



Cutting of Law Enforcement Units Is A Disservice To The Taxpayers and Community

By Damon K. Jones

Why do the local media in Westchester insist on making law enforcement officers the scapegoat for the lack of accountability of local municipal officials? Law enforcement officers risk their lives every day to maintain safety and security in our communities. Are the local media suggesting that crime will diminish when municipalities prevent law enforcement officers from voluntarily working overtime? It is the opinion of the National Black Police Association, North East Region, that these tactics by the media are not truly informational and do a tremendous disservice to law enforcement and the communities they proudly serve.

One unfortunate outcome has been a misguided outcry against law enforcement professionals. It is no wonder the usual response from politicians is to cut, cut, and cut. Naturally, instead of cutting the fat at the top, they usually begin with the rank and file. In most cases police officers cannot afford to purchase a house in the community in which they risk their lives daily.

The recent decision by several municipalities in Westchester to play the *tax save game*; reducing services by cutting specialized units and funding for equipment, is clearly unacceptable. Trimming the bottom line can never be more urgent than protecting the lives of taxpayers and the men and women who place their lives on the line for them eight, and sometimes 16 hours a day.

If politicians were truly honest with their constituents, they would admit that paying overtime is generally less costly than hiring more staff. Unfortunately law enforcement officers are too often caught in the shuffle with politicians: Work overtime to protect the community and

you're attacked for making money. Do not work and crime increases and you are attacked for not doing your job.

Unfortunately, crime does not occur during typical working hours like 9-5 or 10-6. In this post 9/11 era, our country has become much more of a military state. Safety and security are major concerns. Law enforcement professionals in Westchester County, police, correction and probation officers and sheriffs, have responded to these concerns by increasing work hours, adapting to new federal policies and procedures and sacrificing time with family and loved ones in an attempt to keep our communities safe.

Crime has no schedule. At times, police officers put in overtime voluntarily out of a sense of duty. Other times, overtime is mandatory due to the massive budget cuts and resultant staff shortages many municipalities have experienced. At present, local police departments are operating at bare minimum staffing. Unfortunately, even successful community outreach programs like PAL and DARE, have been eliminated from budgets for lack of staff. Nevertheless, despite decreases in enforcement funding and staffing, crime has not increased. Law Enforcement professionals in Westchester County generally carry out their sworn duties and responsibilities with dedication and valor. They are faced, on a daily basis with particularly traumatic experiences; gruesome accidents, homicides, vicious crimes against children, not to mention personal brushes with death, and/or the death or serious injury of a



partner, the shooting of a perpetrator or innocent civilian. Their sworn duties and responsibilities include keeping the penitentiaries and jails

safe and secure with only one officer alone to a housing area that holds some 40 -60 inmates.

Even with health and safety precautions, Law Enforcement Professionals face exposure to diseases such as AIDS, MRSA, Hepatitis, and more recently, the H1N1 virus. With all these dangers, they must still don the uniform of Justice, go to work, and remain extra hours when needed to keep our streets and jails safe for the citizens they serve.

It is incumbent upon local law enforcement unions to maintain better relationships with the communities that they serve. Taxpayers should know what our job entails completely. We cannot continue to allow others to tell our story for their own political reasons. Sometimes we must abandon political correctness and speak the truth on the safety of the law enforcement professionals we represent. We cannot allow disconnected management to waste taxpayer dollars on expensive toys such as Shotspotter while cutting critical units and details such as Gang and Robbery units or the purchases of much-needed body armor for Police and Correction Officers.

It is well known that Law enforcement personnel have worked diligently over the years to maintain law and order in the County. It is the hard work of the Correction Officers that have paved the way for the department to receive National Accreditation from the American Correctional Association. This means

that the Norwood E. Jackson Correctional Facility Correction Officers operate at the highest standards in the nation. Both correction and police of Westchester County have not had a pay raise since 2006.

The National Black Police Association has found that these careless governmental decisions with respect to law enforcement have occurred throughout Westchester County. When you have cities such as Mount Vernon and Yonkers that have been infected with small arms and light weapons (SALW), gang members video-taping themselves with SALW, along with the rise of people being shot at or killed, the Police Departments should be well trained and equipped to deal with it. They need to have the best equipment, training and assistance made available to them.

In closing, let me say the Police Officer is the key to safety in our communities. She/he is the primary entry point to the justice system and the part in closest contact with the public. It is municipal government management's responsibility to the officer, community-enhanced policy and procedure, and a better workplace, that gives the community a better, more efficient, well-trained officer who will better respond to the needs of the community.

Finally, it is unfair to suggest that overtime is the rationale for cutting crime units and the lack of proper equipment. Who is willing to pay that price? The same individuals who are outraged by funds dedicated to the payment of overtime will also be outraged by skyrocketing crime in their neighborhoods.

In Unity and Peace,

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