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# PRESIDENTIAL NEWSLETTER

February 15, 2000

## STATE OF THE UNION MESSAGE

by George P. Christie

As always, it is my honor to serve you as your president and help maintain our focus on the mission of this great organization. We have passed into the new millennium, and it is time to reflect on our accomplishments for 1999. We must also look at our unfinished business, and review the challenges ahead for the year 2000.

Our primary objective is to defend and protect the rights of our members and maintain an organizational structure capable of doing so. In 1999 our challenge has been difficult, but not unlike previous years. We have had our usual share of grievances, many of which were successfully concluded. For example, in 1998 a large number of people were rated as needs improvement and denied their increment. PANJ grieved the flaws in the evaluation process and reversed this situation. Another group of people who had their 1998 exceptional rating lowered by a second rater lost an increment. PANJ grieved because our evaluation system calls for a single rater only. In both cases our legal action obtained payments for all the injured PANJ members.

In terms of discipline we have again prevailed by insuring that a level of fair play exists at all times. Our efforts have not always resulted in complete victory, but we have considerably reduced the level of the discipline being sought by management.

Our negotiations have been ongoing, as most of you know. The contract for the Case Related Unit expired on June 30, 1999, and we have been attending regular sessions to finish the outstanding issues in the old contract and work on a new agreement. The old contract still remains in full force and effect until a new agreement is ratified by our membership. We have been attempting for over a year to get the administration to bring the title issue and the transfer issue (both inter and intra county) to closure.

Unlike the other labor organizations we put a great deal of effort into helping our members who have complaints that fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act. These are often people who are let go for one reason or another because of a law that may be

loosely interpreted. However, I'm proud to say that PANJ defended its members in these situations in many counties and has had success. One former Probation Officer is now able to live with dignity and receive a pension instead of the Judiciary's alternative, which was termination from employment.

In 1999, PANJ saw the Judiciary enter into an agreement with a Cape May County School Board to pay teachers as "part time probation officers." Despite our efforts to mitigate, what we believe was a violation of the law, PANJ was ultimately forced to file litigation against the Judiciary and the school board. Probation Officers who supervise juveniles take great pride in their role, spending countless hours working with troubled youths, their families, special programs, schools, medical facilities,

the courts, and a host of other interested groups in an effort to get a probationer back on track. These officers are skilled professionals, who obtain employment by complying with a statutory process. PANJ believes all Probation Officers have been demeaned, when our employer places so little value on our professional skills and training that our work is capable of being contracted out to a teacher with a computer, a few hundred dollars, and a couple of hours of his or her time to solve all that child's problems. PANJ recognizes that there are hundreds of effective volunteers who serve the courts in limited and specific ways, but when the Judiciary enters into an agreement that results in compensation for uncertified "pseudo probation officers," they cross the line. There are plenty of documented programs in other states where Probation Officers have been brought into the schools and worked effectively with the students. In New Jersey, the Judiciary chose not to utilize the other programs' key to success; a sworn and certified Probation Officer. This choice is truly unfortunate.

All good labor organizations must lobby for their constituents with their legislators and PANJ is no different. With the aid of Princeton Public Affairs, our Trenton based lobbying firm, we succeeded in having one bill signed into law by the Governor. S949 (Body Armor Replacement Bill) added Probation Officers to a list of other law enforcement officers for inclusion in grant money for body armor. This is the first time in our history that we have included Probation Officers in a law with police officers, and I'm confident that it will not be the last time.

Our PANJ office in Brielle has become quite a busy location over the years. We outgrew the first office and are bulging at the seams in our current location. John Morton, our Business Manager, will certainly let us know when it is time for PANJ to consider securing a larger headquarters.

PANJ sponsored the 57th annual Training Conference in November 1999, fulfilling another part of our mission. We believe in continuing training so that our members can develop as professionals. Our members managed this conference, like all the others. It was perhaps the most successful event ever staged with over 500 people in attendance.

In conjunction with the concept of training and education, PANJ has entered into a dialogue with Seton Hall University in hope of establishing a Master of Arts program for our members. We would like to make the program a reality in the Fall of 2000.

PANJ has continued to publish newsletters to keep you informed of all the most pressing issues. We print approximately four *INSIGHTS* and approximately six *Presidential Newsletters* every year. We maintain a web site at [panj.org](http://panj.org) to make information more easily accessible. You may now file a PANJ incident report *on line* through the world wide web.

PANJ has also developed a partnership with Doehler and Associates and they have brought a number of benefits to our members that are described in each *INSIGHT*. Of course, they include Liberty Mutual Auto Insurance and Homeowners Insurance, and discounts at Jos. A. Bank Clothier. We are looking at new discount programs with PNC Mortgage Company and a legal services plan with attorneys at Fox and Fox, for our members.

Looking forward, we believe that we must protect the positive things we have in our contract and strive to get the most for our members. We must continue to fight for better working conditions and equipment. We need to keep lobbying for more staff so that case loads can be lowered to legitimate levels, and we must find ways to develop a standard performance evaluation that is fair to all in our group.

As you can see PANJ has worked hard for our members and our office has been a busy place. I promise to work just as hard in 2000 to make PANJ a better union than anyone could ever imagine. Thanks to all of you who work for PANJ on the committees and with the Local Associations, and to all members for your continued support.

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