



Escondido
Police Officers' Association
PO Box 1309
Escondido, CA 92033

DEAR ESCONDIDO RESIDENT,

As President of the Escondido Police Officers Association (EPOA), it is my job to represent the men and women of the Escondido Police Department in their employment with the city. While EPOA is an organized labor group, we are by any stretch of the imagination a traditional “Union”. In this President’s Message, I would like dispel the myths that have been inaccurately and unfairly bestowed upon public safety labor groups by the politicians with the help of the media. I’m also going to highlight what EPOA has been doing to help the citizens and the city government during this economic recession. Finally, we will present you with an opportunity to hear firsthand about the state of the Escondido Police Department and public employee pensions.

I feel it is important to clarify the differences between a public employee labor groups and traditional unions. Unlike traditional unions, public employees cannot strike if we don’t agree with our employer’s contract offer. Unlike traditional unions, public employees do not enjoy the benefit of binding arbitration (a third party moderator that assists the two parties in reaching a fair and balanced agreement). If EPOA and the city are unable to reach an agreement on our employment, the city may impose any contract on us they wish.

Another difference between public employees and private sector employees is retirement. By law, all public employees are enrolled in and provided with a retirement plan in the Public Employees Retirement System, also known as, PERS. This retirement plan is part of the public employees’ compensation and benefit plan they receive for their employment with a public entity. Because we have a defined benefit plan such as PERS, we are not eligible to receive Social Security unless we accumulate enough work credits outside of our employment with the city which very few people achieve. In essence, PERS is our Social Security. EPOA, nor did any other public employee labor group create this system. PERS was established by the State of California Legislature and signed into law by the Governor in 1932. As you might guess, the law means a lot to the men and women who put on a ballistic vest and gun every day before they head off to work especially when it comes to our pension.

No one asked any of us to volunteer for this job in law enforcement. It was something we all elected to do of our own free will. Most volunteered, because as a young child we liked the uniform, gun, or badge we saw the local police wearing. We loved the police car or the police K-9 that may have come to our schools for show and tell. But for most, and as corny as it may sound, we volunteered to do this job because we wanted to help and protect people. That is a quality in a person that speaks volumes of their character in my mind.

Of course it isn't easy getting hired as a police officer. The process is long, tedious, and can be stressful at times. Once selected, you have to work very hard to stay well educated, stay physically fit even with injuries at times, continuously train in weapons and defensive tactics, report writing, and stay current and up to date on case law involving many situations that will surely be encounter at some point during your careers.

It is with great pride that I can report to you, the citizens of Escondido, that each and every one of your Police Officers, Community Service Officers and Public Safety Dispatchers gives his or her best to the community on a daily bases. Chief Maher knows the quality of people he leads that have made Escondido Police Department one of the best departments in San Diego County and California. Our Chief has worked diligently to ensure that we receive the best training, equipment, and essential tools necessary to do the job. Chief Maher understands that we are much like the military who is protecting our freedom overseas; that is; we are protecting our citizens in our community.

All of this and we are the lowest paid police department in pay and benefits for Police Officers in San Diego County, (California State Comptroller's Office 2010). The Escondido Police Officers' Association understands that the city has had some financial short comings. We know sales tax revenues have declined over nearly three years due to the economic down turn and not because of our pension system as some have stated. That is why we offered to help the city during our last contract negotiations when we made \$1.5 million in deferrals and concessions. We wanted to be part of the solution and not the problem. In addition, all employees have had their merit step increases frozen for over two years.

What are merit step increases? Merit steps are the gradual increase in an individual employee's pay over the first five years of their employment. These increases are factored into the total cost to hire a new police officer and are part of their components of pay given in writing by the city when they are hired. Merit step increases are not raises, because they only affect the individual employee and not each employee across the board. These merit increases were frozen in 2009 by the City Manager as a stop-gap for the city and their shrinking revenue stream. The

City Manager assured all employees that these merit step increases would be re-instated when the city's revenue began to return. The City has posted higher than estimated revenue gains over the last eight fiscal quarters, yet all groups continue to have their merit steps frozen.

Prior to the this council voting on their new two year fiscal budget, we met several times with Mayor Abed, Mayor Pro-tem Waldron and Councilman Gallo, City Manager Clay Phillips and Chief Maher to openly discuss these issues and the effect they are having and will have on the police department if a compromise could not be reached. Each issue they raised we provided a solution to, and as you might guess each solution was dismissed. Chief Maher even wrote two detailed internal memo's to Council via the City Manager's Office outlining the consequences of continued budget reductions on the police department and the continued freeze to merit steps and radical pension reform. He made reasonable suggestions for solutions which were also promptly dismissed.

In a last ditch effort to resolve the issue, Vice President Garcia and I met with City Manager Clay Phillips and later Mayor Abed to make them an offer we felt they could not refuse. Here are the highlights of that offer:

- Full Pension Reform for New Hires
 - o Pay all 9% of their Employee Contribution
 - o 3% @ 55 retirement formula
- Reinstate merit step increases for all members to where they should be (made whole)
- Continue Holiday and Uniform Allowance deferral to end of 2011 and allow to sunset
 - Reinstate Certificate & Education Incentive pay for those who are eligible
- Extend this same contract for one year (No new pay increases or benefits of any kind)

This package would continue the same level of costs to the city that have been in place since January 2009. Disappointingly, this offer was also quickly dismissed. However, the City Manager and Mayor counter offered with:

- One Merit Step increase for whom ever is due one in exchange for a two-tier retirement formula of 2% @ 50 for Sworn and 2% @ 60 for non-sworn.

Unfortunately, the city's offer presents a scenario that will do more long term damage to the police department and the city as a whole which is why we cannot accept the offer. Since then, we have been informed privately that the City would be willing to go two-steps now if we would accept the same retirement formula change. However, at the Mayor's July 12, 2011 Town Hall meeting, City Manager

Clay Phillips informed the Mayor publicly that no provisions for merit step increases was made in the recently approved two-year budget. This information came out when we asked the Mayor directly what he planned to do about this problem. So, as you can see the city has not prepared to address this issue as they said they would do when the financial crises subsided.

Folks, your police department, and for that matter all Escondido City employees who have worked so hard to help make this city a great place to live and work are being held hostage for pension reform; I can't say it any clearer. We have been attempting to work through this with city staff, the city council, and mayor, but no one seems to want to be fair with us in fixing the situation. I believe the plan this association offered to the city was more than fair. We are simply trying to get the city to honor their contract with us.

The Escondido Police Officers' Association will continue to meet the challenges of serving and protecting this community. We will continue to be professional and give our citizens the best service we possibly can. However, in order to continue to provide you with the highest quality services, we will need your help, support, and understanding.

In an effort to provide the residents of this community with the facts about the state of the police department and the public employees retirement system, we hosting a town hall meeting on Tuesday August 9, 2011 from 6-8 PM at the East Valley Community Center, 2245 E. Valley Pkwy, in the Vineyard Room. Admission is free and we invite you to join us for an open discussion.

Best Regards,



Bruce A. Masten
President EPOA