembly version is pending a hearing in the Assembly Judiciary Committee.

PANJ President George Christie and Legislative Representative Dan Bergin appeared on the 30 minute talk show "At Issue" on Star Ledger News which was broadcast on February 27 and 28, 1999 to approximately 1.9 million viewers throughout the New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia area. During the program, President Christie explained to the viewing audience the role of PANJ as a labor association representing Probation Officers and Judicial employees in New Jersey. Both he and Mr. Bergin discussed the shortage of vehicles, high case loads, and lack of resources as well as training for our members. The central issue of Probation Officers being granted law enforcement status and the pending legislation was extensively discussed. Examples were noted of the dangers and problems inherent in the Probation Officers' role in the community.

Further, on March 4, 1999, the front page of the *Herald & News* exhibited a large photograph of Passaic County Probation Officers on the steps of the Passaic County Courthouse under the quote "Probation Officers Are Up In Arms". In this article, Journalist Nancy Averette provided an objective and graphic illustration of Probation Officer safety and showed a detailed graph of a 1993 survey of assaults on Probation Officers throughout the country between 1980 and 1993.

On the subsequent date of March 5, 1999, the *Herald & News* had another front page article which essentially revolved around an interview with President Christie concerning the settlement of the lawsuit filed by ISP Officers against the AOC regarding back pay they were denied for supervising offenders during off hours. In the article, Mr. Christie indicates that PANJ has filed a broader lawsuit in US District Court, Newark, which charges that New Jersey's 1650 Probation Officers have been working unpaid additional hours beyond the 40 hour workweek and have not received full compensation. It should be noted that this lawsuit includes other Judicial employees as well.

During the PANJ Executive Board Meeting of February 25, 1999, the proposed resolution to amend the PANJ By-Laws to include Section 4 for a continuing political action committee was approved and will be submitted for a vote to the PANJ membership. The "PANJ PAC" will do its own fundraising and will be able to disperse those funds under the guidance of the Legislative Committee. It will also be registered as a continuing political committee with the state of New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission.

Concerning the teaching mentor proposal program that has been implemented in the Middle Twp. H.S. in Cape May County, wherein teachers have been hired to perform the duties of Probation Officers on a part time basis, the Legislative Committee has contacted legislators in that district regarding our opposition to this proposal since it usurps the duties and authorities of Probation Officers in the state of New Jersey.

On March 12, 1999, President Christie attended a dinner of the Ocean County Emerald Society honoring Judge William H. Huber of the Ocean County Superior Court. Present at that dinner were several Superior Court Judges as well as other local citizens and fire and police officials. One of the invited guests to the dinner to honor Judge Huber was former State Senator James E. McGreevey, who Mr. Christie had the opportunity and honor to be photographed with. The former Senator McGreevey has been supportive of PANJ issues since 1997 and has also expressed his concern for Probation Officers and Judicial employees in the state of New Jersey. Also at the dinner was Senator Leonard T. Connors (District-9) who also discussed with Mr. Christie PANJ-related issues. It should be noted that Senator Connors is the Chairman of several Senate Committees.

If you have any questions or legislative concerns, please contact the PANJ Office. Also, each of your local presidents will be receiving a copy of the "At Issue" program for your viewing.

Commentary on the JUDICIARY BUDGET

by George P. Christie, President

On April 15, 1995 the Newark Star Ledger reported that Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz formed a blue-ribbon committee to study the Judiciary. In particular, the focus was to determine where the New Jersey Judiciary needed to make changes to run the courts more efficiently, and where resources were needed to improve the quality of justice.

The blue-ribbon committee was chaired by Alfred C. Koeppel Senior vice-president for PSE&G and staffed by several leaders in the business community, as well as Robert D. Lipscher, Administrative Director of the Courts, and at least three Assignment Judges. In a seventy-two (72) page document reported on in the *New Jersey Lawyer*, May 6, 1996, the committee made a number of recommendations. The most significant ones follow:

"The sole area in which the committee found no other alternative but to increase funding were in dealing with the burgeoning domestic violence and probation cases that have swamped the state in the last few years, but... have received scant attention."

The committee noted that the number of domestic violence cases has tripled since 1983 and jumped by 14 percent between 1994 and 1995 alone. But the committee found that there remain far too few judges to handle that huge caseload.

The story is the same in the Probation Division, the committee found. In 1995, state Probation Officers were responsible for supervising more than 80,000 adult offenders and 14,000 juvenile offenders. The committee found current staffing levels made the average caseloads of each Probation Officer to be 189 adult offenders, or 87 juvenile offenders.

Added to that is the lack of sufficient facilities, according to the committee. Its report urges the establishment of more drug testing centers and more rehabilitation and job training programs-- quickly.

"There is a pressing need in these areas," Koeppel says, adding that "he would like to see those improvements implemented immediately."

Although I was denied membership to the blue-ribbon committee, I was satisfied with the committee findings. The problem now is to assess what, if any, recommendations were implemented.

After the blue-ribbon committee issued their report in 1996 we in Probation were continually faced with increasing case loads of more and more dangerous offenders, and as Probation Officers left the Judiciary

they were not replaced. Of course management was trying to save money, but these methods were not cost effective for society at large.

In 1997, 200 Probation Officers went to the budget committee to ask for more resources. We could show that we needed about 400 more officers to keep up with the rising caseloads. The budget committee did appropriate money for more officers in the Family Court and in Probation, but that relief simply has fallen far short of the promises.

I am no expert in the budget process, but I know that my colleagues continue to be overloaded in their work areas. The budget committee should question the representatives of the Judiciary to determine if they are asking for enough resources or spending what they have appropriately.

The Probation Officers in New Jersey are truly a dedicated and hard working group of professionals, but they are met at every turn with increasing difficulties. They suffer with caseloads that are at unmanageable proportions. They are not trained properly to deal with dangerous offenders within the community. While Parole Officers in New Jersey have 8 weeks of intense training at an academy, Probation Officers get only a few hours.

Probation Officers are not given the tools to perform their duties, or to protect themselves and the public. Parole Officers are provided with cars, vests, firearms, communication devices, and other appropriate equipment. Probation Officers have to use their own personal vehicles in many counties, they have old used vests in only one county, they have pepper spray in some counties as their only means of protection, and they have cell phones that often do not work. They also lack self defense training, arrest training, or appropriately marked clothing to identify them as Probation Officers in the field.

Since 1997 we have seen a slight increase in the number of Probation Officers, and not nearly what we were promised. Probation Officers are now dealing with about 150,000 adult and juvenile offenders on probation. There are approximately 20,000 active bench warrants that need to be addressed.

Many people in our society give little thought to probation, and thus, are not always responsive to our pleas. I must tell you that we are all affected by crime in one way or another. We all pay for the victimization of our citizens through higher insurance rates, and through other government programs. Many of us, unfortunately, will have a close family member or friend become the victim of a serious crime.

What is even worse is that society has deceived itself by thinking that its children are safe at home, in their neighborhood or in school. Look around, read the news, there are very few schools or children who are safe from the elements of crime. Gang violence, weapons in schools, assaults and intimidation, sex offenses, and drugs are prevalent. The list goes on and on. There are youth gangs today who have initiations whereby they must kill someone to be considered for membership. The public has a strong need to have the presence of Probation Officers in many high schools today.

While I have painted a bleak picture about crime in our communities, and about crime being perpetrated by people on probation supervision, there is hope for the future if budgetary decisionmakers take action today.

Probation Officers need to be better trained preferably by having a program approved by the Police Training Commission which is similar to the one provided to Parole Officers.

Probation Officers need to be given proper tools, such as state vehicles, radios, handcuffs, flash lights, pepper spray, clothing marked appropriately, bullet and knife proof vests, and weapons that will enable them to respond to the full range of threats.

Probation Officers need to have a clear cut set of policies and procedures to guide them while they work in the community. They need to know the appropriate way to conduct themselves when they observe a crime being committed against another citizen or being committed against them.

Probation Officers need to know the proper way to conduct a search and to make an arrest. Today, probation in New Jersey has about 20,000 active bench warrants, which receive very little attention by the rest of the law enforcement community.

Probation offices need to be better staffed so that the caseloads are manageable. New Jersey spends about \$1.65 per day to keep each probationer under supervision as opposed to about \$82.00 per day to keep someone incarcerated. New Jersey is one of the states that spends the least on probation. Increased expenditure would likely be cost effective.

If Probation receives the things that have been outlined the future will be a brighter one. As Probation Officers begin to work more effectively within the community, and become more intrusive in the lives of their clients the rate of crimes committed by probationers should drop. A well staffed Probation Department will result in fewer victims of sex offenders, and of gang violence.

Every time we read the newspaper and we observe a crime being committed by someone on probation supervision, those who make the budgetary decisions for this state and the Judiciary must answer the question of whether or not they could have prevented that crime.

PANJ is the Leader in Fighting for Equality in Pay

by John Morton, Editor

A recent *New York Times* article cited a study by the AFL-CIO, indicating that the gap between wages paid to working women as compared to men with similar qualifications has widened since 1993. Big Labor has chosen to take a legislative approach to this problem, by sponsoring new bills in twenty-four states. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 already address this problem, but not adequately. The new legislation is based on the concept of "comparable worth," (skills, effort, responsibility, and working conditions), and they cite the possible comparison of a social worker making \$35,000 and a probation officer making \$55,000.

While this annual salary is off the range for a Probation Officer in New Jersey, (there are some SPO's who make this amount) for the writer to use this comparison shows who Big Labor is looking at. PANJ negotiated and litigated over this problem, obtaining the first pay equalization plan in the Judiciary.

You can be proud that you are part of a union that addresses the concerns of its membership in effective ways.

Another Retirement Party?

by Peter Savage, President, Essex Local 101

This wasn't just another retirement party in Essex. The one held on March 30 at Rillo's in East Hanover was a Big One. William "Bill" Hughes, the VCPO in Essex was retiring after 37 years. Over 200 people enjoyed the dinner party which was reminiscent of a class reunion because of all the former Essex PO's and staff who came to pay respect to the man. They came from all over the state; Camden (Chief McGrath and friends) to Bergen (Chief Brill). The two Assignment Judges who spoke (Weiss from Essex and Falcone from Passaic) thanked Bill for making their job easier. TCA Ijoma (Essex) echoed similar sentiments and each mentioned words like "integrity." Dick Talty (Acting Chief of Probation Service) recalled his boss who became a good friend, but you knew you still had to produce for him. Tony Casale (Hudson Chief)

remembered a supervisor who was his mentor. He also joked about the chief's writing memos and this was a trait of Mr. Hughes; he was one who "went by the book."

George Christie (PANJ President) livened things up by "roasting" the Chief and he noted that Bill had long been a PANJ supporter when we were a professional/ fraternal organization. George hoped that Bill would not be remembered in Essex only for initiating the Alternate Workweek and night field work. But all those former PO's, veterans, and ISP Officers who came will remember him for other things, like encouraging and helping them in their careers, guys like Dennis Beyer (retired Chief, Middlesex) who ran the first Eclipse program in Essex under Bill. His vision was of a more effective supervision using non-traditional hours like ISP or Eclipse.

I never worked under Bill, but I saw him as a tough but fair boss who enjoyed a good joke and had a dry sense of humor. He also kept his distance and was a man of few words. If you didn't get to know him, at least you had to respect him. The way I saw it, he was well focused on what needed to get done.

Bill reminded George Christie that he came from a family with union ties and that he was one of the ones who founded the "Association" in Essex, during the late 60's (right after PERC allowed public employees to organize and enjoy collective bargaining rights). That was ironic; the man from a family with union values became a supervisor after a few short years as a PO and was thrust on the management team for 30 years. He became an ACPO when I started in 1973. Nick Fiore (retired Essex Chief) said that Bill was the one most responsible for his becoming a Chief, because he turned down the job in the early eighties. Assistant Prosecutor Pat Toscano said Bill was a comfort to his mother Mickey when his father Pat Toscano passed away while Chief in Essex. Frank Marino (ACPO, Essex) summed it up when he reminded us that it is fitting that the Grove Street branch will be closing the same year that Bill Hughes chose to retire; he was there to open that office 30 years ago and put his mark on the place. They might as well close it- It won't be the same now.

Golf Outing

by Jill Potter, Event Chairperson

PANJ is sponsoring its fifth annual golf outing for the **benefit of the Watson and Janowitz scholarships** that are awarded at the conference. It will be held **Thursday June 3, 1999** at Gambler's Ridge Golf Course, Burlington Path Rd., Creamridge, NJ (800-427-8463). The cost is **\$75.00 per golfer**, which covers cart, green fees, food, and prizes. We must limit participation to the first 100 golfers this year. There will be **a shot gun start at 12:30 PM**, responding to popular demand. Grand Prize for a Hole in One will be a trip for two to Scotland /Ireland. All registrations must be at the PANJ office in Brielle by May 10. **Hole Sponsorships can be purchased for \$100**, and I encourage Locals to participate in this way. Other sponsors are welcome, of course. As educational costs rise, let's continue to make these scholarships a reality.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

by John Morton, Editor

With the help of Doehler and Associates, PANJ financial advisors, our members have access to certain benefits. These benefits are available to Active Members only (Those who pay 100% of annual dues). Judicial employees who are represented by PANJ but pay representation fees (85% of dues) are not eligible, but you may sign up as Active Members at any time. See any PANJ Representative for

membership information or contact the PANJ office. The staff of our information center can be reached by phone at 732-223-1799.

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