

Guest Article from Florida's Chief Financial Officer

Legislative Session Offers Opportunity to Better Protect Floridians

As Florida's CFO, I have seen the devastating impact insurance fraud has on victims. People lose their good credit, homes, cars, savings, and many other assets because they place their trust in untrustworthy people.

When I was elected three years ago, I charged leaders in my Division of Insurance Fraud to out-smart the criminals and put together preventative and proactive ways to crack down on these crimes. Since then we have made progress in a number of ways – increasing our numbers of arrests each year, earning accreditation status – but there is always room for improvement as we fight to protect Floridians from insurance fraud.

This is why, after discussions with many insurance fraud experts, I am proposing legislative initiatives on behalf of my Division of Insurance Fraud for the 2010 Legislative Session that will give these officers more tools to protect Florida's citizens.

First, we would like to see an increase in our law enforcement capabilities by adding **money laundering authority**. Our officers already have the skill set and experience in working white collar crimes. Gaining this authority will allow us to go immediately to the root of the problem where the criminals are most vulnerable: the places where they are moving and laundering large amounts of cash. Having the ability to follow the money from the top of scam (instead of beginning at the bottom by starting out at a work site, for example), we can identify the ringleaders faster, allowing us to recover assets and dismantle the criminal enterprise.

Second, we are requesting **traffic enforcement authority** under FS 316, which will allow my sworn staff to make traffic stops on vehicles and individuals suspected of being involved in insurance fraud and arson related crimes. Too many times cases have been jeopardized because we had the bad guys in plain sight but could not pull them over because we did not have the authority to do so. When dealing with criminals, every second counts. There is no doubt that timing can compromise an investigation, and that is why my sworn staff needs the authority to take **immediate** action and make traffic stops when appropriate.

These proposed legislative initiatives are built on the foundation of creating a stronger, safer Florida, ensuring that those who prey on our state's citizens are going to get caught and be held accountable for their actions.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome our new Director of the Division of Insurance Fraud, **John Askins**. Director Askins has 30 years of experience working for the Division of Insurance Fraud and will be a tremendous asset by bringing a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the field of insurance fraud. As the Division Director, John will lead the Division of Insurance Fraud as it continues to vigorously investigate and arrest insurance fraud criminals throughout the state, and we welcome him back to the team.

As always, I look forward to our continued, strong partnership with the PBA, and thank all your members for their brave service to protect our citizens, communities and state. ■



Alex Sink

As a statewide elected officer of the Florida Cabinet, Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink oversees the Department of Financial Services, a multi-division state agency responsible for management of state funds and unclaimed property, assisting consumers who request information and help related to financial services, and investigating financial fraud. CFO Sink also serves as the State Fire Marshal.

Guest Article from Florida's Attorney General

Florida's Police Officers Offer Front Line of Defense in Domestic Security Efforts

Nearly nine years after September 11, 2001, our fight to protect our nation from terrorist attacks is far from over. As we saw on Christmas Day, our nation is facing an enemy that is determined, and here in Florida there are 18 million people who still require our diligence and perseverance facing this threat.

Because of your commitment to excellence and your dedication, Florida was chosen to pilot a training program to develop front line officer training on domestic security issues. This training will enable Florida's police officers to identify and develop actionable intelligence information, including reports of any precursor actions or behavior patterns indicating potential terrorist threats in the making. This program is set to go nationwide within the next few months, and I could not be more proud of our state's law enforcement officers for making Florida a national example for the rest of the states to follow.

I also appreciate your participation in our state's regional domestic security task forces. Florida's regional

domestic security task force model uses a tiered response capability that begins with local engagement, which then escalates to state and federal levels. As Florida's police officers, you are often the first to identify and report suspicious activity because you know your neighborhoods and communities better than anyone else.

Originally created to focus solely on terrorism events, the Florida regional domestic security task forces are now also responsible for various functions including the acquisition and deployment of public safety equipment and supporting local responses to emergencies, catastrophes, and other events that severely impact communities.

Florida is fortunate to have hundreds of men and women in the law enforcement community whose primary focus is our safety and our security. Every single day, you put your lives on the line working to keep us safe. Knowing that you are watching out for our children, our seniors, our families and our friends makes us all feel more secure, and for that Florida and its citizens owe you our sincere appreciation. ■



*Bill
McCollum*

