



# Law Enforcement Officers Should Not Be Scapegoats For Government's Budgetary Downfalls

By Damon K. Jones

All over the country, there has been an enormous public outcry over the rising cost of health care. When this issue is raised with respect to our law enforcement officers (corrections, police, sheriff and probation), they are lately asked to pay more for less, when, in fact, we are constantly exposed to disease on a daily basis. When times are good, our elected officials are quick to take the credit, but when times are tough, through no fault of dedicated civil service workers, they point a finger at them, especially those in law enforcement who are doing the job of protecting our communities, jails, and highways. We, as law enforcement professionals, risk our lives daily. And, now, because of budgetary constraints, we are being asked to sacrifice our health benefits and our families' well-being.



The question remains, "What will our politicians bring to the table to bargain with for our health benefits?" Is it the belief of our elected officials' who we protect, serve and put our lives on the line for, that we should run the risk of being infected with the HIV/Aids Virus, H1N1, Hepatitis and MARS A, all the while paying into decreased benefits without an increase in pay or improvement of quality of work issues? If that is their belief, then they have the wrong understanding of what a law enforcement professionals job really entails.

American researchers have found that Law Enforcement Professionals are among the high-risk occupations for coming into contact with infectious disease. Law Enforcement Professionals with 4-10 years in the job have the highest rate of exposure at 59.3 per 10,000. Those officers who work patrol and specialized units have a high rate of exposure of 43.6 per 10,000. These elected officials are truly out of touch with the reality of the daily work life of the law enforcement professional.

We have stated countless times that the law enforcement professional has the most stressful service job there is. Law enforcement represents a worst-case scenario in terms of the toll occupational activity takes on the human body. Relatively sedentary work activity, 95% of the time, escalates to an all-out assault on the physical and mental senses during an emergency response.

Most officers feel the effect of a variety of unwanted medical outcomes, including an untimely death. The law enforcement community and their families can bear cold witness to this statement. If those not healthy enough to endure the demands of the job are lucky enough to escape during their careers, the accumulated damage may reveal itself in the form of a relatively brief retirement. The average life span of a Correction Officer after retirement is 10 years.

Heart disease attacks our men and women in blue at significantly higher rates than the general public. The life expectancy for a law enforcement professionals is 15 years less than the average American, and nationally, 50% of all law enforcement officers will die from heart disease within five years of retirement.

Westchester County Police and Corrections haven't renegotiated their collective bargaining agreement since 2006. Even a raise will not allow these dedicated men and woman to catch up with the rising cost of living and health care. It is up to our elected officials and union presidents to bargain faithfully when it comes to the benefits of our law enforcement professionals and their families.

For the benefit of its members, police unions should consider becoming one voice instead of a collage of scattered agendas with little or no effect on policy outcomes.

With proper unity among law enforcement unions, they'll be able to enhance their political power. Why is political power so important? In a democratic society the extent or magnitude of political power gives unions their voice and their seat at the great social negotiating table provided by democracy.

The National Black Police Association has been in existence since 1972 with chartered organizations in the United Kingdom, Canada and Bermuda.

The principal concerns of the National Black Police Association are the promotion of justice, fairness, and effectiveness in law enforcement issues and the effect of those issues upon the total community.

*In Unity and Peace*

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