



AFTER LONG DELAY HOMETOWN HEROES ACT GOES INTO EFFECT

Includes NAPO's Suggestions for Improvement



Former PBA attorney Bill Johnson is the Executive Director of NAPO.

The National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO) is a coalition of law enforcement unions and associations from across the United States that serves to advance the interests of America's law enforcement and corrections officers through legislative and legal advocacy, political action and education. Founded in 1978, NAPO now represents more than 2,000 police unions and associations, 236,000 sworn law enforcement officers, 11,000 retired officers and more than 100,000 citizens who share a common dedication to fair and effective crime control and law enforcement. Florida PBA, Palm Beach County PBA, Dade County PBA, and Coastal Florida PBA are members of NAPO.

www.napo.org

Almost three years ago, **President Bush** signed the Hometown Heroes Act into law on December 15, 2003. A year ago, the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) posted the initial proposed rules for the implementation of the Hometown Heroes Act for comment. NAPO had some concerns with the draft language and formally submitted comments to the BJA. When the final rules were published in the Federal Register on August 10, 2006, NAPO was pleased to see many of our suggestions had been incorporated. The provisions of the Hometown Heroes Act were finally implemented on September 11, 2006. The regulations can be found on NAPO's website, www.napo.org.

Hope Janke, who heads the Public Safety Officers Benefit Program (PSOB), spoke to our members about the new regulations at our Annual Legal Rights and Legislative Seminar on October 4. NAPO took this opportunity to personally thank her and the PSOB office, for taking into account and using NAPO's suggestions in the composition of the final rules.

This necessary expansion of the Department of Justice's Public Safety Officers Benefit Program (PSOB) extends

coverage to include those officers who suffer debilitating or fatal heart attacks or strokes while on, or related to, active duty or training work.

Families of any public safety officer who died of a heart attack or stroke in the line of duty since December 15th, 2003, must submit an application to the PSOB office to find out if they are eligible. Survivors must file for the benefit within three years of the officer's death, leaving only a couple of months for those who lost a family member shortly after the bill became a law.

The PSOB Program now has an online application system in which you can file for survivor benefits. Currently the website (<https://www.psob.gov>) only accepts applications for death benefits, but the PSOB office is working on including disability and educational benefits applications on the website in the near future.

NAPO is proud to have worked on strengthening the PSOB program over the years. NAPO's accomplishments include helping to increase the program's one time base payment, as well as our current victory of the enactment and implementation of the Hometown Heroes Act. ●

H.E.L.P.S. RETIREES ACT TAKES EFFECT JANUARY 1, 2007

After two years of hard work by NAPO, the Healthcare Enhancement for Local Public Safety (H.E.L.P.S.) Retirees Act was signed into law on August 17, 2006. The H.E.L.P.S. Retirees Act allows retired public safety officers to use up to \$3,000 annually from their pension funds, including defined benefit plans and defined contribution plans, to pay for qualified health insurance premiums without taxing these distributions. It will go into effect on January 1, 2007.

"This law greatly assists law enforcement officers, who often retire earlier than those in other occupations because of the physical demands and unique job hazards they face, by providing them with means to more affordable healthcare options," according to **NAPO Executive Director Bill Johnson**. "It helps to preserve the retirement security and the health of those public servants who selflessly serve and protect our communities."



Bill Johnson with Central Florida Chapter's President John Park and Vice President Marty Premo at Governor Crist's Inauguration.

NAPO has been a primary supporter of the "H.E.L.P.S. Retirees Act" since the beginning and fought tirelessly to see this legislation implemented. NAPO worked closely with members of Congress and their staff, as well as other organizations like the National Conference on Public Employee Retirement Systems (NCPERS) to push this Act through Congress.

If you have any questions regarding the implementation of the H.E.L.P.S. Retirees Act or need further information concerning eligibility or how to take advantage of this benefit, NAPO recommends you visit the NCPERS website, www.ncpers.org, and click on the link "HELPS Implementation Resources." On this website you will find FAQs, model enrollment forms, and an implementation check list, among other resources. ●

FINAL UPDATE ON WEP/GPO REPEAL

On September 7, 2006 **U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett** (D-TX) introduced H. Res. 987, a discharge petition which would allow floor consideration of H.R. 147, the "Social Security Fairness Act." H.R. 147 would eliminate the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). The GPO and WEP reduce the Social Security benefits of more than a million teachers, police officers, and other public servants across the country. Although the Social Security Fairness Act has 323 bipartisan sponsors (an overwhelming majority of the House), the House leadership has refused to allow the House to vote on it.

As of November 15, the start of the House's Thanksgiving Recess, there were only 122 members signed on to the discharge petition. This is 96 signatures short of the 218 needed to force a vote on the "Social Security Fairness Act." The final status of the petition can be seen at <http://clerk.house.gov/109/lrc/pd/petitions/Dis15.htm>. Unfortunately, due to House rules, members could not add

their names to the petition until the House returned from recess on December 4, which was the last Monday that the discharge petition could have been considered in the 109th Congress. While NAPO finds it unacceptable that the petition was not able to obtain enough signatures, the petition did receive more signatures than it had in the 108th Congress. Progress is being made to bring about the total repeal of the GPO/WEP, and we will continue to urge the next Congress and its newly elected leadership to pass the "Social Security Fairness Act."

For over 20 years, NAPO has been fighting for the repeal of these two unjust offsets that drastically cut public safety officers' Social Security benefits. NAPO will continue this effort to protect the retirement security of the law enforcement community in the 110th Congress. We thank you for all of your efforts in helping us push for the passage of H.R. 147. ●