

INSIGHT



PUBLISHED BY THE PROBATION ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY
OFFICE ADDRESS: UNITED PROFESSIONAL CENTER, BLDG. 2, 617 UNION AVE • BRIELLE, NJ 08730

ISSN 1065-7800

APRIL 2011

WWW.PANJ.ORG

PENSION AND HEALTH BENEFITS REFORM CONTINUE TO BE TOP PRIORITIES

By: Chrissy Buteas, Capital Impact Group

It seems like a day does not go by without a major newspaper in New Jersey covering the continuing discussion around pension and health benefits reform. With the entire Legislature up for re-election this year, this topic is playing out to be the main theme on which many will base their election campaigns.

With the Legislature still on budget break and prepared to start regular business in the next couple of weeks before they break for summer recess in July, Governor Christie and Senate President Sweeney have not reached a compromise on their respective pension and health benefits packages. Given that both sides have what they consider to be a strong plan, pension reform will likely be considered before health benefits reform, especially since Senate President Sweeney lacks the support of his own caucus on his health plan.

On pension reform, Governor Christie wants to roll back the 9 percent benefit increase from 2001, raise the retirement age, and increase worker payments into the system and freeze cost-of-living raises. Senate President Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver introduced a competing plan that would also freeze automatic raises while allowing workers to keep the 2001 increase if they pay more into the system. Governor Christie believes his proposal will do more to close the pension gap.

On health benefits reform, Governor Christie wants government workers to pay 30 percent of the cost of their health-insurance premiums. Senate President Sweeney is pushing a plan that will raise workers' contributions gradually over seven years and let lower-income employees contribute a smaller percentage.

Both plans are contentious and lack support on both sides of the aisle.

As we approach the final two months before the budget must be adopted by the constitutional deadline of June 30th, the PANJ Executive Board will keep a close eye on any compromise deal that may be struck by June 30th and will weigh in heavily with Governor Christie, Senate President Sweeney and Speaker Oliver on behalf of PANJ members.

A Message From The President

I am truly proud of our Association (PANJ and PANJ Educational Fund) for achieving so much for our members over my past eighteen years as president. We have accomplished a great deal under the leadership of First vice President Dwight Covalleskie of the Line Staff and First vice Brad Fairchild of the Supervisory Staff. We have received our raises and have one coming in July 2011 and we have not experienced furloughs and layoffs over the past year. We can thank our two Vice Presidents for their dedication and ability to negotiate a contract that benefited all members without layoffs.



I must also commend our finance committee and the State Executive Board for their honesty and integrity in carefully monitoring your dues. The State Executive Board receives a finance report each month listing every expenditure attributable to PANJ. I know of no other union or association that is so forthright. PANJ-EF has held many great events, and was able to add another Scholarship at our yearly conference.

Together we will continue to be successful as a labor organization. We see the changes that our Governor and Legislature want to make and if they achieve their aims we will all suffer losses. We strongly believe in the collective bargaining process and hope our friends in the legislature join us in this belief. At any rate we will continue to defend and represent you and fight for your rights.

Stay strong and stay united and don't let anyone or any group distract you from our mission. I also wish everyone a Happy Easter and Passover.

George Christie

A Message From The Editor

Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Insight!

There are several exciting things taking place in our organization that I would like to share with you. We now have a PANJ Facebook fan page! If you already have a Facebook account and want to become a fan of the PANJ page you just need to type in the search bar Probation Association of New Jersey and you'll be able to 'like' our page. We have been posting information about events that we hold, and events that Brother and Sister Organizations have as well, in addition to news articles about current events that affect us.

PANJ-EF is holding our annual Golf Outing on May 9th at Mercer Oaks Golf Course. All the proceeds from the day will support the PANJ-EF scholarship fund, which is given out at our annual conference in Atlantic City. This year's conference theme is "Net-Working: The New Frontier," which really represents the technology changes that we have been making recently.

Our attorney's at Fox and Fox have been hard at work for us as well. Recently they analyzed the Governor's pension bill, and both the Republican and Democratic pension bills, which are available on our website at PANJ.org. I'm sure that there are plenty of Local happenings as well, and if you would like this information posted either on our Website or on Facebook, you can either reach out to your Local Representative or call me at the PANJ office.

In Solidarity,

Ellen Cribbin

Business Manager
Editor

OFFICIALS

George P. Christie
President

Dwight Covaleskie
First V.P., Line Staff

Bradley J. Fairchild
First V.P., Supervisor's Unit

Stephanie Hennessey
Second Vice President

Daniel M. Bergin
Northern Regional V.P.

Kevin Farley
Central Regional V.P.

Patrick Barrea
Southern Regional V.P.

Carmelo Velazquez
Northern Regional V.P., Supervisor's Unit

Gavin Cummings
Central Regional V.P., Supervisor's Unit

Glen Moton
Southern Regional V.P., Supervisor's Unit

Dorothy Robinson
Recording Secretary

Susan Ormsby-Cuozzo
Financial Secretary

Jacqueline Guarini-Sheehan
Treasurer

Linval Lewis
Parliamentarian

Ellen Cribbin
Sergeant-at-Arms / Business Manager

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Region 1

Anne Dutton, Morris
Bridgett Patillo, Essex
Anthony Persico, Morris

Region 2

Edda Burry, AOC
Michael LaCosta, HUnterdon
Susan Smith, Middlesex

Region 3

A. Francis Nunan, Cape May
Roberta Scull, Atlantic
Susan Lively, Cumberland

Opportunity for PANJ Members to Save Money!

By Susan Ormsby-Cuozzo, Financial Secretary

The Probation Association of NJ-Educational Foundation, Board of Trustee's has partnered with **Viridian Energy** to offer you, our members, your families, friends, etc., an opportunity to save on your current electric bills. This company presented this opportunity to PANJ-EF, it was adopted and brought before the Executive Board where it was again presented, and accepted.

Viridian offers "**Green Energy**" alternatives to the electricity that you currently use. This energy is cheaper to use, therefore they can offer this at a cheaper rate to their customers. You, the members can save on your monthly bills by enrolling to purchase your electricity from Viridian. This is a fast, simple, cost free process, which requires no signing of a contract and enables you to switch back at any time if you are unhappy with your savings. It also does not disrupt anything with your current company. You will continue receiving your energy and any repairs from your current company. There is also an added benefit for PANJ-EF, as Viridian will donate back to PANJ-EF, as a form of fund-raising, to support our scholarships.

As stated, enrollment is simple. You will need a copy of your current Electric Bill for your Account number and then log into www.viridian.com/PANJEF. This will bring you right into our site. Enroll and enjoy your savings and feel good, as you are also supporting our scholarships, without it costing you a dime.

Any questions please see your local President or representative that was at the meeting or you can contact Susan Ormsby-Cuozzo in Morris or Deneen Hohman in Atlantic. If we don't have the answer, we will find it out. Thank You for your continued support.

What is P.E.R.C.?

By Ellen Cribbin, Business Manager

Many of us have heard of this acronym before but what does it really stand for? It stands for the Public Employee Relation Commission, a bi-partisan agency that deals exclusively with certain labor relations issues involving public employers, public employees, and unions that represent public employees. Issues that fall under their authority include representation matters, scope of negotiations, unfair labor practices, mediations, fact-finding and arbitrations. PERC makes policies and establishes rules for employee - employer relations in public employment related to dispute settlement, grievance procedures and administration including enforcement of statutory provisions concerning representative elections. There are seven members that make up the board of PERC, who are appointed by the governor and approved by the NJ Senate, two representatives from public employers, two representative of public employer organizations, and three representatives of the public. PERC has jurisdiction over the following types of public employers, the State of NJ, public college and universities, counties and municipalities, local public schools and charter schools. Each year PERC holds a conference on Public Sector Labor Relations Law, which a group of PANJ's Executive Board Members attended, on April 15th. Among the presenters from both Labor and Management was one of our Fox and Fox attorney's, Craig Gumpel, who spoke about the history of shared services and regionalization. Among the many hot topics presented concerning public employees was Governor Christie's appointee to the Chair of PERC, Kelly Hatfield, and the firing of longtime general counsel, Ira Mintz. PERC has always been an independent and neutral agency, free of politicking, for the past eight governors. Unfortunately for PERC and all the public employees and employers they govern, Ms. Hatfield has ignored decades of legal precedent by failing to file supporting briefs for PERC's own decisions with respect to municipalities furloughing employees that were subject to collective bargaining. At the same time that Governor Christie is making the once neutral agency who fairly administered the law without the fear of losing their jobs, he is pushing for legislation to make negotiations over health benefits illegal. If you would like to let you're Legislators and the Senate know that you are concerned about Governor Christie undermining collective bargaining, and to let PERC continue to remain a neutral partisan agency you can call either Senate President Sweeney at (856) 251-9801 or Assembly Speaker Oliver at (973) 395-1166 to show your support.

Preparing and Educating Our Leaders

By Jacqueline Guarini-Sheehan, Treasurer

I had the opportunity to once again attend the National Staff Organization, Winter Advocacy Retreat this past January. This has been my third time attending this conference, and I have always been provided with the tools necessary to perform my duties as a Local President. I attended this retreat with leaders from PANJ who take their positions seriously, and are eager to sharpen their skills as leaders.

This year's theme was Defending our Future; one could say this is an appropriate title for the issues Unions are facing across the nation. The types of classes that were offered help to reinforce our skills as union leaders. We attended classes on how to file a grievance on all levels, arbitrations and just cause to name a few. The newest of the classes involved social media, which is a big influence in our daily lives. The classes have enlightened us on the new era Unions are facing.

This retreat also provided us an opportunity to interact and share our ideas with one another; as well as network. This is definitely a retreat worth while attending for union leaders, and I am glad PANJ has an opportunity to participate and send leaders to this well planned and informative retreat.

Supervisor Update

By Brad Fairchild, First Vice President, Supervisory Unit



The unprecedented state budget crisis has many PANJ Supervisors concerned about the impact of budget cuts and increasing staff shortages caused by vacancies that occur as a result of mass retirements. What is especially troubling is that Supervisors who are working in Divisions with mounting vacancies are expected to pick up many additional tasks with no consideration or acknowledgment that expectations need to be adjusted as a result of the shortages.

Failure to revise expectations could leave many Supervisors subject to discipline as their performance will be considerably impacted as a consequence of being assigned additional responsibilities without the benefit of additional resources. We have already witnessed a dramatic increase in number disciplines filed by management in the last few months. We have also observed an increase in 9.8 removals as several vicinages simply disregard the appropriate disciplinary procedures by terminating supervisors so they can avoid having their actions subject to review and examination. We believe that this is a sad commentary on an agency that goes to great effort to publicize its national reputation for fairness and decency. It's a shame that the evenhanded approach that is utilized for litigants is not extended for those who make the courts operate on a daily basis. When you compare how the Judiciary views the public verses its employees it is indeed a "tale of two cities".

PANJ will address this issue aggressively because if the problem is ignored, it will have a dramatic impact on morale which is already in steady decline as a result of the relentless assault on state workers by the members of the media and pandering politicians.

PANJ Supervisors recognize that we are living in a time of declining resources and we will have to accept the reality that some of the benefits we have enjoyed in the past may not continue and we will have accept additional sacrifices. What PANJ cannot accept, however, is that our employer so causally disregards the basic principals of fairness and justice for employees who are making the courts function during this difficult time. We believe we deserve fairness and we believe that our employer should 'practice what it preaches". Please notify your Local Supervisor PANJ President or representative or contact me directly if you believe you are not being judged fairly in the conduct of your duties as a supervisor. Together we will do everything possible to survive and even excel during this crisis.

The View From Health and Safety

By Brad Fairchild - First Vice President, Professional Supervisors

Many people view labor unions as the driving force behind the increase in salaries and benefits for the working class during the last century. What is often overlooked is the critical role unions have also played in improving safety in the workplace. Unions have a "whistleblower" as well as an "advocacy" role in highlighting safety problems which cause many serious injuries and death. Forcing safety issues to be the focus of labor management relations may not be a particularly glamorous job, but it is still has been one of the most important functions of unions in the United States.

One of the most dramatic examples of successful union advocacy for improved safety conditions (which was the subject of a recent HBO special) came as a result of the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City in March 1911. The Triangle Shirtwaist Company made woman's blouses and they hired many young Italian and Jewish women who were recent immigrants attempting to make a fresh start in the new world. Most of the women were between 16 and 23. Just before the end of the day on March 25, 1911 a fire broke out in a scrap bin under one of the cutting tables on the eighth floor of the Triangle factory.

The fire spread quickly to several floors and within a few short minutes the full horror of this catastrophe was in full view of hundreds of bystanders. Sixty factory workers jumped from eighth and ninth floor windows to avoid being consumed by the flames but as a result died instantly from the force of the impact on the pavement below. Fireman attempted to catch the falling victims with life nets but the nets broke from the force of the falling bodies. Others who were trapped died of smoke inhalation and burns. The loss of life was staggering, 148 dead; of which 129 were young women.

In the weeks after the fire the Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Woman's Trade Union League were relentless in their call for investigations and reform of factory safety conditions. Examination of the environment inside the factory at the time of the fire found conditions that significantly contributed to the disaster. The Fire Marshal found that two months of accumulated material cuttings were scattered on the floor. A cigarette butt or match had quickly ignited cuttings into a raging inferno. Several exit doors which would have provided an escape route were locked and the only exterior fire escape buckled and broke under the weight of frantic workers who fell to their deaths on the street below.

An investigation by the New York Fire Department found 200 factories in the City in dangerous conditions similar to Triangle Shirtwaist factory. The New York Legislature completely revised the state's safety labor laws. As a result of the investigations the American Society of Safety Engineers was formed within the city of New York.

Although a century has past since that awful Saturday afternoon in New York the event, and how unions responded, can teach present day union activists and PANJ members many lessons.

Many Probation Officers and Supervisors continue to work in dangerous neighborhoods and among some of the most violent individuals in the state. (That's right Judiciary; our clients are not all non violent first offenders!!) Training for Probation officers remains inadequate in comparison with Parole Officers who supervise some of the same clients. Judiciary staffs in many Divisions work in hazardous conditions and unless PANJ remains vigilant in filing Incident Reports and pressing Health and Safety grievances, the chances of our members becoming victims will only increase.

Documenting these issues and providing the advocacy necessary to make improvements requires tenacity and persistence. Perhaps all of us would be wise to remember the ominous words of the philosopher George Santayana, "those who fail to learn the lessons of history, are condemned to repeat it".