

THE FLORIDA  
GUARDIAN  
AD LITEM  
PROGRAM



## The Florida Guardian ad Litem Program Needs You!

The Florida Guardian ad Litem Program is a statewide organization that serves as a powerful voice for abused, abandoned and neglected children. There are over 35,000 children in Florida who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect and who are now involved in the dependency court system through no fault of their own. Of those 35,000 children, over 6,000 do not have a Guardian ad Litem; someone to stand up on their behalf and advocate for their best interest. A Guardian ad Litem advocates for the child in court and in the community. They do this by visiting regularly with the child, gathering information from family members, teachers, doctors etc. and using that information to make independent recommendations to the court. In addition, the Guardian serves as an advocate in the community and social service arena to ensure that the child is getting the services and support they need.

A 17-year-old girl said the following about her Guardian, "While my life was so uncertain, always switching houses and never knowing who my social worker would be from one week to the next, one factor remained constant, my Guardian ad Litem." Statistics show that approximately 24% of the children in the program are 13-18 years of age. Unfortunately, more than half of the former foster youth are unemployed. A third of former foster youth are homeless and one in four former foster youth will be incarcerated. **The Program needs your experience and commitment to the community to make a difference for these children and teens.**

A message from **Geoff Monge**, Sarasota County Sheriff 1985-2001, Volunteer Guardian ad Litem Jefferson County and past Board Member of the Florida Guardian ad Litem Association, Inc.:

*"There are no more qualified individuals to help the abused and neglected children of our state than Florida's Finest—retired law enforcement officers. Whether you worked in communications, as a detention officer, a police sergeant, a detective or even a sheriff or chief, you have what it takes to be a volunteer guardian ad litem. Your professional career has been training you for this and now the time has come. Won't you volunteer to help these kids and the other approximately 6,000 children who are not represented by a volunteer Guardian ad Litem? For law enforcement, there's no better fit for volunteering than Guardian ad Litem."*

Volunteers work as part of a team with a Volunteer Supervisor and Program Attorney. On average volunteers give 4-6 hours a month. To find the contact information for your local program visit [www.Guardianadlitem.org](http://www.Guardianadlitem.org) or call 1-866-341-1GAL(425).

**Editor's Note:** Florida PBA's Legal Secretary, **Marcha Kay Beane**, has been a volunteer GAL for ten years and she enjoys serving the children in our area in this capacity. At the Annual GAL banquet, held on 9/18/08, Marcha received an award for her Outstanding Service.



## High gas prices force cops to walk the beat more

By JEFFREY COLLINS, Associated Press Writer

NEWBERRY, S.C. (AP) -- With gasoline climbing toward \$4 a gallon, police officers around the country are losing the right to take their patrol cars home and are being forced to double up in cruisers and walk the beat more.

The gas crunch could also put an end to the time-honored way cops leave their engines running when they get out to investigate something.

Some police chiefs think the moneysaving measures are not all bad, and might actually help them do a better job. But they worry about the loss of take-home cars, saying the sight of a cruiser parked in a driveway or out in front of a home deters neighborhood crime.

In Newberry, population 10,000, Chief Jackie Swindler is telling his officers to turn off the ignition whenever they are stopped for more than a minute or so, and to get out and walk around more.

"It's not a rolling office that you stay in all day," Swindler said. "You still need to get out and interact with the public."

Jonathan Taylor, a rookie officer in Newberry, said walking the beat in the region's oppressive summer heat may be a drag, but he added: "We're police officers. It's not supposed to be a comfortable job. If getting out and walking helps me do the best job I can, I'm all for it."

In Grainger County, Tenn., Sheriff James Harville planned for gas prices of \$2.22 a gallon when he drew up his budget last year. He has since redrawn the patrol map for the two officers who work each shift, splitting his county in half. He now puts one officer in each half and makes them responsible for all calls in their area.

"That way, unless it's just a life-threatening call, I don't have officers just crisscrossing the county," said Harville, who has asked local officials for an extra \$30,000 to keep patrol cars running in the county of 22,000 in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains.

When shifts overlap in Apple Valley, Minn., officers pair up and supervisors send those cruisers to domestic disputes, burglar alarms and other calls that would usually require two officers to respond separately, said Capt. Jon Rechtzigel. Officers also have been asked to turn off their engines whenever possible.

"Years ago, you used to pull in a back lot to investigate something and keep your car running," Rechtzigel said. "You just can't afford to do that anymore."

In the South Carolina town of Elgin, Police Chief Harold Brown delayed hiring a sixth officer so he could use the money for gas. "I guess you could say rising gas prices have cost me a man," said

Brown, who found enough money in his budget to bring the new officer on board a few weeks ago.

The Georgia State Patrol has asked troopers to reduce the amount of time spent driving by 25 percent.

In Evansville, Ind., some officers will lose their take-home cars and others will have to pay more for the privilege. Starting Friday, those living within city limits will pay \$25 every two weeks and those in the surrounding county will pay \$35. Both groups previously paid \$10. Eleven workers living outside the county will no longer get take-home police cars.

Proposals to restrict the use of take-home police cars also are on the table in Camden, Del., Avon Park, Fla., and Hagerstown, Md.

"I don't think we should be taking our city cruisers outside of our city," said Hagerstown City Councilwoman Kelly S. Cromer. "With the price of gas right now, I just really think that's a waste."

In Allegany County, Md., Sheriff David Goad told elected officials seeking to limit his department's use of take-home vehicles that "it's a proven fact" that the sight of a patrol car on the road or in a driveway deters crime.

As the fiscal year comes to an end, chiefs and sheriffs are trying to predict how high gas prices will go and craft budgets that won't be blown.

"It's a shot in the dark," Swindler said. "You just have to take your best guess."

Swindler, who joined the force as a patrol officer in 1975—back when "only people with rank had a car"—said the return to old-fashioned police work could be a good thing in some ways, by bringing officers in closer contact with the public.

The chief is doing his part by riding the department's Segway electric scooter during festivals and other events, and is looking to buy smaller, lighter cruisers.

Newberry officers don't seem to mind. Sgt. Andy Rowe said he has heard no complaints from the officers he oversees as a shift supervisor and doesn't mind walking a little himself.

"I enjoy getting out and interacting with everybody," Rowe said.

Associated Press Writer David Dishneau in Hagerstown, Md., contributed to this report.

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