

# ESCAMBIA COUNTY TAXPAYERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.

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September 17, 2009

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Dear Commissioners:

Last year when we appeared before you we were met in the audience by between 60-70 uniformed armed ECSO deputies and SWAT personnel. Many of these employees were on duty but diverted to a stand-in at the County Commission budget hearings by the PBA union officials. They were sent to protest any reduction in funding to the ECSO. You all then rejected our request to require a substantial reduction in the ECSO budget. We will not attend this year's final budget meeting because the manner in which the union intimidates to accomplish their goals is not conducive to good decision making. If we do not attend, perhaps they will remain on duty protecting the citizens of the community and leave the funding decision to reasoned debate. The political threat was obvious by their attendance en masse. We offer this written request for a substantial reduction in the Sheriff's budget request.

The union contract that was in effect last year controlled the wages and benefits of nearly everyone employed at the ECSO, some 1,000 plus employees. Those in management, however, receive the same benefits. The previous union contract expired in June, 2009, and we expected a vigorous objection to the renewal of many of the 2006 contract benefits. The Sheriff elected, however, to sign a new contract with the union that not only continued every single benefit in the 2006 contract but added more financial benefits to senior union membership. The Sheriff had a legal right to enter into the contract but you have a duty to only fund a reasonable budget request.

The Tax Watch study suggested millions in savings that the ECSO could realize and made suggestions on how to accomplish that reduction. The Sheriff has responded to some of these and we thought we were engaged in a constructive dialogue to effect a responsible budget reduction as a result. In addition, we all and I

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am sure you all, expected that this next year would not see excessive longevity raises, promotional raises as high as 20% and other benefits that in 2006 were a product of a windfall of revenues and a less than arm's length relationship between the administrator and the ECSO. What we, and we are certain you, expected was a frugal trimming of positions, freeze in hiring, elimination of excessive overtime benefits and excess spending. In some respects, Sheriff Morgan has trimmed some expenses. He has, however, apparently asked for \$1 million more in LOST funded expenditures.

We request that you address the salary increases that the ECSO has been granted by previous administrators and the commissioners who approved those budgets over the last decade. These union contract provisions should cause each of you and every public official who is working hard to reduce expenses to ask how this could have happened. These longevity supplements of 2-10% and some as high as 12% would if generally known offend every taxpayer in this county. The Sheriff was REQUIRED by the new contract as well as the prior one to ask you for another across-the-board raise of 3% of salaries after the longevity supplements. You previously denied that request.

Sheriff Morgan has lamented the lower pay scale for new deputies. However, in the 2006 contract and the new contract just signed these men and women who are in harm's way every day don't get a nickel more unless they have been employed for over five years. The union took care of the union's interests. No mention of even minimum pay because the union does not care if we have consistent and excessive turnover, low morale and low pay for the deputies who are employed less than 5 years. The contract benefits the employees who have simply been there the longest.

We also recommend you undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the ECSO expenditures over the last decade. We offer to help in that evaluation. The Board of County Commissioners has no way of independently knowing if the size of force, pay scale or other expense items are reasonable and necessary. Taw Watch has observed the extraordinary increase in the ECSO budget over the past decade compared to all other Constitutional officers.

More fundamental is affirming the role of the Board of County Commissioners as a check and balance where the ECSO has unilateral authority to enter into contracts. To that end, we suggest that every contract that the Sheriff signs be reviewed by the County Administrator if the contract requires county funding. The County Administrator would have no authority to prevent the signing of any contract but when budget review is later undertaken the Administrator would be better prepared to address the specific financial obligations of all contracts.

We request you reduce the ECSO budget an additional 5%. If Sheriff Morgan appeals he will have to defend his decision to enter into the contract he did. We will be there to argue

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for the taxpayers and we suspect the Cabinet of Florida will not overturn your decision. You could make the resulting millage rate reduction applicable subject to either acceptance by the Sheriff or affirmation of your decision by the Cabinet. We suspect the union will play the same card they always play – threatening an increase in crime if the budget is reduced. This may not play well given their overreaching in the union contracts of 2006 and 2009.

Very truly yours,

Robert G. Kerrigan  
Escambia County Taxpayers' Association

cc: Sheriff David Morgan  
Mr. Bob McLaughlin