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FIRST RESPONDERS UNITE FOR THE LOVE FUND A Cause Greater Than Competition

Cover photos by Eddie Hernandez

An adrenaline-filled afternoon of jiu-jitsu, nonstop energy, and real impact for our heroes.

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VOLUME 43, NO. 4

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STEADMAN
STAHL

Staying the Course, Strengthening the Future

This has been a time of change—not only for our Association, but for our profession as a whole. And through it all, your PBA has stood firm, focused, and fiercely committed to progress. From historic contract wins to renewed political relationships, from reshaping our public image to strengthening support systems like the Love Fund, I believe we’ve done more than

adapt—we’ve elevated.

When I first stepped into this role, I saw an organization that had great potential but had lost some of its direction, our compass got fogged a little bit, and we needed to change, needed a reset. I knew we had to foster better communication, build trust with our elected officials, and be more responsive to our members. Today, I’m proud to say we’ve turned a corner. We’ve built bridges instead of walls—and the results speak for themselves.

Every municipality and agency we represent now has a current contract. That alone is a significant shift from just a few years ago, when many departments hadn’t seen raises or benefit increases in over a decade. We negotiated with respect, checked egos at the door, and made our members’ well-being priority. The results have included some of the most meaningful pay and benefit increases we’ve seen in years—from Key West to Aventura, from our cities to our Sheriff’s Offices.

But it’s not just about numbers. It’s about culture. The PBA is no longer viewed as operating in isolation from the community. We’ve evolved from an “us versus them” mindset to a forward-thinking, collaborative one. Today, we are a trusted partner at the table—both in the community and at the legislative level.

I’ve often said leadership is about getting out of the stands and onto the field. That’s what our Board of Directors has done—and it’s what I ask of any member seeking to serve. Get in the game. Be engaged. Push for progress. Because the work isn’t finished. Far from it.

We’ll continue supporting officers through the Love Fund—an arm of the PBA that has quietly changed lives in moments of crisis. Whether it’s helping a family financially after a devastating injury, buying a bed due to a paralyzing accident, or small acts of kindness that help navigate through life-changing events, or providing scholarships to children of our members, the Love Fund is a lifeline that deserves even greater visibility and support.

We recently held a Jiu Jitsu tournament that brought incredible energy and raised vital funds. Next up is our annual Car Show, which is always a hit with both members and the community. These events aren’t just about raising money—they’re about showing up for each other when it counts most.

It’s time to make its impact known—not only within our walls, but across the broader community.

I’ve always believed that we must leave things better than we found them. That’s been my mission every day as President. We’ve built a culture where communication is constant, decisions are collaborative, and every dollar is accounted for. That’s what our members deserve.



SOUTH FLORIDA PBA

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The President's Gallery



And as we head into elections, I ask each of you to look at where we were—and where we are today. Are we better? Stronger? More united? I believe the answer is yes.

We have more to do. But with your trust, your voice, and your continued involvement, I know we'll keep moving forward—together.

One last note, as we close out this edition, I'm proud to share that Governor Ron DeSantis has appointed me to the Florida Criminal Justice Standards and Training

Commission, which oversees the certification, training, and conduct of law enforcement and correctional officers statewide. It's a responsibility I take with great pride.

Steadman Stahl
South Florida PBA President
steadman@sflpba.org



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WHERE ANGLERS AND HEROES GATHER



The South Florida PBA Fishing Tournament was held on Saturday, June 7th, at Matheson Hammock Park Marina. In the week leading up to the event, there were thunderstorms every day. But miraculously, on Saturday, the rain stopped, seas were calm, the sun was out, and it was a beautiful South Florida day. It would seem that the PBA has someone “upstairs” who knew what an important fundraiser this was and made sure we had the weather we needed to make it a great success. We had 24 registered boats and more than 120 anglers, including Stuart Archer and Don Rhindress, who



have participated in every PBA Fishing Tournament since its inception thirty-nine years ago. We thank them for their continued support.

Anglers arrived on a beautiful day to weigh in their catches with retired Marine Patrol Officer Paul Kuiper, who traveled from out of town to serve as the official PBA weighmaster. Paul did an outstanding job keeping the process organized and running smoothly. While awaiting the final results with eager anticipation, participants enjoyed the opportunity to relax, socialize, and share food and drinks with both old and new friends.

The PBA would like to congratulate the following winners: **First Place** went to Kevin Archer, from team Nasty Fishing, with a 15.2 lb dolphin; **Second Place** went to Stuart Archer from team Nasty Fishing, with a dolphin that weighed in at 8.95 lbs; **Third Place** and PBA member was Jorge Ponce from team Slingin’ Bait, with a 7.2 lb dolphin. The **Top Female Angler** was Barbie Diaz, from

team On the Water Daily, with a dolphin that weighed in at 6.7 lbs. In other categories, the Best of Three Dolphins went to Jeff Archer, from team Nasty Fishing, who had a combined weight of 16.3 lbs. In the Junior Division, First Place went to Marlee Martinez, of team Triple A, with a 4.05 lb dolphin. Second Place Junior Division went to Eejay Lopez, from Team Doral PD, with a 3.7 lb dolphin, and Third Place Junior Division went to Liam Alcantara, from team Poco Poco, with a 3.15 lb dolphin. The winner of this year’s Fun Fish category was Lance Larkins, from team On the Hook, with a 48.25 lb Amberjack.

There are many people to thank that helped make this a successful event for the PBA Love Fund. A special thank you to George Joseph, President of the Dade County Federal Credit Union, Ed Williamson from Williamson Cadillac dealership, Eric Raistrick from Eric’s Outboard Marine Service, Al Germi from ACCO Foreign Shipping,



Eduardo Barreto from Sea Tow, Andy Antelo from Palmetto Bay El Capitan Marine and Fish Center, Albert Sosa and Yadira Creighton from Oliva Cigars, Rene Alvarez from ISure Insurance Inc., Mike Clifton from Clifton Event Group, Ray Crego from Excalibur Towing Service, Nick Christian from Lou’s Police Distributors, Inc., Jaws Lures Corp., Lili Crook from Crook & Crook Electronics and Marine Supplies, Alberto Gil from Injured Response Pharmacy, Jon and Mary Greenwell from the Greenwell Foundation, and AvMed. ***Remember to support those businesses that support the police!***

Thanks also to all the PBA volunteers, including Kim Gregson, Margarita Vasquez, Kelly Boyle, Linda Carta, Elvia Garcia, Mike Clifton, Alex Munoz, Orlando Sosa and Devyn Maher.

This was another successful fundraising event for the PBA Love Fund, a federally recognized 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. The Love Fund provides critical

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

support to active members and their families during times of need and remains steadfast in its commitment to the families of our fallen officers. All donations are tax deductible.

The South Florida PBA Keys Fishing Tournament also was a great success, raising over \$25,000 for the Autism Society of the Keys. Congratulations to our winners: **Diggin Lifetook** 1st Place with a 24.04 lb catch (Captain Mike Macko, Angler Joe Trotta). **Gary Eagle** came in 2nd with 17.50 lbs (Captain Rob Harris, Angler John Timura), and **No Doubt** secured 3rd Place at 15.70 lbs (Captain/Angler Desi Perez). **Halftime** claimed 4th Place and Top Junior Angler with Justin Toro (Captain Fred Deno). **Fin Crusher** brought in Top Female Angler with Elizabeth Goeman and Biggest Tuna with Hope Drewry (Captain Murry McDonald). **Leviathan** won Top PBA Member with Frank Betz. Thank you to everyone who participated and helped make a difference!

As always, stay safe out there. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 305-593-0444 or greenwell@sflpba.org.



South Florida PBA Keys Fishing Tournament



Jr. Division 2nd Place



Fun Fish



Jr. Division 1st Place



Heaviest Dolphin Female Angler



2nd Heaviest, 1st Heaviest and Best of Three Dolphins

TAKE THE VACATION BEFORE THE JOB TAKES TOO MUCH FROM YOU



41 years ago, my grandfather who was dealing with the effects of being paralyzed on his left side of his body due to a stroke looked at me and said, "Grandson do everything while you are young, travel and enjoy life. Look at me, I have the money but

not my health." That piece of advice stayed with me as I became an adult. Being a law enforcement officer in Miami-Dade or Monroe County is more than a full-time job. It is a constant demand on the mind, body, and spirit. Law enforcement professionals are expected to be alert, strong, and emotionally steady in every situation. The reality is that many officers are running on empty because they are not taking the vacation time they have rightfully earned. That choice is not a mark of dedication, it is a dangerous risk to personal health, family life, and long-term performance.

There is a culture in law enforcement where working nonstop is seen as a sign of toughness. Officers often skip vacations for months or even years, banking hours with the idea that time off will happen later. But later rarely comes as call volumes stay high and staffing stays tight, the mission never stops. So, the days off get postponed again and again until stress, fatigue, and burnout become part of daily life. This type of nonstop work has real consequences. Physically, the body begins to respond to chronic

stress with high blood pressure, trouble sleeping, headaches, weight gain, and other serious health issues. Emotionally, there is often growing irritability, depression, and mental fatigue. Over time, those effects bleed into family life. Conversations grow shorter and moments of joy are replaced with silence or frustration. Loved ones begin to feel the absence, even when the officer is sitting at the table. Children notice when a parent is distracted or too tired to play. Partners feel the emotional distance. Relationships can suffer not because of a lack of love, but because of an unchecked pattern of exhaustion. How many times have we seen when someone retires, their partners hit them with divorce papers, their children don't want anything to do with them, this is sometimes due to officers working all these off-duties/OT and seldom taking time away from the job to spend time with their family. Stop chasing the money and go to your kids' events! They need you now, not when you retire. Often, they may resent you because you were never there when they needed you, now you have time in retirement, and they remember you were not there. This happens all too often and unfortunately will continue to happen just because officers are chasing material items in life. Choosing not to take time away can slowly erode the very relationships that give meaning and strength to the work.

Performance on the job is also affected. Officers who are overworked and under-rested are more likely to make mistakes, use poor judgment, and have slower reaction times. Stress reduces patience. Emotional exhaustion reduces empathy. These effects can impact the safety of the officer, the team, and the public.

Research supports the need for extended time away from work to fully decompress. According to a 2021 study published in the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, short vacations offer only temporary relief, with stress levels often returning to baseline within days of returning to work. The study found that longer breaks, ideally two to three weeks, are significantly more effective at reducing psychological strain and improving long-term well-being. This extended time allows for full detachment from job-related pressures, improved sleep, emotional

reset, and restoration of cognitive function. In law enforcement, where high stress is a daily reality, taking a full two to three weeks off is not indulgent. It is essential for sustained mental clarity and emotional balance.

Taking a vacation is not a weakness. It is one of the most important tools for staying sharp, calm, and resilient. A real break away from the job allows the mind and body to reset. It brings rest, clarity, and a return to the values that brought someone into law enforcement in the first place.

Travel is also a powerful part of this recovery. Getting outside of the usual environment helps restore perspective. Seeing different parts of the country or the world reminds officers that life is broader than a patrol zone or court calendar. Exposure to new places, people, and ideas can reignite a sense of purpose and open the mind to different ways of thinking. Even something as simple as a road trip with family or a few days in nature can have a lasting impact.

Time away does not mean a loss of commitment. It shows a deeper understanding of the demands of the job and a commitment to doing it well. Every officer has a duty to the badge, but there is also a duty to oneself and to the people at home who love and depend on that officer. Vacation time was earned. It should be used. Not when it is convenient, but when it is needed. And for most officers, that time is now.

Leadership should support this shift. Supervisors and command staff have a role in encouraging time off and modeling that behavior themselves. It must be clear that rest is part of readiness. There is no honor in breaking down from preventable exhaustion.

Take the vacation. Protect your health. Reconnect and be present with your family. Experience the world beyond the job. Come back rested, focused, and ready. Everyone benefits when the people behind the badge are at their best.

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A STRONG TEAM, A STRONG UNION: HONORING THE SOUTH FLORIDA PBA EXECUTIVE BOARD RECAP AND A LOOK AHEAD



As we approach the upcoming elections for our PBA Executive Board, it's important to reflect on the exceptional leadership that has guided us over the past four years. In a recent piece, I shared what it means to serve as your Sergeant-at-Arms—being present in times of crisis, supporting our members with compassion, and standing ready around the clock. I also emphasized the value of open communication and forming your own opinions based on firsthand experience, not hearsay.

Now, I want to turn the spotlight on the remarkable individuals I've had the privilege to serve alongside. There is no better team to represent and fight for our members than the one currently in place. Each executive board member brings unique strengths, unwavering dedication, and a servant-leader mindset that strengthens our union every single day.

President – Steadman Stahl

President Steadman Stahl is a tireless advocate for our members. Under his leadership, we've achieved significant legislative victories, secured critical contract improvements, and amplified our voice across all levels of government. His vision and determination continue to drive the mission of the PBA forward.

Executive Vice President – David Greenwell

David Greenwell is an individual driven by a deep commitment to serve and fight for the members of the PBA. He plays a vital role in both our daily operations and in maintaining strong relationships with local government. David proactively addresses challenges before they escalate, ensuring our members' voices are heard and their interests are always represented.

Vice President – Nizam Ishmael

Nizam Ishmael is the operational heartbeat of the PBA. His behind-the-scenes efforts ensure our daily functions run smoothly and that members receive prompt, meaningful support. His organizational

acumen and problem-solving abilities make him an indispensable part of our leadership team.

Treasurer – Alex Muñoz

Alex Muñoz brings transparency, integrity, and discipline to our financial operations. His careful oversight guarantees that every financial decision is aligned with our mission and that our resources benefit our members directly. His commitment to accountability is second to none.

Secretary – Jennifer Valdes

Jennifer Valdes is the organizational cornerstone of our board. Her attention to detail and thoughtful communication keep our records accurate and our members informed. She ensures clarity and structure in everything we do.

Chaplain – Robin Pinkard

Chaplain Robin Pinkard offers emotional support when it's needed most. Whether through memorial services or personal outreach, her compassion brings strength and comfort to our officers and their families.



A Firsthand Perspective

Over the past year, I've had the privilege—serving as your Sergeant-at-Arms—of witnessing this team's work up close. I've seen each board member face difficult challenges with professionalism, empathy, and purpose. Their leadership is not just visible—it's deeply felt by every member of our union. As election season approaches, I can say with full confidence: there is no better team to lead us into the future.

The Good Greek Way

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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING – MANAGING EXPECTATIONS



ANDREW M. AXELRAD
General Counsel

You may recall that in the March/ April 2021 edition of Heat, I wrote an article entitled “Collective Bargaining Refresher” which addressed bargaining at the macro level (and I know, you don’t recall – but many Heat past editions are available

to read on our website – look it up!). Now that we are once again fully into “bargaining season” when agreements expiring in the fall are being negotiated now before the budget process starts, I wanted to address bargaining at the “micro” level. This is not to suggest that I can even remotely scratch the surface about a specific issue in your particular agency, but I can address how we approach and deal with bargaining the specific benefits you are seeking.

The subtitle of this article, managing expectations, should not be seen as defeatist. Let’s be clear: There is no amount of money that can adequately compensate you for what you do. Whether you are a Detention Deputy in Monroe County, a dispatcher for MDSO or a police officer in Opa-Locka, YOU ARE NOT PAID ENOUGH. For 99% of the public, if asked to do a job where your life could end, there wouldn’t be enough millions of dollars a year that you would accept to do the job. Yet if you are reading this, you do the job for much less, or are in a position to influence those that hold the purse strings.

Entering any bargaining cycle, we want your input as to your wants, but also need to know what would be acceptable to you. As sad as it is to say, we won’t be able to negotiate the millions you deserve, but we do need to know what are the “must have” demands versus the “I really want” ones. It should go without saying that there will not be enough money to fund everything we may want for you. Dollars do not grow on trees, and while government can raise property taxes, we all know that they are either extremely reticent to do so (they must

face elections after raising taxes, which usually doesn’t bode well for them) or are close to the maximum legal millage rate, so the only taxes a local government has any control over cannot go up.

Whether you own or rent your home, you pay property taxes. Directly if you own, and indirectly, via rent increases, if you don’t. You, like everyone else, do not want your taxes to go up. While a noble cause, we would rather make proposals that can be funded within an existing budget than force a government to raise taxes, although that is sometimes necessary. We often speak about budgets as a list of priorities. Is the money available for everything a government wants to do? No, but do we believe that public safety should be the top priority for any local government? Of course, but it will not be their only priority, and everything costs money.

What we seek from you as we propose anything from cost of living adjustments, specialty pay, hazard pay, certification pay, retiree health care supplements, etc., is twofold. A pure wish list of anything and everything you want to see in an agreement, but also a more realistic sense of what would be acceptable to you where we know we will not get everything we propose. These are, of course, negotiations which means there is generally a give and take. We seek not to give anything up, as terms and conditions of employment, which include monetary

2025 PENDING GRIEVANCES

This list represents the pending grievances filed at the various departments represented by the South Florida Police Benevolent Association as of June 30, 2025, The PBA legal staff receives numerous other complaints that are resolved by other means.

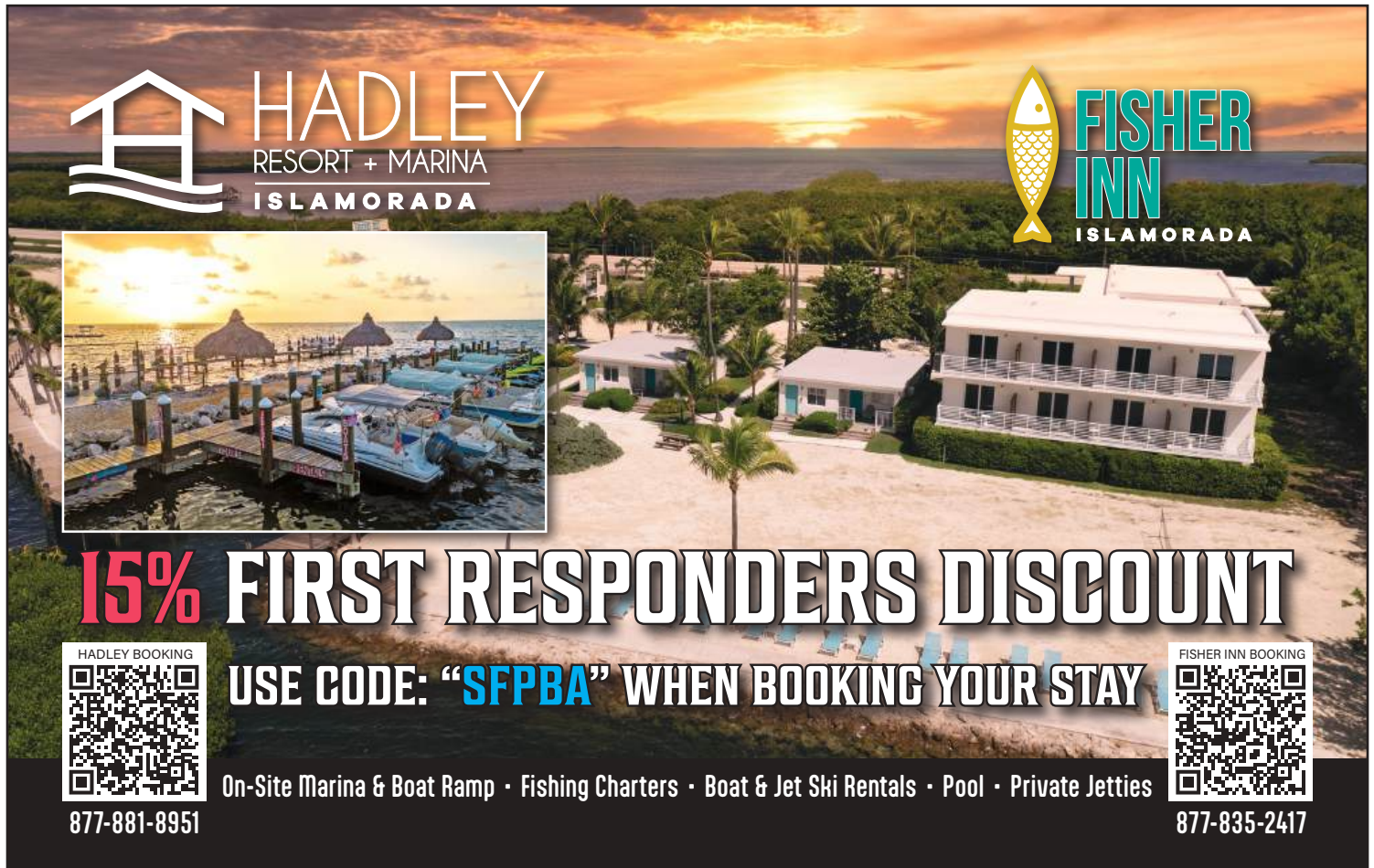
DEPARTMENT/DISTRICT:	
BAL HARBOUR VILLAGE PD	1
DORAL PD.....	1
CITY OF MIAMI PD.....	3
MIAMI-DADE CORRECTIONS	
Association.....	1
Total.....	1
MIAMI-DADE SHERIFF'S	
Hammocks.....	1
Total.....	1
MIAMI GARDENS PD	2
OPA-LOCKA PD	1
TOTAL GRIEVANCES.....	10

increases to pay for goods and services, do not go down. What there will necessarily be is a withdrawal of any number of proposals that are simply not attainable when compared against more important proposals. This is often frustrating to the casual observer, who often ask “why are we kicking the can on (fill in the blank).” It is a fair question who’s answer is sometimes equally frustrating. Strategy dictates that certain proposals are made only so that they can be withdrawn later in the process in order to get a deal done. Again, that is the nature of bargaining and why there is a vast difference between the “must haves” and the “wouldn’t it be great if we could get” proposals.

This is not being defeatist, this is being realistic, and there is a big difference. We go in with the knowledge that we will not be getting everything, but with the additional knowledge that there are certain things that are far more important to get an agreement successfully ratified.

To our credit and yours, and not to be boastful or arrogant, but we are very good at what we do. We have recently (within the last several months) negotiated successful agreements in Monroe County, North Miami, Bal Harbor, Homestead and West Miami. In each of these places, we did not get everything we initially requested, but enough of the higher priority items to lead to new three year agreements that will see salaries increase substantially.

We will continue to maintain these strategies as we move forward into ever increasingly confusing times about the future of property taxes, instability in the stock market and constant fears of recession. Successfully maneuvering these landmines is what we do, and we look forward to many years of continuing successes for all of the bargaining units we currently represent, or will represent in the future!



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MORE THAN A ROOM:

How the PBA Lounge Became a Symbol of Brotherhood and Support



As I continue visiting districts and bureaus, having conversations with officers across various assignments, I'm reminded of the importance of spaces — not just physical spaces, but the emotional and mental ones we create for each other. Recently, during a stop at the Court Services Bureau, a few officers brought up something that might seem simple at first glance but holds much more significance: the PBA Room.

Many officers, especially those new to the agency or unfamiliar with courthouse operations, may not know what the PBA Room really is. Located on the fifth floor of the Richard E. Gerstein Courthouse, the PBA Room is a private lounge exclusively for law enforcement

officers. It's not open to the public and serves one core purpose — providing officers with a quiet, secure space to rest, decompress, and prepare for court proceedings.

The idea behind the room is simple, yet powerful. Officers can arrive early, regroup, have meaningful conversations, or simply sit in peace — away from public areas and potential distractions. It's a space built on mutual respect and camaraderie.

I remember during my own FTO phase, working the midnight shift and finding myself scheduled for court at 10 a.m. My shift ended at 0700. Exhausted, I was about to figure out where to go when my FTO told me, "We're waiting for court in the PBA Room." Walking into that room for the first time, I saw officers from all across the county — chatting, catching some rest, or preparing for testimony. It left a lasting impression. That room wasn't

just a lounge — it was a place where officers could feel understood and supported, no matter their agency or rank.

A Room in Need of Help

Over time, however, heavy use took a toll. The furniture had grown worn and damaged, and the space no longer reflected the dignity or comfort our officers deserve. That's when Court Services Officer David Munoz invited me and Sergeant-at-Arms Karlos Ramos to take a closer look at the condition of the room.

After seeing it firsthand, Karlos said, "I think I know someone who can help." He introduced us to Jonathan and Russell, the owners of Empire Fitness Club, who — as it turns out — are more than just local business owners. They also run a nonprofit organization called Specialized Charities Group, which supports veterans, the elderly, and single parents in need by repurposing and selling furniture donated by major retailers such as Macy's.

When they heard about the PBA Room, Jonathan and Russell didn't hesitate. They generously donated brand-new furniture to completely revamp the space. Thanks to their generosity and quick action, the room has been transformed back into the peaceful and respectful environment it was always meant to be.

Community and Collaboration in Action

This donation wasn't just about new furniture. It was a reflection of the powerful relationships between the PBA and the local community — relationships built on mutual respect, shared values, and a desire to support those who serve.

And like any successful project, it wouldn't have happened without a team effort. A special thank-you goes out to the officers who stepped up to help unload and arrange the furniture — turning a generous donation into a welcoming space once again:

Sergeants Eric Lopez and Andrew Rattigan

Deputies Matt Larsh, Eric Novo, Armando Recio, Jules Virgile, Robertito Rivera Jr., Roody Meme, Lovell Lewis, Jonathan Villanueva

And, of course, *David Muñoz*, whose initiative helped set everything in motion.

A Place to Recharge

The newly furnished PBA Room is a quiet place, but its

impact speaks volumes. It's more than just a room with a couch. It's a space for officers to gather, support one another, and find a moment of calm in the middle of a demanding day. It's a place free from the noise of the courthouse — and free from the glare of those who don't understand the burden of the badge.

We talk often about brotherhood, service, and pride. The PBA Room reflects all of that. It may just be a room number on paper, but for those who've used it, it's something far more meaningful.



Thank you to Empire Fitness Club for standing with us and supporting our mission with your generous donation.

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PAYING IT FORWARD

Investing in Tomorrow: The South Florida PBA Scholarship Fund

By Christina Castrillon

What began as a small program that helped a few students has grown into a meaningful benefit for South Florida PBA families. Today, the Scholarship Fund awards over 90 scholarships each year — a testament to the PBA's commitment to its members and their children.

"This program reflects our dedication not just to our officers, but to the families who support them every day; it shows how much we care about investing in the educational prospects of our wider PBA family," said the President of the Scholarship Committee, Robin Pinkard. "It's our way of giving back and investing in the future."

The application process begins each year through the PBA's social media and direct outreach. Essays are reviewed and scored by a five-member committee, and top winners are recognized — including a rare tie for second and third place this year. But what truly sets the program apart is that every applicant receives a scholarship.

"We value more than grades," the South Florida PBA Scholarship Committee President said. "We look for character — students that share the same values of service, honesty, and community as our first responders do every day, are involved in their community, and have high moral standards, integrity, and care for their communities."

We are delighted to help young people who are

dedicated, take charge, and truly respect the sacrifices made by our officers and their families.

This year's applicants stood out for their sense of responsibility, many helping raise siblings, support grandparents, or work part-time to ease financial burdens at home. Their stories deeply moved the committee.

"These young people embody the values we stand for. By supporting them, we honor the sacrifices of law enforcement families and help shape future leaders," said Pinkard.

The scholarship is more than a check — it's a message of belief and encouragement. "We want every recipient to know they're part of a family that believes in them," the director added. "And we hope they carry that with them wherever they go."

To qualify for the South Florida PBA Scholarship, applicants must be children of active PBA members with at least one year of membership, be enrolled or planning to enroll in a qualifying educational program (accredited trade school, two-year or four-year college but not graduate school), and be under 24 years of age.

Applicants also need to submit a letter of acceptance (for first-time applicants), a headshot, a transcript with GPA, and an essay reflecting on a time someone made a significant impact on their life and how they plan to "pay it forward."

"We're not just teens — we're trying to grow, express ourselves, and heal what came before us. That takes work, and we're up for it." Silver Winner – Dajah Daniels

GOLD Winner – Hyjah Bennett

Turning music into motivation.

Music keeps her centered, and wisdom keeps her grounded. "A closed mouth doesn't get fed," she says — and she's asking, learning, and growing. Raised to know actions have consequences, she walks with intention and heart.





SILVER Winner – Dajah Daniels *Leading with integrity.*

include her 3 emojis: bouquet, ocean wave, laughter

She stepped out of her comfort zone and never looked back. Her motto? Don't mess with anyone's food, money, or honey — and always move with quiet integrity.

SILVER Winner – Jamil Diaz *Stay Ready*

"Stay ready so you don't have to get ready." That mentality has helped Jamil stay prepared, be resilient, and give his best in any task. Growing up in a law enforcement family, he learned to stand up for what's right—even when it's challenging. Now, as a proud PBA scholarship recipient, he'll use the funds to help cover tuition and expenses at UCF as he continues building on those values.



BRONZE Winner – Wesley Love *A kid with a Lacrosse stick and big dreams; Future CPA, grounded and grateful.*

COVID stole a year, but it didn't steal his drive. Wesley's proudest win? Graduating strong and chasing his CPA. "Growing up in a law enforcement family gave me a different view of the world — and a deep respect for hard work."

BRONZE Winner - Mekhi Hicks *A Harvard Law student turning doubt into fuel.*

With a mom in law enforcement and a heart full of purpose, Mekhi stayed on the right path — even when others strayed. He sees through the illusions of social media, where too many chase image over authenticity. "Sadly, my generation is the sole perpetrator for this." His scholarship helps to lighten the load; his mindset — embrace doubt from the outside world and utilize it as fuel to boost you in the future.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW



PAST WINNER – Michael Hellman

THEN: Just a kid grateful for book money and Publix runs.

NOW: PBA attorney with purpose.

Michael received the PBA scholarship in 2007 — a gesture he remembers not just for the help it gave, but for the foundation it quietly laid.

The scholarship covered a few books and more than a few Publix runs, but it also reminded him he was supported — just like his father, a homicide detective who served for 27 years.

Today, as a PBA attorney, Michael has come full circle — offering members the same dedication his family has long stood for. His advice to this year's recipients? Use your time wisely, call your parents, and don't take a single opportunity for granted.

"Back then, there were 15 scholarship winners. Now there are 92 — and the impact is real. Use your time wisely. And never forget: the path you're on matters."



PAST WINNER - JORGE GONZALEZ

A Young scholar on the rise

Jorge Gonzalez, a 2019 PBA scholarship recipient, graduated Summa Cum Laude from Boston University with a degree in English—completing his undergrad in just three years. At

only 21, he was one of the youngest students to enroll at the University of Chicago Law School, where he is set to earn his Juris Doctor with the Class of 2025. Jorge's rapid academic success reflects his dedication and ambition, qualities he credits to the foundation laid by the PBA scholarship and his unwavering commitment to excellence.

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ALPHA

FIRST RESPONDERS UNITE FOR THE LOVE FUND

Story by: Lyan Babilonia Photos by: Eddie Hernandez



AT THE
FRONTLINE INVITATIONAL

The Frontline Invitational, a first responder grappling event, brought together law enforcement officers, firefighters, active military personnel, and frontline medical staff from South Florida. The premiere event, held this past June at the Milander Center for Arts and Entertainment in Hialeah, raised funds for the Love Fund.

The afternoon was filled with jiu-jitsu tournaments, high energy, a vibrant atmosphere, and great food—but most importantly, it offered a chance to give back to a charity that supports fallen or injured officers and their families during their most difficult moments.

A Cause Greater Than Competition

“I think it’s very important that people know we’re not just the police officers out there pulling them over and writing tickets. We’re also part of the community, and it’s great to see the community turn out for events like this,” said Steadman Stahl, president of the South Florida PBA.

“To all our members and every law enforcement officer we represent across the region: thank you. Thank you for taking the time to be part of this, and for doing what you do every day. Sometimes it may feel like no one sees you, but we do. We see you, and we say thank you,” he added.

That’s also why PBA Treasurer Alex Munoz hopes this becomes a tradition; especially considering the strong turnout from both participants and attendees, which was surprising for a first-time event.

Mario Knapp, Chief of the Homestead Police Department, also highlighted the importance of the Frontline Invitational.

“It’s not only what the event represents, but what it contributes to outside the mats: the Love Fund. Anyone who wears a badge or is a first responder is subject to an emergency at any time, and the Love Fund gives you a little peace of mind,” he said.

Real Impact: The Love Fund in Action

Kedson Julmiste, who benefited from the Love Fund after an accident in 2021, shared that the PBA has never left his side.

“Everything I need—whether it’s counseling, someone to talk to, or just someone to hang out with—they support everything. That helps me, because being in a wheelchair—something I’d never experienced before—is kind of lonely. But when you have an organization like

the PBA, they help me beyond what I physically need. They help me mentally,” he said.

From Young Talents to Adult Warriors

Frontline participants from all over South Florida, including Sarasota, Monroe County, Miami-Dade, Broward, made the event electric from start to finish.

Children of all ages opened the celebration, showing discipline, passion for the sport, and admiration for those who serve and protect the community.



Mark Kripakov, representing Healthcare, defeated Sterling Henry, the CBP fighter.



Damian Arriola from MDSO beat David Marlet, who competed under Healthcare.



Dylan Presman, representing the Marines, earned a medal after defeating Yuriy Kripakov from Sarasota Medical.



Jaxon Tronconso of FHP prevailed over Khaled Salazar from MDSO.



Olivia Bhogue honored the FBI with a medal, while Vidal Carmona made his parents proud with a strong performance representing the Marines.



Nicholas Pena claimed victory for MDSO, and Tyler Thomas added another win for Healthcare.



TYLER THOMAS

Angel Labella closed out the list of youth champions with a final victory for the Marines.



ANGEL LABELLA

Carmona's mom shared how proud she is of her son and the remarkable growth she's witnessed since he began training at age five.

The excitement carried into the adult matches, where

competitors wore work cargo pants and department T-shirts to simulate real-life duty scenarios.



MARVIN LOPEZ VS GABRIEL VALIENTE

Marvin Lopez, representing the City of Miami Police Department, emerged victorious over Gabriel Valiente of the Hialeah Fire Department.



CHRISTOPHER MARTINEZ VS MATTHEW MAZUR

Christopher Martinez, a Hialeah firefighter, triumphed over Matthew Mazur of the U.S. Border Patrol.



MYSTERY MAN VS DANIEL MOREJON

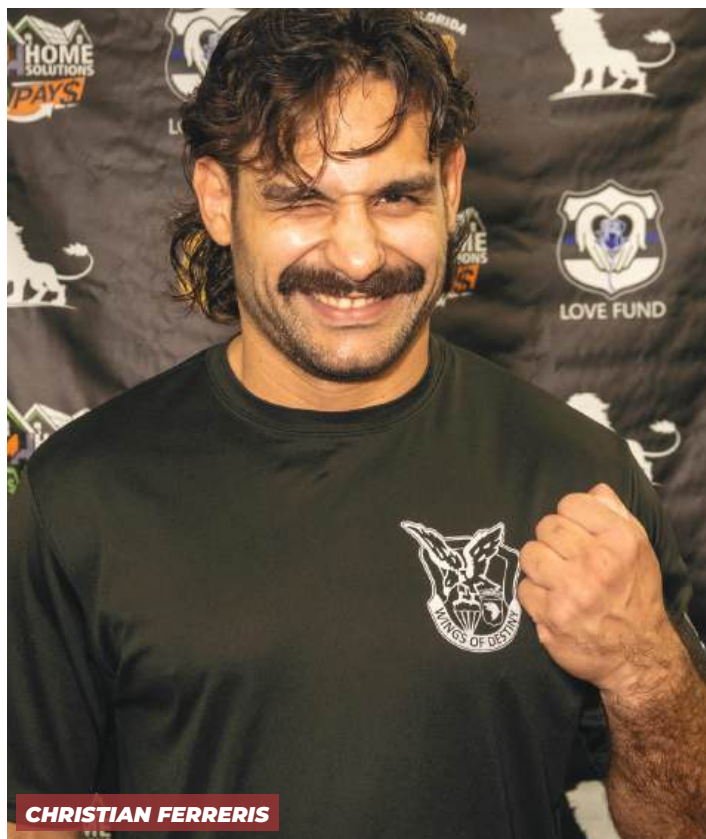
Meanwhile, "Mystery Man," competing on behalf of the U.S. Marines, secured a decisive win against Daniel Morejon of the Florida Highway Patrol.

Martinez took pride in his performance, as it marked his debut in competition.

“I’m glad I did it. It was a way to get myself back into the routine of training. I had a great time, and I hope to see more events like this. I fully support the PBA for what they’re doing. It’s a great thing,” he said.



The Hialeah crowd showed up in full force to support hometown favorite **Gabriel Valiente** of the Hialeah Fire Department, who clinched the title in a match against Bryan Armas of the Miami Beach Fire Department, making the most of his second chance.



The winners’ list expanded with **Christian Ferreris** of the U.S. Army and **Sabrina Perez** of the City of Miami Fire Rescue. **Marine Efrain Ruiz** also secured a victory over **Giovane Lins**.



Daren Anguiano of the Miami Police School defeated **Manuel Arias** of Corrections.

“I feel blessed. Thank God and my family. I dedicate this gold medal to the Love Fund. I’m deeply grateful to law enforcement, the PBA, and the events that unite us,” said Anguiano, who was also celebrating his birthday.

Ferreris added, “It was an honor to step on the mat and represent the U.S. Army. I gave it everything I had out there. Winning this match means a lot to me, and I’m grateful for the support from my team.”



As the champions were announced, **Daren Anguiano** brought his baby onto the mat and lifted him up, sharing a moment of pure joy and pride.

The final match was packed with action and moments

of uncertainty, as the crowd roared with excitement and never stopped cheering for their own.

Frontline secured gold as Corban and Tanque delivered high-energy performances, dominating on the mats to earn the championship belt at the Frontline Invitational.



Tag Team Grand Finale

The Tag Team showdown brought Sunday afternoon to a thrilling close. Each team of two—one competitor at 165 lbs or under, the other over 165 lbs—proved their grit.



Team Fire Department defeated Team Marines and went on to win the final match against Healthcare & Corrections.

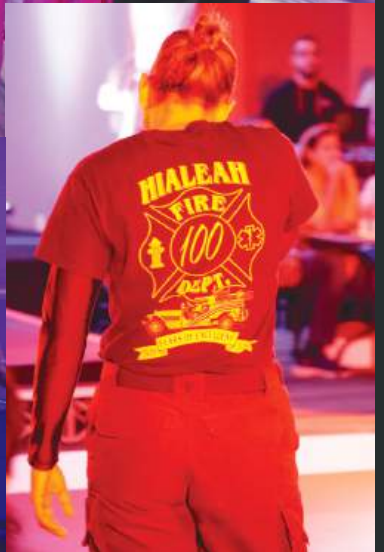


A Celebration of Service and Strength

Judges agreed that the competitors' performances were outstanding, proving that frontline workers are full of both talent and heart.

The four-hour show, organized by White Lion Promotions — who were recognized for the event's success — was also made possible by the dedicated Frontline Invitational team, including Officers Luis Hernandez, Anthony Jimenez, John Song, and Sean McVay, who played a key role in the event's execution in collaboration with White Lion Promotions. While vendors such as Just Direct and Bleeding Blue were present, the event was proudly supported by official sponsors including Combined, a Chubb Company; GLOCK; MH Home Solutions; First Round Management; and TurfShine. The presence of Scruff McGruff, the Crime Dog, and Dottie, the therapy and support dog, added a special touch for the youngest attendees.

FRONTLINE INVITATIONAL MOMENTS





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JOB OPENINGS

A man and a woman are standing outdoors in front of a green fence and trees. They are both wearing blue polo shirts with the 'embrace' logo. The woman is on the left, smiling, and the man is on the right, looking serious. The text is overlaid on the image.

From Captivity to Courage, *The Fight Against Human Trafficking Starts Here*

Story by: Christina Castrillon Photos by: Beligoy Productions

It's easy to believe that human trafficking happens somewhere else — far away, to someone else. But the reality is more heartbreaking: it's happening here, in our own communities, in silence. Behind closed doors and under watchful threats, men, women and children are being bought, sold, and stripped of their humanity. One woman saw that darkness — and decided to become a light.

Behind Closed Doors: The Hidden Faces of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking wears many masks — and while sex trafficking dominates headlines with its shocking brutality, it is only one side of a much larger, darker truth. Labor trafficking is far more common, quietly thriving in industries we often take for granted: agriculture, construction, restaurants, and domestic service. Victims, including children, are forced into relentless labor under horrific conditions, exploited for their innocence or endurance, and discarded when broken.

Sex trafficking, on the other hand, strips victims of all autonomy, turning their bodies into currency. They may be forced into prostitution, pornography, or sex shows, performing night after night for strangers, enduring violence, disease, and degradation. Some are hidden in plain sight — in ordinary-looking homes that function as brothels — others are moved from city to city, used until they are no longer “wanted.”

Whether enslaved in fields or in bedrooms, these individuals are bound by the same chains: physical abuse, psychological torment, and the constant fear that escape may never come. Traffickers profit while victims disappear into silence.

Traffickers don't always use violence to capture their victims — at least, not at first. Many begin with false promises: a job abroad, a modeling gig, a chance at a better life. Vulnerable women and girls are wooed by “Romeo Pimps”, charmers who pose as boyfriends, only to be broken and sold once they're isolated.

A young girl meets a man online who flatters her, tells

her he loves her, and convinces her to run away for a better life. A desperate mother is offered a job abroad — only to be forced into domestic servitude with no pay, no passport, and no way home. A child from a poor village is “adopted” by a distant relative, then trafficked into a house of ill-repute.

Sometimes it's a job that doesn't exist. Other times, it's a dream that becomes a nightmare. The methods vary — but the outcome is always the same: control, exploitation, and trauma that doesn't end when the trafficking does.

Many survivors of child sex trafficking have reported being sold or “rented out” by their own parents or guardians — often in exchange for drugs, money, or protection.

Not all traffickers are strangers. In some of the most heartbreaking cases, the enslavement begins at home or by a trusted individual. In communities torn apart by addiction, a child may be offered for sex by a parent desperate for a fix — traded for heroin, meth, or cash. These children aren't kidnapped; they are handed over. They go to school the next day. No one suspects a thing.

Florida consistently ranks among the top three, but typically comes in third, behind California and Texas.

“Trafficking victims are often terrified, not only of their traffickers — but of not being believed. Knowing the signs is the first step to helping them break free.”

Victims of trafficking rarely cry for help in obvious ways. Often, they're hiding in plain sight — in hotels, restaurants, nail salons, suburban neighborhoods, or walking down the street with their trafficker. But there are signs, if we know what to look for.



HOW TO SPOT A VICTIM OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Common lures include:

- False job offers
- Promises of love or a better life
- Family betrayal
- Drug dependency

Signs someone may be trafficked:

- No ID or personal belongings
- Fearful or submissive behavior, especially when accompanied
- Scripted or controlled responses
- Signs of physical abuse or neglect
- Unaware of location or time
- Someone else speaks or makes decisions for them
- Tattoos or branding, especially names or symbols of "ownership"
- Minors with older partners
- Has new expensive items without explanation (phones, clothes, jewelry)
- Avoids eye contact, seems fearful
- Appears malnourished or injured

Mama Bear: A Shelter of Strength and a Heart that Doesn't Quit

Maria Santamaria and Calvary Church founded “Embrace House, Inc.” not just as a safe haven, but as a starting place. A place where survivors can begin again with dignity, support, and hope. Today, Embrace House prepares for its next chapter: a fundraiser that will help provide food, transportation, clothing, and the daily needs of healing. With help from the PBA community and supporters who care, this mission — and these women — have a fighting chance.

When Maria first heard someone speak about human trafficking at a faith conference in 2011, it shattered her world.

“We thought we knew,” she said. “But we didn’t. We thought it was prostitution. We thought it didn’t happen here. But it does. And once we knew the truth, we couldn’t unsee it. We had to do something.”

That “something” became **Embrace House**, a grassroots, three-year volunteer-run organization offering survivors of human trafficking not just a roof — but a reason to rebuild.

They currently don’t have a permanent home as the lease for the house expired; but that hasn’t stopped them. Maria and her team of volunteers — four core members — still care for the girls, paying light bills, buying groceries, and covering Pampers. Some women are placed in other shelters. Others, with addiction or mental health issues, are referred to specialized care facilities. “Every case is different. Every girl has a different story,” Maria says.

But they all need the same thing: safety, structure, and someone to believe in them.

A House Full of Rules and Love

Embrace House runs on discipline, compassion, and zero salaries. Every volunteer works for free. Every dollar donated goes straight to victim services. And every girl who enters agrees to a contract: they must work, go to school, follow house rules, and commit to healing.

They saved money, too — 50% of their earnings was set aside for when they left.

Visitors were not allowed. There was a 10:00 PM curfew, lights out. And everyone helped clean. “This is your home,” Maria told them. “Treat it that way. Remember — somebody is paying for that burger you’re eating, someone is paying the electricity bill.”

Maria’s tough love has earned her the nickname “**Mama**

Bear.” And like any good mother, she knows when to give space and when to hold close. “Sometimes they push you away, they curse you out, they tell you you’re wasting your time. But when they cry — and they always cry — that’s when the walls start to fall. That’s when healing begins.”

The Work is Messy, But the Reward is Real

Healing isn’t linear. “It’s one step forward, three steps back,” Maria says. Some girls run. Some relapse. Some lash out. But many stay. Many grow. And some call her years later, now mothers themselves, just to say thank you — or to cry through a flashback in the middle of the night.

“They’re all success stories,” she says. “Because they’re still here. They’re still trying.”

The youngest girl Maria ever helped was 15. She still remembers every face, every name. “What they’ve been through... I don’t think I could survive a third of it,” she says. “Their resilience is unbelievable. What keeps me going is seeing that light come back — the laughter, the hope.”

A Vision Bigger Than a Shelter

Maria dreams of something more than a house. She dreams of a **village** — a secure, walkable campus with housing, daycare, job opportunities, and therapy on site. A place where survivors can safely thrive, not just survive.

“I’m not a therapist,” she says. “But I listen. I guide. I do life with them. That’s what they need — someone to do life with them.”

Embrace House started in an efficiency behind her home by collecting hygiene products and grew from there — fueled by faith, community, and the quiet determination of a woman and church who couldn’t look away.

“They’re not broken. They’re human. They have names. They matter.”

— Maria, “Mama Bear” Co-Founder of **Embrace House**

Swimming for a Cause: Retired Major James “DiBo” DiBernardo Takes on the Alcatraz Challenge to Support Embrace House, Inc.

At 71 years old, Jim DiBernardo (Miami-Dade Police Department for 36 years) is no ordinary swimmer — and his latest challenge is nothing short of extraordinary. An avid swimmer all his life, former Community Affairs Bureau Major, and one of Maria’s former colleague, Jim is preparing to take on the

grueling Alcatraz Swim on August 31 in San Francisco. This 1.25-mile race through cold, shark-infested waters has attracted over 600 swimmers for 29 years — and Jim is diving in, not for glory, but to raise funds for **Embrace House**, an organization supporting survivors of human trafficking.

When Jim asked if anyone at *Embrace House* received a salary, the answer was no — it's entirely run by

Jim said. "I'm not racing to pay salaries. I'm racing to make a real difference."

The ultimate goal? To purchase a permanent home for the shelter's residents — a safe haven where healing and hope can flourish. Until then, Jim's swim and the generosity it inspires will provide vital support to those who need it most.

Training for the swim is tough, but Jim's



volunteers, fueled by passion and commitment: "a labor of love". That's when he knew he wanted to help. Every dollar "Dibo" raises will go **directly to meeting the urgent needs of the girls** mentored by *Embrace House* — from groceries and utility bills to basic care.

determination is tougher. With his lifelong dedication to swimming, he's already proven there's no way he won't finish this race — and he's inviting the community to join him in making an impact that will last long after the race is over.



How You Can Support Jim and Embrace House, Inc.

You can help make a difference by supporting Jim DiBernardo's incredible swim challenge. Every donation, no matter the size, goes directly to the girls at Embrace House, providing essential services including food, clothing, transportation, medical attention and more.

To donate or learn more:

- Visit Donorbox.org/embrace-the-race.
- Visit the Embrace House website at "goembrace.com".
- Share this story with your friends, family, and colleagues to raise awareness.

Your generosity fuels hope and healing for survivors of human trafficking. Together, we can turn the tide — one stroke at a time.

If you suspect someone is being trafficked, don't confront the victim directly. Call the National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888 or text "BEFREE" to 233733.



FLORIDA FIRST RESPONDER LEGAL TEAM



Your Florida First Responder Legal Team is committed to educating and assisting First Responders, their friends, and families in pursuing all benefits available under the law to obtain the best outcome for injured workers and their families. As you know, many First Responders are afflicted with heart disease, hypertension, hepatitis, chronic back injuries, hearing loss, and more. These conditions can be work-related, as a matter of law, whether it occurred on or off duty. Although these conditions may be work-related legally, employers and insurance carriers often wrongfully deny claims. This is where we can step in to obtain the best care and the most benefits available for our clients. For First Responders, a work injury involves much more than a simple workers' compensation claim. There are employment, pension, PSOB, and Social Security issues that overlap and affect each other. Our years of experience enable us to work to ensure that every client receives the maximum benefits he or she is entitled to. We are centrally located to provide a variety of legal services to our First Responder community statewide.

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- ✓ **A person who likes to volunteer?**
- ✓ **A person who wants to make a difference?**
- ✓ **A person who is not afraid to stand up for your fellow officer/employee?**
- ✓ **A person who likes being part of an extraordinary team?**

IF SO, I want you, and PBA needs you, to apply for an elected position on the PBA Board of Directors.

Applications will be available for pick up at the PBA beginning September 4th, 2025 through October 1st, 2025. The applications **MUST** be turned in prior to the October 1st meeting call to order. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 4:00 p.m. Contested races will appear on ballots and be sent out by mail.

Steadman Stahl, President

Note: You may only submit for one position. Duplicate applications will void both applications.

From **PBA Roots** to **Statewide Impact:** *Kamoutsas* **Steps Up**

By Lhasa Posada

On June 4th, 2025, the Florida Board of Education unanimously voted to appoint Anastasios “Stasi” Kamoutsas as the state’s top education official. A former member of the South Florida PBA legal team, Kamoutsas served with distinction from January 2017 to March 2019. Since then, he has built an impressive career in public service, joining the Florida Department of Education where he has held key leadership roles including General Counsel, Chief of Staff, and most recently, Deputy Chief of Staff to Governor Ron DeSantis.

During his remarks to the Board, Anastasios “Stasi” Kamoutsas made clear that his priorities as Commissioner will remain firmly focused on the success and well-being of Florida’s students, teachers, and families. “Student safety and achievement will be my top priorities,” he stated. “Parents will continue to be empowered. And teachers, you have my word that I stand in support of you.”

Governor DeSantis voiced his full support for Kamoutsas, praising his track record on parental rights, school choice, and his steadfast approach to preserving educational integrity. “Stasi Kamoutsas has delivered on important issues like parental rights, school choice, and fighting back against radical ideologies in education,” the Governor said.

Kamoutsas accepted the role following the confirmation of current Commissioner Manny Diaz Jr. as president of the University of West Florida, a transition that took place in July 2025.

As Florida moves forward, Kamoutsas’s leadership is expected to bring continuity, clarity, and a strong commitment to student-centered reforms. The South Florida PBA extends its heartfelt congratulations on this well-deserved appointment and looks forward to seeing the positive impact he will continue to make in this new chapter of service.



HOW THE ONE BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL IMPACTS YOUR PERSONAL FINANCES



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What Florida Police Officers Need to Know

The One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB), recently signed into law, is a sweeping piece of federal legislation aimed at reforming the tax code, enhancing work incentives, and adjusting federal spending priorities. While

headlines focus on politics, let's keep it practical and explore what it actually means for you—Florida law enforcement professionals earning between \$50,000 and \$300,000 a year.

1. Lower Income Taxes for Most Officers

The most immediate benefit is the proposed reduction in federal income tax rates across multiple brackets. For example:

Officers earning \$70,000 to \$100,000 could see a few thousand dollars in annual tax savings due to lower marginal tax rates.

Those earning \$150,000 to \$250,000, including many senior officers and those working overtime or details, could see even greater savings depending on how much of their income falls into the new middle brackets.

These savings would appear in each paycheck once the IRS updates withholding tables, and they could improve monthly cash flow or boost contributions to retirement accounts.

2. Overtime Pay and Shift Differentials

A major win for law enforcement is that the bill proposes to exclude a portion of overtime income from federal taxation for middle-income earners. While exact thresholds are still being finalized, early drafts suggest that:

Married officers filing jointly with household income under \$160,000 may see partial or full tax relief on overtime pay. If you're above that threshold, this benefit phases out but could still reduce your effective tax rate. This is especially relevant for those working off-duty details, late shifts, or extra hours to cover staffing shortages.

3. Child Tax Credit and Family Benefits

The bill increases the Child Tax Credit and expands eligibility for middle-class families. Officers with kids under 17 may receive up to \$2,000–\$3,000 per child,

depending on income and filing status. If your household income is under \$250,000 (joint) or \$125,000 (single), you're likely to qualify for the full amount.

This change can reduce your total tax owed or increase your refund.

4. Retirement Savings

The bill doesn't touch your FRS pension or DROP plan directly, but it does expand Roth IRA contribution eligibility and may adjust limits on tax-deferred savings in the future. This creates more opportunity for younger officers to diversify their retirement savings beyond FRS and Nationwide accounts.

5. Inflation Protection and Cost of Living

There's no direct change to inflation pay adjustments or COLAs, but by reducing taxes, the bill effectively increases take-home pay—helping you better keep up with rising costs for housing, gas, and groceries.

What to Watch For

The bill is still subject to IRS guidance, and some benefits (like overtime tax relief) may not apply to everyone equally. Officers earning over \$300,000—typically those with large DROP balances and multiple income sources—may see fewer benefits and should consult a financial advisor for personalized planning.

Bottom Line

For most Florida law enforcement officers, the One Big Beautiful Bill brings modest but meaningful financial benefits, especially if your household earns under \$250,000. Expect lower federal taxes, better support for families, and potential tax breaks on overtime.

Just like any change in law, it's not perfect—and it's not permanent. But for now, it's worth paying attention to how it impacts your take-home pay and your long-term planning.

Nicolás Valdés-Fauli is the founder and CEO of Thin Blue Line Financial (www.tblfinancial.com). Call 305-798-1842 or email nvf@tblfinancial.com. Nicolás has served the LEO community in South Florida for 20 years and is dedicated to helping his clients make sound decisions before and during retirement. He is an expert in all matters related to the FRS, deferred compensation and local municipal retirement plans. This material has been prepared for informational purposes only and is not intended to provide, and should not be relied upon, for tax, legal or accounting advice, nor is it intended to be a solicitation for business. Investment advisory services offered through Mai Street Financial Solutions LLC.



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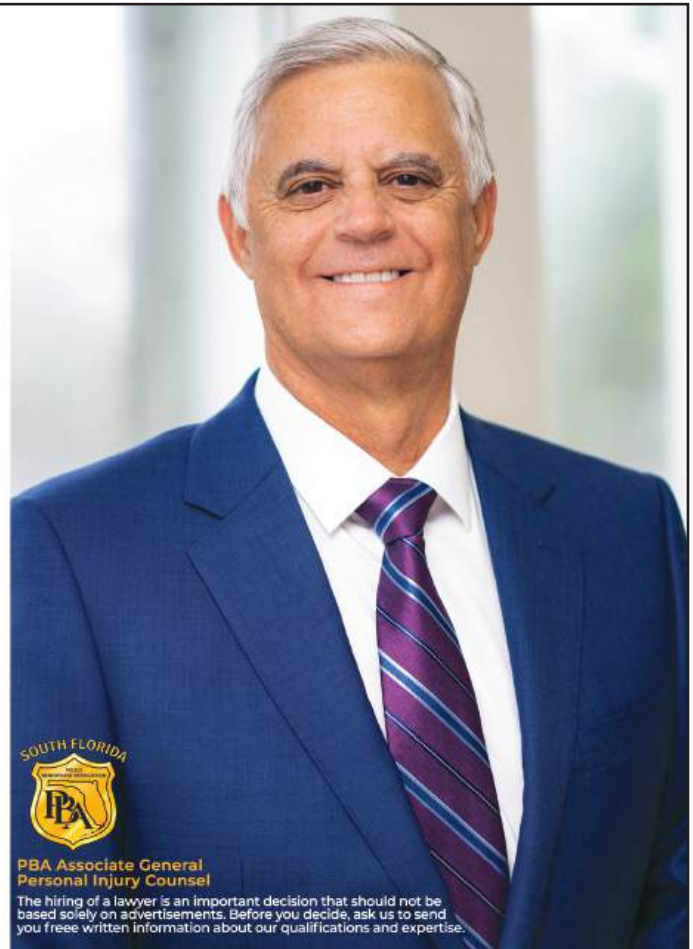
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The hiring of a lawyer is an important decision that should not be based solely on advertisements. Before you decide, ask us to send you free written information about our qualifications and expertise.

REFLECTIONS

Melissa Rodriguez, Retired Corrections Captain

By Lyan Babilonia



The Vitals

- Joined law enforcement in 1992
- Served 29 years in corrections (4 years with FDOC and 25 years with MDCR)
- Holds a bachelor's degree in Organizational Leadership from St. Thomas University
- Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, in a Puerto Rican family
- Now enjoying retirement by spending time with her loved ones, traveling, and pursuing her passion for photography

WHAT LED YOU TO A CAREER IN CORRECTIONS?

I always wanted to be a lawyer when I was younger; that was the original plan. Before I left New York, a friend and I visited a few precincts, and we really enjoyed it. We said we were going to become cops in New York. But I ended up moving to Florida, and while exploring law enforcement opportunities here, I learned about corrections. Corrections was the first to open the door for me, and that's where my journey began.

THE CONVERSATION

Is there anything you always remember from those early years? I started with the state of Florida; I worked at South Florida Reception Center. While I was training, I got injured—I broke my ankle—and I had to wait until I had surgery and went through a bunch of other things before I could get back in. I had incredible support. It took me a long time, but I got in, and it's been a great ride from officer all the way up to captain.

How did your family support you throughout your career? My family was always encouraging. There were times they were a little disappointed because I would miss out on holidays and things like that, but they understood.

My mom especially was always really nervous—particularly during hurricanes or any type of emergency. She would get anxious, but she understood what I was getting into, and she was extremely supportive.

LESSONS LEARNED

What important lessons did you take away from your time as both a leader and a public servant? I think that as a leader, I learned that you have to listen. You don't always have the answers, and you have to listen to the people around you in order to make the best decision. You're not always going to make the right decision, but

you have to stand by it. And I think the biggest thing that I learned is that not everybody's going to be happy.

It's not easy being a leader in corrections . . . you're always going to have people who just don't understand why you do what you do. But you have to stay strong and stay firm.

DEDICATION & LEADERSHIP

Was there a defining moment in your career that shaped how you approached your leadership role?

There were so many. I guess the most recent one was before I left: the pandemic—trying to keep people safe while still doing the job.

Before that, I had done everything in the jails. I had worked in all the jails, I had worked all shifts, and those were good moments.

Another gratifying experience was working in the academy, because you're helping build people to continue the work you've learned to do. You're teaching them what the state requires, but you're also sharing your own experiences and helping to shape a good officer.

What advice would you give to someone just starting a career in corrections? I would tell them to stay strong, to always apply the skills they've learned, to stay true to themselves, and to never forget that their main goal is to leave the same way they came in that day.

REFLECTIONS & ADVICE

In your experience, does working in corrections require personal sacrifices? Absolutely. There's always a sacrifice. I mean, when you work in corrections, you understand that if there's an emergency, you're needed. You understand that if someone can't fill a position and you have to stay behind and work an extra shift, that's going to happen.

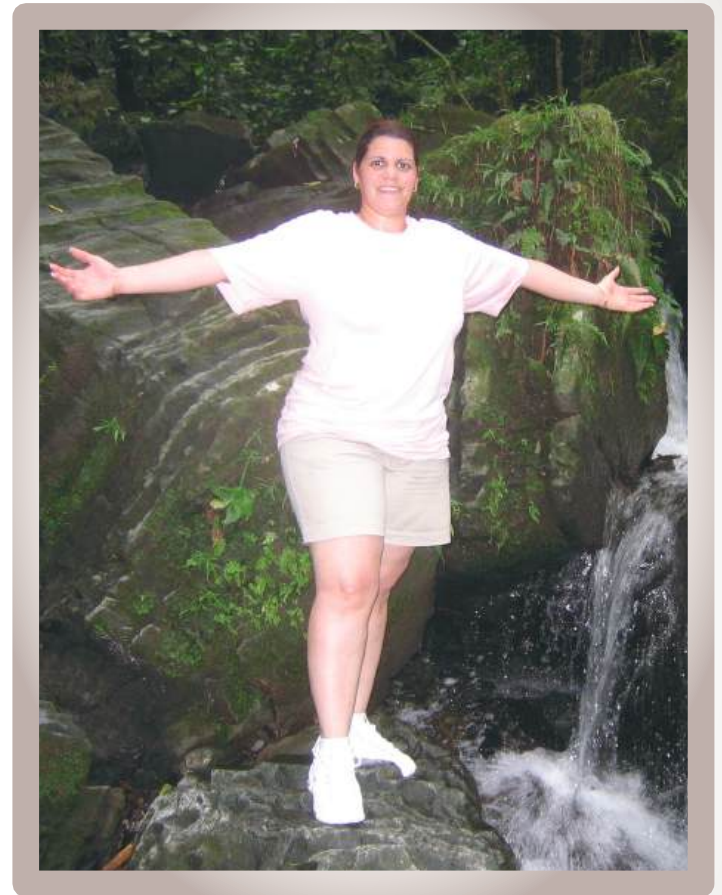
You understand that during emergencies, even when your family needs you most, there will be times you simply can't be there. As much as you may want to attend a graduation, a baseball game, or a soccer match, you may have to miss it because of work. There's a lot of sacrifice, for sure.

How did you balance your job, personal life, and hobbies while working in corrections? I would always

take time for myself to go on vacation and spend time with family.

I have a lot of family in Puerto Rico and New York, and I went as much as I could. I really tried to create balance because you can definitely get lost in just working—especially in law enforcement. Whether it's police or corrections, there's so much overtime.

Now I'm seeing a lot of young people traveling while they're young, and I think that's great. I would tell them to keep doing that because it definitely pays off in the end. It's good for your mental health.



Now that you're retired, what's next for you? Do you have any personal projects or dreams you're pursuing? Just little hobbies I've always had. I've always been really into photography, so I've been doing that—and traveling, too. We've taken quite a lot of family trips. It's really just a matter of enjoying family, I think.

After nearly three decades of dedicated service, Melissa Rodriguez remains a source of quiet strength and inspiration. Her story is a reminder that leadership isn't just about making tough calls—it's about listening, growing, and never forgetting where you came from.

A PROUD TRADITION OF GIVING



SERGEANT
KENNETH HORGAN
POAT Committee Chair

It's that time of the year when parents get ready to see their children take that next step in their education and go to college. The POAT takes great pride in being able to play a small part in that journey. Once the applications are received and evaluated by the Scholarship

Committee, selections are made, and the fun begins. Notifying the recipients of their scholarship award makes the hours of work worth it. The Chairperson of the Education Committee, Sergeant Jody Wright, had her hands full in processing all the applications that were received. She and her committee process them in the appropriate category and review, discuss and select a recipient. The rest are reviewed by the families for whom the scholarship is named. It is very special for us to have the families, be the ones who decide the winners of these scholarships. During the July 2025 monthly meeting, Educational Committee Chairperson Sergeant Jody Wright announced the winners of our 2025 scholarships. A total of eight scholarships were awarded. These scholarships would not be possible without the generosity of our donors. Congratulations to all the winners. We look forward to hearing about the amazing work our scholarship recipients are doing.

THE WINNERS OF THE 2025 POAT SCHOLARSHIPS ARE:

MIKE BYRD SCHOLARSHIP – Jake Miguelez, son of Detective Antonio Miguelez (Coral Gables Police Department)

ROGER CASTILLO SCHOLARSHIP – William Parks, son of Officer Sanya Houston (Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation Department)

AMANDA HAWORTH SCHOLARSHIP – Megan Dorvilier, daughter of Officer Athalie Dorvilier (Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation Department)

PAUL JANOSKY ART SCHOLARSHIP – Mackenzie Bukens, daughter of Lieutenant Robert Bukens (South Miami Police Department)

PAUL JANOSKY CRIMINAL JUSTICE SCHOLARSHIP – Mikayla Williams, daughter of Officer Alexia James (Coral Gables Police Department)

CHRIS TODD SCHOLARSHIP – Adrien Gobin, son of Officer Gary Gobin (Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office)

CHRIS TODD SCHOLARSHIP – Isabel Perea, daughter of Sgt. Henry Perea (Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office)

CHUCK DUNCAN SCHOLARSHIP – Ashley Boone, daughter of Officer James Boone (Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office)

On Thursday, September 11, 2025, the 9-11 Ceremony will be held at the Law Enforcement Memorial site in Tropical Park at 9:30 a.m. The POAT sponsors this ceremony every year in conjunction with Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office, Miami-Dade Fire Rescue, and SOUTHCOM. We will come together to remember those heroes who ran into danger that fateful day and died trying to save the lives of others. We will never forget the immeasurable sacrifices made by the many heroes during America's darkest hours. Our police, fire, and military made a commitment larger than themselves in the face of death. Their service will never be forgotten. Please make every effort to attend.

Thanks for your support and stay safe!

Congrats to Retired Members

The South Florida PBA is proud to honor retired members who have put in long hours and outstanding service for their departments and communities. Join us in honoring these great members and exceptional public servants as they celebrate their retirement.



Cassandra Jones
Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation



Enrique Miranda
Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office



Guillermo Barranco
Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office



Jorge Arana
Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office



Marlene Desir
Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation



Scott Kennedy
Homestead Police Department

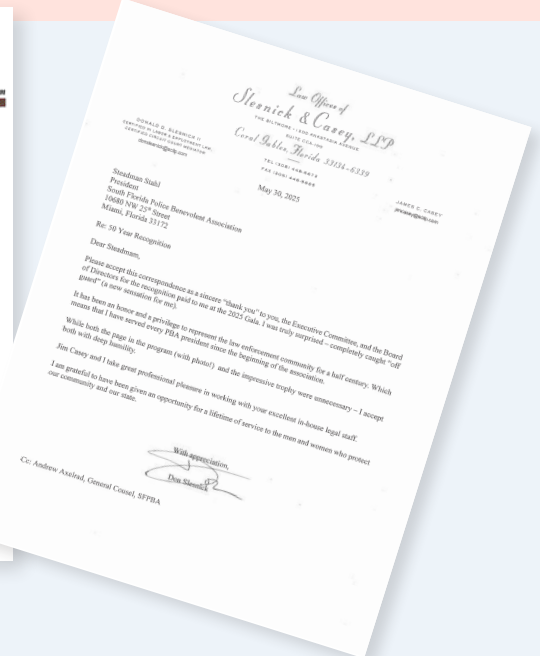
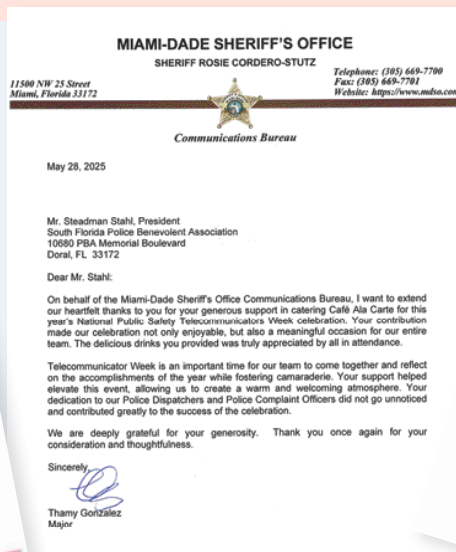


Sergeant Ana Lopez
Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office



Tricia Sire
Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office

Thank You notes to THE PBA



HONORING OUR PAST, INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE



The onset of summer was notably early this year, with the intense heat of early June making conditions challenging at times. Memorial Day arrived with its customary atmosphere of anticipation for barbecues, gatherings, and celebrations. As a patriotic individual,

I am reminded on Memorial Day to honor those who have sacrificed their lives to defend our democracy and way of life. I encourage everyone to take a moment to reflect on these significant contributions made by so many in the United States. Many continue to risk everything in pursuit of freedom; I am personally acquainted with individuals who crossed the Florida Straits from Cuba under extremely perilous circumstances, demonstrating immense courage and determination in seeking a new life in America.

This reflection naturally leads to the observance of Independence Day, a time to consider the nation's journey and the values we uphold today. Such national celebrations are an opportunity to reinforce mutual respect among all citizens, regardless of background or language. For those who have become naturalized citizens through legal means, I extend a sincere welcome to the United States. Nevertheless, it is disheartening to witness instances where respect for the American way of life appears to be lacking among some individuals and public figures.

Recently, I had the privilege of reviewing seven outstanding scholarship applications. I am pleased to report that each applicant received a \$1,000 award:

1. Mackenzie Bukens, University of Florida (Graphic Design), granddaughter of Barry and the late Patty Savage.

2. Julia Churukian, Broward College (Aerospace Sciences), daughter of Louis (Chip) Churukian.

3. Victoria Hoffman, Florida International University (Biomedical Engineering), daughter of Tim and the late Mariaolga Hoffman.

4. Kaitlyn Jorgensen, University of Miami (Criminology and Sociology), granddaughter of Ron Carey.

5. Natalie O'Donnell, University of Maryland (Computer Science), granddaughter of James O'Donnell.

6. Gavin Speranza, Bellarmine University (Sports Administration), grandson of Tony Speranza.

7. Julianna Starnes, Florida State University (College of Nursing), daughter of Anne Starnes.

I commend these students for their commitment to their education and their interest in the OCSF.

These past few weeks have presented challenges within our community. Reba Miller, our RPOC Chaplain, suffered a shoulder injury, while helping Robbie Miller manage health concerns. Additionally, Jon Propst recently underwent surgery for intestinal issues and is currently recovering well in rehabilitation. As we age, such experiences resonate more deeply. Both Reba and Jon have demonstrated great resilience and faith, and I ask you to keep them in your thoughts as they recover. Jon and I have shared a long-standing professional relationship and friendship spanning over fifty-eight years.

It is important to remember the bonds we share from our past service, symbolized by the "Brown Gown." I encourage everyone to reach out and support one another, as time is precious. May the United States of America, and each of you and your families, continue to be blessed.

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