

# INSIGHT

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## H.R. 484

by George P. Christie, President

In February of 2005, New Jersey Congressman William Pascrell introduced H.R. 484 in Washington D.C. This bill calls for a "Probation and Parole Officer Safety Task Force" to study safety, officer training, and review of the law enforcement powers needed for these officers.

After meeting with the members of the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) who include probation and parole officers around the United States and Canada, we have learned that officers in the community corrections field are generally under trained and equipped to perform their duties. The Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics will not collect data on critical incidents involving officers because we are not considered law enforcement. Even the FBI, Uniform Crime Reporting, (LEOKA) Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted Guidelines specifically exclude probation officers and other community corrections officers from these standards.

PANJ encourages congress to enact H.R. 484 and begin the process of studying probation and parole with a goal of including these officers in the law enforcement community.

On the last page is a sample letter which was sent to all New Jersey Congressmen asking for their support. A similar letter was sent by the APPA and by the Federal Probation Officers Association to all congressmen and women in the country. I would like to see each and every one of you send a note to your congressman asking them to cosponsor H.R. 484.

## Portrait of a Professional

by Bradley J. Fairchild, Southern Regional Vice President, Supervisory Unit

Dottie Robinson's professional career as a Probation Officer and PANJ leader has been dominated by faith in people, a commitment to fairness, and a belief that all people have value and virtue. She is relentless in her quest to aid all in need, including clients who have matters before the Court and fellow Officers who depend on her knowledge to protect their jobs and benefits.

After graduating from Old Tappan High School and John Jay College in New York City, Dottie began her career in Probation as an Investigator in Child Support in 1986. Several years later Dottie accepted a position with the Bergen County Sheriffs Department as a corrections officer and records clerk.

In 1995 Dottie returned to the Child Support Unit in Bergen County Probation. Dottie believes that her time away from Probation was a benefit because she acquired a more realistic view of the public and recognized the necessity of understanding people "on a one to one basis" In 1998 she transferred to CCMO and was promoted to Senior Probation Officer in 2003.

While preparing a pre-sentence investigation several years ago Dottie faced a challenge that would make a permanent impact on her perspective as a criminal justice professional. The individual under investigation suffered from multiple mental health disabilities. The Court was considering a state prison term for the defendant. However, Dottie's presentation of the defendant's limitations persuaded the Court that Probation was the appropriate sentence.

As a result of this experience Dottie became a believer in recognizing that every case is unique and sometimes there are factors out of an individual's control that can lead to criminal activity and behavior.

Ms. Robinson became a PANJ activist when she became Secretary for Bergen Local 102. She became President of the Local in 1997 and was highly successful in building a strong county organization. In 2000 she was appointed Northern Regional Vice President for PANJ statewide and was re-elected to that post in 2001 and 2004. She never turns down the opportunity help out as evidenced by her active participation on the Conference, Legal, Finance and Legal Committees.

In her spare moments Dottie pursues her passion for the theater. She has devoted time to Summer Stock Theater in Old Forge, New York and recently to constructing props for a production of the classic "The Wizard of Oz" at St. Mary's School in Bergen County.

Ms. Robinson credits PANJ President George Christie and First Vice President Peter Tortoreto with having the biggest impact on her career. She believes their tireless advocacy has established PANJ as a thriving professional association and successful labor union.

Dottie's commitment to her fellow Officers in Bergen County and across New Jersey is an inspiration to all members of PANJ. Her spirit and enthusiasm will be a valuable source of strength for many years to come.

### **PANJ-Educational Foundation to Host 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Golf Outing**

by Ann Rizzi, Golf Outing Chairperson

On May 16, 2005 the Probation Association of New Jersey Educational Foundation will host its' tenth annual golf outing. This year's outing will be held at Mercer Oaks Golf Course in West Windsor, New Jersey. The cost of the outing is \$105 per golfer and includes coffee and donuts, ball tokens, golf, cart, box lunch, cocktail hour and buffet dinner. Fox and Fox, LLP, will sponsor souvenir golf shirts to each golfer. Hole sponsorships are \$100.

Each year this golf outing is held to finance the three scholarships that are given out each year in November at the PANJ Annual Training Conference held in Atlantic City, NJ. In addition, extra monies are used to help defray costs related to the training conference as well.

Any questions regarding the golf outing can be addressed by contacting the PANJ Office at (732) 223 – 1799. Registrations for the outing and hole sponsorships are still available. All are welcome.

### **SPRING**

by Dorothy Robinson, Northern Regional VP  
President Bergen County Local 102

Spring is here and with it our thoughts turn to flights of fancy, love, flowers and chili peppers. What, you guys don't think of chili peppers? Well you would if you knew what I know and am about to share with you all.

First let me say that the PANJ Educational Fund Conference of 2004 was a roaring success. We had great attendance, fantastic classes, and good times at the "Mardi Gras" party. I personally think the classes were some of the best we have had. Registration ran smoothly and all in attendance seemed to have a wonderful time. I would like to thank all the counties who contributed to our prizes. I am pleased to say that only one County/Vicinity failed to contribute; you know who you are so I am not going to name names, but 100% participation is our goal.

Now we are "springing" ahead to the Conference for 2005. We have lined up (once again) a fantastic group of presenters and class topics. I can't believe the time is here so fast but our Conference is only 7 months away. Now with that come the Scholarships. As you all know there are three available for \$ 1,000.00 each and they are for any child of a *full member* of PANJ or for an Officer continuing education. Funds for them are raised by our Conference, t-shirt sales, and golf outing, so please be generous and participate in all. If you can't play golf, you can donate money to sponsor a hole for just \$100.00 from your Local. The scholarship applications will be available by the end of June and the deadline is October 15th to submit them; likewise for the Awards given out, Probation Officer of the Year, Supervisor of the

Year, etc. Stuart Martinsen will be looking for your nominations so please, please give it some thought and submit the name of someone you feel deserves the honor.

Now back to the Chili Peppers and I don't mean the musical group. Our theme for the Conference Party this year is "South of The Border," so think chilies, maracas, sombreros, and cactus. Bet you guys thought I would say Tequila, Ha Ha. We will be once again selling t-shirts for the cause and if you order in advance you can save a few bucks and be sure of getting one. Last year they were a sellout item. So please pay attention; the Conference material will be e-mailed to you on Lotus notes at the end of June and all the Presidents will also have hard copies available at the Executive Board Meeting in June. I hope to see everyone again this November and many more new faces so encourage any new members to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity for training and camaraderie.

## **When Will Officer Morale Become a Focus?**

by Steve DeStefano, P.O.

Working as a Probation Officer for over two years, my experiences have shown that negative attitudes of co-workers need to be addressed in order for our work environment to improve and become more pleasant to work within and succeed.

One area that needs to be addressed is officer morale. Some officers morale is extremely low and should be addressed appropriately and immediately upon recognition. Our jobs are difficult due to our large caseloads, the expectations put forth upon us and by the clients with whom we work. Some officers may feel as though their work goes without notice or is not appreciated. Many officers' morale may be lowered because of personal issues such as failing to obtain a job promotion or dissatisfaction with management. Also, stress that may be work related or personal, and what appears to be jealousy of other officers that may be doing well or advancing at a faster rate than others.

Furthermore, this issue needs to be addressed seriously, especially when we are

making a direct impact on newly hired officers. Officers that portray negative views about their jobs should be discouraged from expressing these viewpoints. This is unfair to newly hired officers, because they should be given the opportunity to make their own assessment of the job. It appears that low morale is affecting not only new officers but probation as a whole. This may also be a reason that probation has such a high turnover rate when it comes to newly hired employees leaving probation to obtain employment with police departments or parole as examples.

However, help is available to all Probation Officers. COP-to-COP is a program available for job related stress and personal issues officers may be dealing with. All calls are kept confidential. Officers that need more treatment other than this service will be referred to the appropriate source, such as a private psychologist. As per MPO Linda Snow, Morris County Probation will be receiving two presentations from Program Director Bill Ussry. He, or a co-worker, is available to all vicinages to give a presentation of the program. All vicinages should be aware of this program and encourage officers to utilize it. COP-to-COP also needs former Probation Officers to volunteer their services for this program to specifically address our needs and the program will need to be re-named. The current number to call is 1-866-COP-2COP (1-866-267-2267).

All officers would like to work within a positive environment. Attitudes need to change in order for this to be a reality. Officers need to feel as though the structure is positive and open to suggestions. Officer morale should become an important focus of Probation's future because we all should take pride in being Probation Officers.

### **Ryan Stroemel Benefit Golf Outing**

by John Morton, Editor

Ryan is the son of a Senior Probation Officer from Atlantic County who died suddenly. The Atlantic County PANJ Associations have supported Ryan's future needs for several years by organizing and participating in this event. They need your continued support. This year's outing is on May 19, so contact Deneen Hohman at (609-425-3959, or 609-345-6700, ext.3513) for further information. I have personally attended many outings and it has always been a wonderful event.

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The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
Member of Congress

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of the Probation Association of New Jersey (PANJ), my organization would appreciate your support and sponsorship of H.R. 484.

H.R. 484, sponsored by Congressman Pascrell and currently co-sponsored by 10 other Members, establishes a Probation and Parole Officer Safety Task Force within the Department of Justice. The purpose of the Task Force is to study the Federal and state practices and policy regarding the safety of probation and parole officers, guidelines for safety training, and review of law enforcement powers and needs for these officers. The Task Force will consist of nine members appointed by the Attorney General, in consultation with the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, with expertise in probation and parole.

PANJ believes that this study is critical to both the safety of the probation and parole officers around the nation and to ensure that appropriate practices are in effect to protect the public from probationers and parolees who commit new crimes. As you may be aware, the number of dangerous and violent offenders on probation and parole continues to rise around the nation. Probation

and parole officers therefore are encountering numerous threats to their personal safety. Federal and individual state policies on officer protections and powers differ greatly, however, and there is no uniform governmental system to investigate if these officers are receiving the training and equipment necessary to do their jobs.

For your information, while the Department of Justice tracks a wide variety of crime statistics, they do not review incidents involving probation and parole officers. H.R. 484 would therefore also require the Director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics in the Department of Justice to perform a comprehensive review of incidents and effect of violence against Federal and State probation and parole officers once the Task Force terminates. This analysis is critical to providing future protections for these officers and to assist the State policy makers in addressing needed changes in laws governing safety, training, and protection for them.

We would therefore appreciate your support for H.R. 484 and request that you join as a Co-Sponsor of the legislation. Thank you for your attention to this important request. Do not hesitate to contact PANJ at 723-223-1799 with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,  
(Your name here)

C: The Honorable William J. Pascrell, Jr.