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## Probation Association of New Jersey

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An affiliate of the American Probation and Parole Association

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# Presidential Newsletter

## March 5, 2009

### Governor's Announcements Concerning Furloughs, Wage Freezes, and Layoffs

*By George P. Christie, President, PANJ*

PANJ members are covered by four-year contracts beginning July 1, 2008. We seem to receive almost every day different messages as to how the Governor's office seeks to impose furloughs, wage freezes, or layoffs upon State employees. The Judiciary is committed to agreeing with the Governor's plans in this regard.

The Governor will submit his formal proposals when he delivers his budget address on March 10, 2009.

Initially, he proposed two days of furloughs. The Judiciary apparently was planning to close vicinages one day on May 22, 2009 and one day on June 26, 2009. The plan meant one required day off without pay per month, effectively reducing the annual compensation by two days' pay. Unfortunately, no other proposed specifics of the plan have been provided, including addressing such things as payments to essential personnel who are required to work.

The most recent declaration from the Governor's office has increased the furloughs to a proposed one day per month for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2009. He has also suggested a wage freeze, apparently with regard to the planned 3% wage increases for a period of months, which varies from 12 months to 18 months, from July 1, 2009. Although the specifics are lacking, the wage freeze does not appear to apply to increments which are paid each January and are 4% for those who are not at maximum, but does apply to the contractual wage increase. Again, there are no specifics with regard to the proposals.

A third item is the threat of layoffs.

We are opposing politically and legislatively efforts by the Governor's office as to these proposals. We are using our lobbying firms and all other resources, including my personal efforts, to seek to have the Legislature (and perhaps the Governor) eliminate or reduce these proposals.

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Our attorneys will fight these changes before the Public Employment Relations Commission and the Courts and elsewhere such as before the Department of Personnel.

PANJ strongly believes that our recently negotiated contracts are being violated as to the wage freeze, and the furloughs are nothing more than a lockout.

However, we recognize that the economy is in a severe recession. When the Governor originally proposed a two-day furlough, one day in May and one day in June, we were hoping that this proposal would eliminate the layoff threat. However, this recent initial proposal has now been significantly altered.

Of course, layoffs should be “unthinkable” as to PANJ members. In the area of Probation Services, in particular, caseloads remain, in most cases, overwhelmingly high. The risks of the job are universally recognized as huge. Probation Services save huge amounts of funds in the State budget since the cost of incarceration as to one individual for 12 months is \$35,000 or more whereas the average cost of supervision of one individual on probation for 12 months is approximately \$2,000. Because of the increasing number of individuals on probation, the need to hire more members in Probation Services has increased substantially.

Our professional staff plays an important role in public safety supervising domestic violence caseloads, drug court and sex offender caseloads. We deal with child support and in Family Court working with critical issues for the public as well as performing vital services for the smooth operation of the Courts.

PANJ members cannot afford 14 furlough days and wage freezes and for many it will mean not being able to pay bills and severe hardship.

Governor Corzine can do other things to solve his budget problems like letting go of political appointments that cost all of us \$250,000,000 in salaries each year.

We including my Executive Assistant, both First Vice Presidents of the respective bargaining units and the entire Executive Board are addressing these critical issues every moment of every day and will continue to do so and to keep you informed on these matters.

PANJ will continue to meet with law enforcement leaders, members of the Legislature as well as the Administrative Director of the Courts, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and with the Governor’s office on all these issues.

