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Peace Officers Research Association *of Nevada*

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
POSITION PAPER SB346
May 5, 2003

Chairman Raggio and members of the Senate Finance Committee

My name is Ron Dreher. I appear before you today as the president of the Peace Officers Research Association of Nevada and as a representative of the professional peace officers of our great state to ask you to support SB346.

First and foremost we would sincerely like to thank Senators Nolan and Hardy for sponsoring this needed legislation. SB346 would provide a one pay-grade increase to Attorney General Investigators and to those law enforcement positions within the Department of Wildlife effective July 1, 2003. Some of PORAN's objectives are professionalism, high standards and equality in pay and benefits for all law enforcement officers in our state. We recognize that this process must occur over a period of time due to budget constraints. However, we believe that this bill would provide a small pay benefit to those listed law enforcement officers as an incentive to remain in their positions and to recruit new candidates for these positions.

Why the need for this legislation? Recruitment and retention of law enforcement personnel is the chief reason for this legislation. Simply put, in order to attract and keep qualified candidates in these law enforcement assignments comparable pay and benefits are an essential employer function. It is simply not cost effective not to provide them with this small pay increase. There is a cost of doing business in keeping our professional standards high and in keeping our ability to recruit comparable to local government. There is very competitive recruiting occurring throughout the United States in law enforcement careers at this time. I have attached advertisements from the April 2003, edition of the PORAC magazine as examples of the recruitment drive.

Attorney General Investigators are Category II trained peace officers whose duties and responsibilities are quite similar to those of the Washoe County District Attorney Investigators.

There are approximately 36 attorney general investigators statewide. They have not filled 4 positions and currently do not have a Chief Investigator. Their duties and responsibilities consist of initial and follow-up investigations ranging from Worker Compensation Fraud, Consumer Protection, Insurance Fraud, Medicaid Fraud and General Assignment cases. Their positions are unclassified and as is evidenced by the enclosed charts are at the low end of the pay scale. Pay-grade 32. It is our understanding, based on the fiscal note, that not filling two positions would provide the salary savings needed to provide the pay-grade increase for all of the 36 remaining positions.

Recruitment of AG investigators begin with a number of applicants. When the applicants become aware of being on the lowest end of the pay scale for law enforcement in the state and sharing the responsibilities and duties of the highest paid law enforcement officers in the state the applicants reënt and go elsewhere.

Recently, a veteran AG investigator who was considering retiring inquired from the Nevada Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) as to the amount of his monthly take home pay. He learned that his high years of service occurred in 1989, 1990 and 1991 when he was employee by the Washoe County Sheriff's Office. Imagine his disappointment when he discovered that his retirement take home pay would be at a rate of pay that was over 10 years old.

The law enforcement positions of the Nevada Division of Wildlife can be compared and are equivalent to the Nevada Highway Patrol. They are Category I trained professional peace officers. I do not have the statistics for the NHP but we do have some very important statistics from NDOW. Here are some major accomplishments from NDOW's Law Enforcement Bureau in 2002:

- 34 field game wardens handled patrol duties over the entire state of Nevada.
- Their average patrol area is 3, 235 miles.
- Several game wardens have patrol areas that are 10,000 square miles. - Only Alaska has larger patrol areas than Nevada. (Nevada's size is approximately 110,000 square miles)
- Game Wardens had contact with 25,000 people in the field.
- Game Wardens issued 632 citations.
- Their "community oriented policing" consisted of Operation Game Thief - A program for utilizing the public in apprehending poachers, Boater safety programs and community awareness programs.
- The Game Warden's Boating Safety Program contacted 31,000 boaters.
- 9,000 safety inspections were done on boats.
- 152 Boat accidents were investigated by Game Wardens.
- 1,603 boating citations were issued by Game Wardens.
- 23 stolen boats were recovered by Game Wardens.
- 95 arrests were made by Game Wardens. ¹

The above statistics are very impressive. Here are some are statistics that are on point with recruitment and retention:

In the past 12 years, of the 43 game wardens, 11 field wardens left the law enforcement bureau; 1 transferred to be a biologist with the NDOW. 6 of those leaving went to other law enforcement agencies or became special agents for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. And, 2 went to another wildlife agency.

Of the recent testing that occurred in 2002, only 12 persons applied to take the test and only one passed. That person was hired by NDOW.

¹ "Wildlife Almanac", published in the Reno Gazette Journal - May 2, 2003.

Low pay is effecting the ability of NDOW to recruit.

The cost of training a warden is estimated to be equivalent to a patrol officer. This is due to the fact that game wardens are a specialized agency. They attend a 12-16 week POST, category I academy.

They attend a 12-16 week Field Training Officer (FTO) program;

They then attend a 3 week boating school in Virginia, which includes travel time.

They must have a college degree as a minimum requirement to be a game warden.

The cost of training a game warden is estimated to be over \$100,000.00. This includes their initial salary, the POST academy, FTO school, Boat school, background investigation, polygraph, psychological test, interviews, vests, uniforms, etc.

Lastly, they work with little or no supervision.

However, they receive significantly less pay than local government police officers and significantly lower than NHP troopers, again as is evidenced by the enclosed charts.

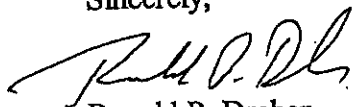
In both of the above we need to note that it is our intent for the pay-grade increases to result in at least a 5% increase for each of the effected peace officers.

SB346 can be compared to AB17 that was passed by the Senate last week. AB17 provided court-appointed defense attorneys a \$50.00 per hour increase in capital cases. The cost of doing business of providing competent professional defense should result in fewer appeal court reversals and therefore would provide the appropriate services to the defendant, to the victims and to the tax-payers at a substantial savings. In other words the increased salaries for professional services results in tremendous cost savings to the tax-payers and thus is not "pound foolish - penny-wise" logic. SB346, using that same logic, would provide an increase of roughly \$1.60 per hour or less to the Attorney General Investigators and to the Game Wardens therefore resulting in fewer turnover costs and potentially saving taxpayers substantially in recruitment and retention costs. Again, this would not result in "pound foolish-penny-wise" logic.

During the last legislative session the Nevada Highway Patrol received a similar pay-grade increase for recruitment and retention purposes. We are requesting this committee recognize that the Attorney General Investigators and the Game Wardens are professional law enforcement employees who, too, are in desperate need of retention benefits.

We ask that you support this needed legislation and pass SB346.

Sincerely,



Ronald P. Dreher
President - PORAN

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