

Brothers and Sisters,

The Florida State Lodge, Fraternal Order of Police stood alone today in the Florida Senate Community Affairs sub-committee. President Preston, our legislative director Lisa Henning and our attorney Tad Delegal presented our opposition to Senate Bill 610 correctly pointing out the problems with this divisive bill. We had 20 FOP members in the audience who all voiced their opposition to this bill. Those voices fell on deaf ears and it was clear the Senators on this committee had made up their mind before the hearing. Only Senator Tony Hill had the courage to oppose this bill and we thank him for his effort.

Senator Mike Fasano's bill would recognize county Sheriffs as a "legislative body" for the purpose of collective bargaining. What this means is that the Sheriff as the Chief Executive Officer of the agency would bargain with the FOP or collective bargaining representative on a contract. The Sheriff could simply decide, as they have in Pasco and Clay Counties that they can declare an impasse and then rule on that very impasse, which again they have done in Pasco and Clay Counties and then impose their own version of the contract as in Pasco County.

This is fundamentally unfair. The present system of checks and balances guaranteed by our system of government provides that an impasse be ruled upon by the "Legislative Body" of the county which would be the County Commission. How can the Sheriff objectively rule on his own impasse? Even criminals have their cases heard before a judge independent of the prosecution and defense.

The Sheriffs and their representatives stood before the Senate Committee in favor of this bill and spoke about controlling their budgets as they artfully evaded the issue of collective bargaining. Sheriff Beseler of Clay County told the committee that this bill would not impede the collective bargaining process and that he has bargained in good faith with the FOP even though we have been at impasse for 3 years, even though we have filed unfair labor practices against him, even though the Public Employee Relations Commission has ruled that he is not a "legislative body" and even though he has arbitrarily transferred the FOP leaders in the Clay County Sheriff's Office to less desirable positions to punish them.

Senator Fasano spoke on behalf of his bill and reminded the Senate Committee that only the FOP opposed this bill while the PBA sat silently in the last row. If this bill were to pass the House and Senate, collective bargaining for Deputy Sheriffs is dead. We go back in time to the 1950's style of dictatorial rule by one man (or woman) who control all of the power and run a sheriff's office as their own personal fiefdom.

Make no mistake; the FOP will continue to oppose this bill without compromise. This is bad legislation that strips away the hard fought for rights of deputy sheriffs that the Florida Supreme Court affirmed, recognizing Deputy Sheriffs as public employees

guaranteed the right to collective bargaining. This bill will impact every deputy in the state of Florida and must be defeated. The issue goes way beyond Pasco and Clay Counties as Sheriffs or their representatives from Hillsborough, Pinellas, Charlotte, Highlands, Gadsden, Lake and Wakulla Counties were present and voiced their support for the bill. This issue is gathering support through the Florida Sheriff's Association and will spread across our state to every county when sheriffs realize they no longer have to bargain in good faith with their employees but rather declare an impasse and rule on that very impasse making the collective bargaining process null and void for Deputy Sheriffs.

Let your legislators know that the FOP and the hard working, dedicated law enforcement officers we represent stand together against Senate Bill 610.

James W. Preston,
President