

INSIGHT



PUBLISHED BY THE PROBATION ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY
OFFICE ADDRESS: 2409 PAYNTERS ROAD • WALL, NJ 08736

ISSN 1065-7800

SPRING 2015

WWW.PANJ.ORG

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE, SPRING 2015

By Gerry Gibbs & Jeanette Hoffman, Capital Impact Group

Legislature Acts in Support of Unions' Pension Lawsuit

Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto announced that both houses of the New Jersey Legislature will file an Amicus Brief in Superior Court stating that the Christie Administration is ignoring the law and the legislative intent of the pension reform bill.

In a joint statement, Sweeney and Prieto stated, "We want to make it clear to the Court that the administration's refusal to make the legally required pension payments violates the law and disregards legislative intent. The pension reform bill approved by the Legislature and signed by the Governor is a law he can't choose to ignore. He has a legal, constitutional and contractual obligation to make the required payments."

The lawsuit, which was filed on behalf of dozens of state employee unions, went to Superior Court on May 6, when arguments were heard regarding the state's decision to cut \$1.6 billion from this year's slated payment for the public pension and benefit system. Oral arguments for the case were heard on May 12th.

PANJ-backed Bill to Study Probation System Passes Senate Law and Public Safety Committee

S-2334: Directs the collection of recidivism data for adults sentenced to a period of probation.

Bi-partisan legislation to analyze the effectiveness of the state's probation system unanimously passed the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee in March. The bill, S-2334, would require the Administrative Office of the Courts to establish a program to record and analyze recidivism rates for adults sentenced to a period of probation. The bill is modeled on a similar program established in 2009 to record and analyze recidivism rates for adult and juvenile inmates released from incarceration.

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“This legislation is an important measure in analyzing the effectiveness of the community supervision system and, in turn, ensuring our officers have the tools and training they need to safely and effectively perform their jobs,” said PANJ First Vice President Ellen Cribbin, who testified in support of the bill.

Under the bill, the program would record data regarding the types of crimes that result in a sentence of probation, the arrests for all offenses committed by probationers within three years following their sentence of probation and any convictions resulting from the arrests, crimes committed while on probation, the number of repeat offenders and the number of probationers concurrently serving a parole sentence. This data would be analyzed to determine whether the rates and nature of re-arrests and convictions differ according to the criminal histories and personal characteristics of probationers, the treatment they received while on probation, participation and involvement in rehabilitation initiatives and programs, and such other factors as may be relevant, including, but not limited to, race, gender, ethnicity, and age, but without referencing personally identifying information.

The bill now heads to the Senate Budget Committee for consideration.

PANJ EF New Ad Journal

By Deneen Hohman, Conference Chair

The Probation Association of New Jersey, Education Fund Inc., is an incorporated, 501(C)(3) non-profit organization of probation officers and other judiciary employees that serve as the only statewide voice for New Jersey’s probation officers and professional supervisors within the New Jersey Judiciary.

The purpose of the Education Fund is to improve public safety through the funding of specialized training not otherwise available to probation officers. Each year, PANJ EF sponsors a three day training event in November.

We are currently in the process of preparing for the 73rd Annual Training Conference. We would like to request your assistance. If you own a business or know of a business who would like to place an Ad in our Ad Journal please direct them to the website (www.panj.org) or contact the office (732)-223-1799. By supporting us, their business will be recognized as a full year supporter at all the PANJ EF events in the 2015-2016 season.

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A Message From The President

Brothers and Sisters,

I am hoping that this message finds you and your families well.

As we have had the Primary Election back on June 2, 2015 and the General Election for all 80 Assembly seats ahead of us on November 3, 2015; I want to remind everyone that the deadline for registering to vote, if you have not already done so, is 21 days before an election. It is not too late to register for the General Election. PANJ will have a link for the voter registration form on our website (PANJ.ORG) and on the Probation Association of New Jersey’s Facebook page.

I urge all of our members, families and friends to vote. It is extremely important to send a message to the Legislators that we care about our futures and our families by voting. More information will follow with specific information on Legislators that support PANJ and its efforts on behalf of its members.

In Solidarity,

Dwight Covaleskie

Dwight Covaleskie
President



A Message From The Editor

Brothers and Sisters,

We have exciting news about the upcoming PANJ EF Training Conference in November of this year! Please read the article in this Edition of the Insight, by Deneen Hohman, Conference Chair, to find out all about it. We hope you will be as enthusiastic about these changes as we are, and encourage you all to come and join us in Atlantic City for all the informative trainings, excitement and fun!

I would like to take a moment to wish Thea Fitzpatrick much happiness, enjoyment and relaxation in her retirement this month, after over 3 decades as a Probation Officer! All of us at PANJ thank her for her many years of service, loyalty and dedication to our Union. Please read her farewell article, also in this Edition!

In Solidarity,

Nick Briscuso

Nick Briscuso
Editor

Who's to Blame?

By Ellen Cribbin, 1st VP Line Staff

By now, we all know that New Jersey's public employee pension fund is a mess. But do we know whose fault it is? Our current Governor blames democrats and unions. Public employees blame politicians. Well respected financial advisors say that New Jersey's economy is to blame.

Absent any adjustments or modifications to the pension fund in fiscal year 2016, pension and benefit costs will deplete one fourth of the state's budget.

In 2010 Governor Christie pledged to fix our retirement system. He then proceeded to increase our benefit contributions, raise our new hire retirement ages, and freeze the cost of living adjustments for our retirees. The following year Governor Christie skipped a \$3 billion contribution.

The last time our pension was fully funded was in the early 2000's. Governor Christie is not the first governor to make partial annual pension payments instead of full contributions, but the last of six to do so.

Back in 1997 Governor Whitman borrowed close to \$3 billion from our pension fund to spend on other programs and ended up only paying back a fraction of that money. Governors DiFrancesco, Codey, McGreevey and Corzine continued to fail to fully fund the pension system. It takes about \$600 million annually to fully fund our pensions. For the better half of the decade following 1997 our leaders only contributed about \$23 million per year. If you asked any of these elected officials why they didn't make a full contribution their responses would undoubtedly be that they were required by law to balance the state's budget, and they used our pension money to do so.

New Jersey's unemployment rate is currently ranked 42nd in the nation. NJ's unemployment rate is the worst in the tri-state area, and is a full percent higher than the national average. We have faced one of the nation's slowest recovery rates since the housing market collapsed in 2008. If we had enjoyed the same job recovery success rate that other states have our current governor would have had close to \$3 billion in revenue to add to the annual budget.

While states are in an economic downturn both state and local budgets feel the stress. Rising unemployment rates, declining incomes, and lack of spending result in lower tax revenues, all the while state government and local municipalities need to increase financial support. That double negative affects the balancing of NJ's budget. That gap needs to be closed somewhere and our past governors have filled that gap with cuts to pension contributions.

Our pensions have been attacked in a vicious cycle for the last 20 or so years. Maybe the question we should be asking is where do we go from here?

The Annual 2015 PANJ EF Training Conference

By Deneen Hohman, Conference Chair

PANJ EF Has Exciting News!!!!

The 73rd annual training conference will be held at the GOLDEN NUGGET in Atlantic City this year! The conference dates are November 22nd to the 24th. Nick Briscuso and I have been able to work out a very attractive contract with the Golden Nugget. This year the room rates will be only \$59 plus taxes & fees with free Wi-Fi/internet and complimentary parking! Plus this year all the early bird registrants will be eligible for a drawing to win a room upgrade, 2 passes to the Chairman Club and a massage. We are actively working on more surprises.

The attendees will be able to register for the conference through PAYPAL and use a credit card. The registration forms this year have been revised and will be available on the PANJ website. Please make sure to review everything on the form before sending it in.

Our conference title this year is ***"You Don't Need Super Powers to be a Super Hero"***.

The training committee has scheduled sessions that will provide EVERYONE with valuable information and insight to help with our daily tasks. Remember that no matter where you work at any time you could be relocated and continued training enhances your work. Please visit the PANJ website (www.panj.org) after July 1st to check out all the sessions being offered and their descriptions. If you know of any trainers who like to participate in future conferences please contact Nicole Mlynarczyk in Atlantic County Vicinage.

We will be continuing with the "Give Back to the Community" by collecting non-perishable items for the FOOD BANK. Last year we were able to collect over 400 pounds of items! Awesome kudos to everyone who participated!! Let's see what we can do this year!

The PANJ website has all the Scholarship applications along with the PANJ Award nominee information. Start thinking now of which co-workers have stood out from all the rest. Remember in order to be considered for an award, PANJ EF Awards Committee must receive a nomination letter so please take the time to acknowledge your fellow co-workers.

If you know of a business who would like to be an exhibitor or a sponsor please contact Gary Haase in Sussex County Vicinage or visit the PANJ website.

Mark your calendars to check the PANJ website for all your conference information and deadlines. Have a fantastic Summer! We will see everyone at the GOLDEN NUGGET!



THEA FITZPATRICK-RETIRING AFTER 34 YEARS

By Thea Fitzpatrick, SPO Atlantic County

I started as a Probation Officer in Atlantic County in 1981. I have served in various departments; CCMO, Juvenile, Family and Adult Supervision. It has been an extreme privilege and honor to serve in the capacity of Senior Probation Officer for the past 27 years (promoted in 1988). I have met many wonderful colleagues and lasting friends.

I want to thank the Probation Association of New Jersey for its professionalism and support throughout my career. I have had the honor to serve as Parliamentarian, Regional Representative, and Health and Safety Representative, Line Staff. I have served on the Conference Committee, Finance Committee, Governance Committee, Health and Safety Committee and PANJ-EF.

I will continue to attend our annual PANJ-EF Training Institute, assisting and supporting our fellow Probation Officers in any way that I can.

I look forward to my new life as a retiree, and I have many plans (trip to China, learning French, missions trip to South America, church work in many capacities) so I won't be bored!

Thanks again to PANJ for all you have contributed to my life.