

August 4, 2011

## **Camden Needs A New Kind of Police Force**

**By Louis Cappelli, Jr.**

Public Safety in the City of Camden is in crisis. The existing public safety structure in the city has failed its residents for years, if not decades. That is indefensible.

The primary function of government is to protect its people. Public Safety is not currently doing that so that people can feel safe in their homes, on the streets, at work and at school. This crisis in the failure of public safety needs to be addressed now, not delayed by special interests thinking only of themselves and not the people they are sworn to protect.

The residents of Camden deserve the same standard of safety that all other residents in the state have and expect. They are not getting it now.

The model needs to change. It needs to be recalculated and recalibrated to ensure that there are twice as many police on the streets, instead of many senior officers costing the city \$200,000 apiece, doing administrative work.

The Camden Metro District Police Force is the solution to this catastrophic problem. By restructuring this way, the City will be able to deploy double the numbers of officers on the street, double the number of officers on a shift. In a war against crime, you need more foot soldiers.

How?

By changing how resources are managed.

Local Fraternal Order of Police President John Williamson says he's outraged that jobs for himself and his colleagues on the police force may change. But he is not outraged at the crime in the city and the lack of Public Safety they have provided. In his scenario, it is the police who are entitled, not the residents who pay their salaries and benefits. He himself costs the city more than \$100,000 a year to be the spokesperson for the union. That is his full-time assignment and does no patrol work at all, a perfect example of how outrageous the contract is.

The City repeatedly has asked for concessions in a union contract that is strangling the city's already-pressed budget. Williamson and his colleague have refused to recognize the taxpayers' interests and, as a result, scores of their colleagues were laid off because paying them was unsustainable and, with

or without them, the city was not safe.

But in the real world of Camden City, where people live and die on the streets, labor agreements must be consistent with the city's Public Safety needs. They should be paramount. They are not.

The facts speak for themselves:

- Average cost to the city of a senior police officer is \$200,000. You could hire Navy Seals for less.
- Police get a shift differential for a DAY SHIFT. Unheard of.
- There is a 50 percent absentee rate on the force on a daily basis. What organization can function with that?
- Long-serving officers get a "breathing bonus"—just for being there. That can be 11 percent for senior officers. For example, a senior officer on a night shift can get 22 percent over and above his salary.

Now is the time to reorganize and recalibrate from a top-heavy force with highly compensated members to a redeployed force that is out on the streets, where it should be.

The Camden City Metro District, with bipartisan endorsements across the City, county and state, is the right solution. This is the opportunity to have a state-of-the-art, high-functioning force with better-trained officers who live in the city and reflect the city's population.

It's time to put the people of Camden first. It's time to defend their right to the protection of their government. No more excuses.

*Louis Cappelli Jr. is Director of the Camden County Board of Freeholders.*