

# Guest Article from the Governor of Florida



Charlie  
Crist

## Governor Crist Applauds Law Enforcement for Continuing to Protect Floridians

Across our state every day, thousands of police officers, deputy sheriffs and state law enforcement officers make a daily renewed commitment to public safety as they head to work. In April, because of this commitment to excellence by officers statewide, I was able to announce that Florida's crime rate is at a 39-year low. The significant decline is an encouraging indicator that our crime prevention efforts are working. Despite this success, we all know each crime represents one or several victims, and together, we must continue to pursue solutions that protect all Floridians and visitors.

As we reflect on the 2010 legislative session, I am grateful for the steady partnership of the law enforcement community. Public safety is always a top priority, and with the help and input of officers around the state, I recently signed legislation enhancing our existing child safety laws. House Bill 119 empowers law enforcement to arrest convicted sex offenders or predators of children who are loitering within an area where children congregate, and creates new penalties for certain offenses towards children under age 18. I also signed House Bill 525, eliminating the statute of limitations in both civil and criminal action relating to sexual battery of a victim age 16 or younger. The pain carried by children who suffer from abuse knows no time limits, and it is our job to bring their abusers to justice. Children are our most precious resource, and Florida's law enforcement officers should be commended for their efforts in keeping them safe.

Like children, homeless Floridians are also vulnerable. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, Florida has had a disconcerting reputation as a state hostile to our homeless population. With House Bill 11, we took a bold step to change that reputation. This legislation added "homeless" status as a protected class under Florida's existing hate crime law in response to the senseless 2006 killing of a man by four Broward County teenagers. All individuals in Florida deserve this protection – no matter their race, ethnicity, or where they choose to live.

Violent behavior has no place in our society, which is why I advocated for and signed another important public safety measure protecting not only children, but also senior citizens and persons with disabilities. House Bill 7069 takes

another important step in protecting the most vulnerable among us by requiring background screening procedures for individuals who work with vulnerable populations. In 2009, I charged select state agencies with reviewing current policies, and legal requirements for screening individuals who provide care to children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. We presented the group's findings to the legislature for consideration and this bill reflects the solid, comprehensive recommendations of the group.

My goal has always been to ensure our law enforcement officers are equipped with the necessary resources to protect and serve the people of Florida. I was proud to sign a 2010-11 budget fully funding state public safety agencies at \$5.2 billion. Recognizing that Florida's crime rate continues to decline and prison admissions are slowing because of the excellence of law enforcement officers' crime prevention strategies, we were able to capitalize on a major cost savings by not investing in the construction of new correctional facilities. We were also successful in establishing new standards requiring Guardian ad Litem staff and volunteers to undergo state and federal fingerprint screenings prior to having any contact with children in the program and significantly reducing the cost for these screenings. I am confident these investments and measures will enable law enforcement to continue honorably and bravely serving the people of Florida.

**Finally, I was able to help protect the financial future of thousands of dedicated law enforcement and correctional professionals by vetoing legislation that would have reduced the annual accrual rate in Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP) accounts from 6.5 to 3 percent. I was proud to give something back to those of you who give so much every day. [Bold emphasis added by Editor]**

Floridians and visitors to our state are blessed to have such dedicated public servants working day-in and day-out to secure their safety. I am constantly in awe of your courage and bravery. For all you do to guarantee the well-being and security of our communities, residents, and visitors, we are forever grateful.

May God bless you and our great state, and keep our people safe. ●

**Editor's Note: PBA has endorsed Charlie Crist for the U.S. Senate.**

“Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”

~ Mark Twain

# Join E-PBA Today!

**NOT AN E-PBA MEMBER YET? Become one! Be the first to know about breaking news... direct to your inbox. Don't wait, sign up today for E-PBA. Visit our website to sign up: [www.flpba.org](http://www.flpba.org)**

**Knowledge about PBA issues is the strength of our Association. PBA will be e-mailing members timely news about what's up at the Florida PBA, helpful information regarding legislative issues, quick tips, and best practices for members.**

**(Your e-mail address will not be given to any other group or organization and you will receive no advertising from outside sources. E-PBA is available to PBA members only. Be sure to add "pbamail@flpba.org" to your approved sender list.) ●**

