



Sheriff Jim Coats

Pinellas County Sheriff's Office

"Leading The Way For A Safer Pinellas"

September 1, 2010

Honorable Karen Williams Seel, Chair
Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners
315 Court Street
Clearwater, Florida 33756

Dear Commissioner Seel:

I am writing to address the inequity of the BCC using reserves to fund a wage increase for firefighter/paramedics in Pinellas County when Pinellas County Sheriff's deputies have not received a wage increase in two years. Moreover, the last wage increase was nominal at best and there is no wage increase anticipated in the foreseeable future. We are very proud of the courageous work performed everyday by our deputies and they deserve to be treated on par with their counterparts in the fire service.

We know the history behind the EMS system in Pinellas County and the Board is faced with a difficult situation due to the structure of the current EMS system and the contracts the County entered into with the cities. We also know that the current system is not sustainable and changes have to be made to address the imbalance between fund expenditures and revenues. Nevertheless, the interim solution of using reserves, or raising taxes to fund wage increases for some public safety personnel (firefighter/paramedics) and not others (Sheriff's deputies) is unjust and fails to duly recognize the important role Sheriff's deputies play in keeping our community safe.

Further exacerbating the situation is the fact that firefighter/paramedics in Pinellas County will be receiving a significant wage increase at a time when Sheriff's deputies will experience a net pay decrease due to paying more out of each paycheck for health insurance. If it is appropriate to fund a wage increase for firefighter/paramedics from reserve funds, it is appropriate to fund a wage increase for Sheriff's deputies from reserve funds.

By policy, the Board decided to fund its General Fund reserves at \$94 million for FY11, which is estimated to be 16% of the General Fund. The Board set its FY 10 reserves at 15%. The \$94 million in reserves is not decreasing from FY 10 to FY 11 despite there being a significant overall budget reduction; thus, the percentage of reserves is actually increasing.

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We recognize the need to do our part and contribute to budget reduction requirements, which is evident by our elimination of 561 positions and a reduction of \$88 million from our General Fund budget since FY 2008. However, everyone needs to be treated equally and reaching into "savings" to fund a wage increase for some and not others is inequitable. Reserves are controlled by Board policy and all public safety personnel need to be treated equally. We hope you will give this issue due consideration as you begin FY 11 budget hearings on September 7, 2010.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Coats". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JIM COATS, Sheriff
Pinellas County, Florida

JC/tw

Cc: Commissioner Brickfield
Commissioner Harris
Commissioner Bostock
Commissioner Latvala
Commissioner Morroni
Commissioner Welch
Robert LaSala, County Administrator