



PRESIDENTIAL NEWSLETTER

May 2000

PANJ, Judiciary, and Department of Personnel to Examine Probation Officer Entry Requirements

by George P. Christie, President

PANJ leaders have been actively advocating for increased staff for a long time. Those efforts bore fruit but the Administrative Office of the Courts did not hire Probation Officers to full capacity. This trend has gone on for years. There are a number of reasons for it, but the bottom line is that the positions were not filled and caseloads are too high.

Early this month, Human Resources personnel at the AOC summoned PANJ leaders to an emergent meeting. They admitted that they have a large number of Probation Officer positions that they have not filled. If they do not fill the positions soon, they will lose funding. The AOC employees complained that the Department of Personnel (Civil Service) had taken too long to produce a list. The AOC proposed bringing in new candidates without a test, a process referred to as "Interim Non-Competitive" hiring. But the AOC also wanted to eliminate the requirement for a Bachelor's Degree (and 24 credits in behavioral sciences) in favor of 60 college credits and two years experience.

PANJ recognizes the need to hire Probation Officers quickly. David I. Fox, PANJ General Counsel, and PANJ leaders made contact with authorities at the DOP and expressed our ideas for a short term hiring process that should allow the AOC to bring on more officers. The DOP was amenable to our ideas, and suggested that PANJ and the AOC continue their dialogue to produce a mutually agreeable solution.

PANJ has networked with individuals at the Department of Personnel in the past, and our relationship with that agency has resulted in our involvement in the process described above. Remember that PANJ has been the professional association for Probation Officers since 1904, and we should be consulted on issues such as this. I want to thank our friends at the DOP for including us in this process. I want our membership to understand that without PANJ's intervention, our entry level requirements would have been altered

drastically. Such changes as those envisioned by the AOC impact on our compensation levels in a negative way.

One of the reasons for the large number of unfilled Probation Officer positions is the drain of our human resources to Parole. There, a Probation Officer can obtain a job doing substantially the same functions with a smaller caseload of similar clients at a much higher pay scale. Currently, a Parole Officer Recruit earns \$36,643 for one year before becoming a Senior Parole Officer where the range is \$44,541 to \$62,362. If a Senior Parole Officer has a specialized caseload, he or she can earn \$46,769 to \$65,483. We have some work to do at the negotiation table to achieve comparable salary levels.

PANJ's position for the short term hiring crisis is that all new officers should possess a college degree and obtain the requisite credits in behavioral sciences within a certain time frame. We are opposed to any substitution of experience for years of schooling. For the long term, PANJ seeks specific degree requirements and an associated increase in minimum salary to attract and keep qualified applicants. Any substantial increase in the minimums should be accompanied by a mathematical "ripple effect" across the entire pay scale. Be assured that PANJ will represent all our titles vigorously, should similar situations arise. I will keep the membership informed of future developments on this front.

Teaching Mentors

by George P. Christie, President

I would like to give you an update on the circumstances surrounding this most important issue involving Probation Officers. As you know in 1998 the Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage administration entered into an agreement with the Middle Township Board of Education to pay school teachers as part time Probation Officers. After repeated requests from PANJ to change this agreement went unanswered, we were forced to file litigation in Superior Court, in November 1999.

Judge Paulette M. Sapp-Peterson of the Mercer Vicinage has been assigned the case and has asked for briefs. The AOC, through their counsel Deputy Attorney General Diller, express that the statutes which outline the duties of a Probation Officer are not to the exclusion of all other public employees. We believe that the AOC is absolutely wrong in their assessment.

We expected oral arguments on May 12, 2000 before Judge Sapp-Peterson, but the matter was adjourned to a date that is yet to be determined. This issue is of the utmost importance to all Probation Officers and we will keep you informed.

Senate Bill 950

by George P. Christie, President

On May 11, 2000 S-950, the bill that would give Probation Officers law enforcement powers, was heard before the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee in the State House Annex. After a lengthy debate which included strong opposition from the Judiciary, the bill passed unanimously. It will now be moved to the Senate Budget Committee.

Approval will also have to be obtained from similar committees in the Assembly, but I'm confident that we will persevere.

Credit for our success at the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee must be given to all Probation Officers who are doing an outstanding job in New Jersey. We must also credit the many officers who contacted the senators on the committee asking for their support. Lastly, credit needs to be given to our legislative committee members Stuart Martinsen, Dan Bergin, and Jeff Gross for their hard work.

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