



Fraternal Order of Police **FLORIDA STATE LODGE**



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE BLAME GAME

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioner's are involved in a back and forth battle over their budget. The BCC announced that Pinellas Sheriff Jim Coats would have to reduce his budget by 10%.

This shortfall means that the Sheriff would have to shave \$25 million dollars in allocated resources and programs. Sheriff Coats and his staff have gone through the budget and made several cuts in services and personnel. These changes dissolved some highly productive units that were essential to the delivery of professional law enforcement services to our community. These initial cuts did not reduce the budget to the level that was requested. The Sheriff decided it would be necessary to conduct lay offs of personnel.

Personnel costs make up for over 70% of the sheriff's budget. First it was the Detention and Corrections side with the loss of 24 Detention Deputies. Notably, the inmate population has not decreased and the loss of these deputies puts others at risk. A second wave of cuts by the Sheriff means the loss 12 more positions. A total of 36 fewer deputies in the jail.

Even after this loss of 36 Detention Deputies, the next step being taken is to lay off Road Patrol Deputies, those who serve the public and provide essential services to keep our communities safe. Under the Sheriff's new order, 25 Uniformed Deputies will loose their jobs. Most may find employment with the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office. Pinellas County loses not only the cost of salaries for these men and women but the cost of hiring, training and equipping these officers.

This significant loss of 61 members of the sheriff's office losing their jobs will most certainly have a great impact on our organization. Additional cuts include civilian members of the Sheriff's Office that have been either reassigned or terminated. The threat that additional members would be laid off is still an uncertainty that hangs in the minds of all our members.

The Sheriff has contacted the FOP to advise that he was able to do some crunching of numbers to find some additional monies and came up with a plan to stop the threat of making any other lay offs. This money was not enough to be able to keep the original 25 Road Patrol Deputies or 36 Detention Deputies.

Pinellas County Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 43, represents most of the Law Enforcement Patrol side affected by the lay offs through collective bargaining agreements. Our members

have expressed deep concerns. While we wish to work closely with Sheriff Coats during these tough economic times we strongly protest the loss of active personnel from our department.

We have met with the Sheriff and Chief Deputy several times to discuss why they had to take such drastic cuts. The FOP wanted to address the Board of County Commissioners to express our concerns and hear what the BCC had to say since there seems to be some discrepancy as to what was being done.

The FOP reached out to the BCC to seek their help in resolving the extreme measure of lay offs which the BCC attributed to a decision of the Sheriff, not their mandate. One of the County Board members came out to the FOP lodge and in fact gave the county's reasoning behind the cuts. The FOP was led to believe that there are funds available for the Sheriff to draw from that could save jobs. The BCC never intended for anyone to be laid off. The board member expressed that the different Department Heads under the County Administration had been told last fall they would be cutting the budget and for them to start to tighten their belts.

After this meeting, the information was discussed with Sheriff Coats, who countered that monies believed to be available were in fact not available. The monies that were being considered, about \$10 million dollars were reserve money from the Health Benefit. The Sheriff called a meeting for FOP members to explain the reserve funds. At this meeting the chief deputy was able to show that the monies in reserve could not be used for anything other than health benefits. This was written in the contract with the health provider.

It seems that we keep bouncing back and forth between the Sheriff and the BCC as to what has taken place.

We remember not too long ago when Governor Charlie Crist was pushing for us to approve Amendment 1 and that he would not allow it to affect public safety and first responders while still helping the citizens of Florida. Well, we must strongly disagree. The kneejerk response to budget cutting in response to Amendment 1 is having a serious impact on Public Safety and First Responders. We have heard from other areas of the state that public safety officers are losing their jobs. We know from experience that as the economy slows, economic crime increases and the pressure of providing adequate law enforcement protection must be preserved. We are opposed to deputies losing their jobs and to the impact it will have on our communities and the citizens we serve.

With the blame game going on, the only ones that are losing are the men and women that took the oath to serve and protect the citizens of Pinellas County and the very citizens they promised to serve.

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