



Probation Association of New Jersey

Serving New Jersey Since 1904

An affiliate of the American Probation and Parole Association

United Professional Center, Unit 2-20

617 Union Avenue, Brielle, NJ 08730

Phone (732) 223-1799 Fax (732) 223-8363

Website: www.panj.org

Ellen Cribbin
Business Manager

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Executive Assistant
To the President

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Op-ed Regarding Pension Reform "Enough Is Enough"

As the President of Probation Association of New Jersey I am certainly aware that the State's finances are in a state of crisis. With the current financial crisis in mind we came to the collective bargaining table in 2008 and negotiated a contract in good faith. At that time, we made significant concessions and did our share to cut costs and find ways to save the state money in the pension system by agreeing to pay for a portion of our health benefits and pensions, by taking furlough days; by reducing the number of paid holidays, and by deferring our July 2009 raises for 18 months among other "givebacks." All of these things have taken significant money out of the paychecks of the 2,800 probation officers and supervisors I represent. We are dismayed that in the year-and-a-half since those negotiations we are now faced with even more sweeping changes to our pension and benefits.

Contrary to public perception public employees do not have "cushy" jobs. Our members are middle-class men and women with college degrees who signed up for tough jobs. None of us are going to make it rich by working for the probation system. We supervise criminals in dangerous neighborhoods, supervise drug courts, make sure child support payments are made, work to carry out justice in court rooms, conduct pre-sentence and pre-trial investigations, and in the family courts we are responsible for domestic violence, child placement, and children in courts. But yet, we have been broadsided over the course of the last four years with constant reductions in the benefits we worked so hard to earn. Enough is enough.

Further, I am disheartened by anti-public employee and anti-union messages we hear often from the Christie administration and elsewhere. This administration believes that the civil service system should be optional. I think that is a misguided policy position. Civil service was created to guard against corruption and cronyism in government. There are plenty of examples such as the EZ Pass system and the Division of Motor Vehicles Inspection program of past administrations when buzzwords such as "efficiency" and "cost savings" were used as a justification to replace public employees with private enterprises which led to completely disastrous results.

The time is now to stop making middle-class public employees the scapegoats for all that is wrong with the State of New Jersey's operating budget and look for answers to our woes beyond continuously stripping public employees of their hard earned retirement and health benefits. It is time for the citizens of New Jersey to recognize the great services that our state employees, and especially those of us in the Judicial and Probation services, provide.