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**Council Leader Gina Lopez | Assistant Council Leader Dayna Lamb
Assistant Council Leader Gabriella Franklin | Treasurer TBD
Secretary Carla Andre Joseph**

Division 236 Members:

With COVID-19 continuing to change our work lives every day, we wanted to send you a newsletter focused on how the role of a parole officer has changed during this pandemic and the steps your union has taken to maintain your safety. The parole division's primary concerns are:

- How the state's new policy of identifying and responding to micro-clusters affects our work, region by region
- The continuous availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Effective communication by executive team management about issues that affect your jobs
- Increased on-the-job safety of parole officers during these tumultuous times
- Morale for our officers and how they can obtain the resources required when they need help

In addition, I wanted to let you know that PEF President Wayne Spence continues to advocate for the [Productivity Enhancement Program \(PEP\)](#) to be extended for 2021. You can click here to [send a letter to Governor Cuomo](#) demanding that this valuable benefit be reinstated.

I urge you to contact your stewards with any issues or concerns. Division 236 is committed to addressing them.

In unity,

Gina Lopez
Division 236 Council Leader

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS:

- Parole officers always stuck between rocks and hard places
- COVID strikes Niagara Frontier parole office, sickening multiple members
- Parole members serve the community, supervise society's worst offenders
- **Parole Benefits Webinar**
- PEF Factsheet: Vehicle Safety & Cleaning
- PEF Division 236 awards annual 2020 Neil Boyle Scholarships
- PEF Parole Officers in the News

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Parole officers always stuck between rocks and hard places

November 24, 2020

By SHERRY HALBROOK

Just a year ago it would have difficult to come up with a more dangerous, complicated and unappreciated job than being a NYS parole officer. And it would have been unimaginable to think how the work could become massively harder almost overnight. But that is exactly what has happened.

Parole officers have two almost contradictory roles – protecting the public from dangerous criminals, and helping those dangerous criminals re-enter society and become productive, law-abiding citizens.

Very violent crime has skyrocketed in 2020, and parolees have been among both the victims and the perpetrators. The New York Daily News ran a story November 23 with the following harrowing report:



“Police counted 1,667 shooting victims in the city this year as of Nov. 15 — an increase of 101%, or slightly more than double the number reported in 2019 in the same period. The increase in shootings has even outpaced the growth in the homicide rate: NYPD data show 405 murders in the city this year as of Nov. 15, 37% more than were reported in the same period of 2019.

“Fire Department gun-victim statistics — separate from the police department data — show that EMTs and paramedics took 1,304 shooting victims to emergency rooms in 2020 as of Sept. 30, compared with 690 in the same period last year — an 89% increase. The data doesn’t include private hospitals and ambulance companies that also respond to shootings.”

Shootings aren’t the only kinds of violent crimes that are alarming New Yorkers. On November 19, for instance, the Daily News carried a news brief that began this way:

“An ex-con is suspected in the sexual assault and robbery of a woman in a Manhattan park, police said Wednesday. ... (The suspect) was paroled in April after serving more than three years in state prison for a Bronx burglary. He previously served time for an attempted robbery in Brooklyn and was paroled in June 2011.”

What’s even more troubling is that this extreme rise in violent crime is not restricted New York City. It’s up dramatically all over the country and that includes upstate New York. And this unexplained surge in violence has accompanied a new and invisible danger – COVID-19.

The pandemic has pulled the rug out from under the economy. With millions of hard-working, law-abiding citizens laid off from their jobs and competing for the remaining jobs, the chances of getting work that pays enough to support you are much worse for parolees.

Not being able to find a paying job just heightens anxiety for parolees who may have originally landed in prison because they saw crime as the only way to support themselves. That frustration and anxiety leads to panic that can make people more likely to make poor choices that could possibly land them back them back in prison.

So, the work gets harder and more dangerous for their parole officer, and the newspapers carry these reports nearly every day.

In recent weeks, a parole officer working upstate was struck by a vehicle driven by a parolee trying to flee from arrest for a parole violation. The officer landed on the hood of the vehicle and fired at the parolee, striking the individual three times.

In New York City a warrant officer was struck by a parole violator’s vehicle when he drove up a sidewalk and crashed in an attempt to escape arrest.

Most arrests of violators are not so dramatic, but there is always danger. When people are arrested for crimes, the news

reports perfunctorily mention that parole officers participated in the process of finding the suspected perpetrator and arresting him or her. Injuries and COVID-19 exposures to parole officers are rarely mentioned. Danger is simply seen as inherent to the job and not worthy of public appreciation or mention.

That has not stopped or even slowed growing political demand for fewer parole-violation arrests. People who dismiss the need to arrest parolees for violating the terms of their paroles, describe these infractions as “technical” and insignificant. And the state Department of Corrections and Community Services that runs the parole program often blames the parole officer for the misdeeds of the parolee.

It doesn't stop there. Advocates for fewer arrests of parole violators, have also spent this year demanding those who are arrested be released to spare them the heightened risk of becoming infected if they are incarcerated. Combine that with bail reform enacted in 2019 and parole and other law-enforcement officers now experience the frustration of seeing the people they just tracked down and charged let out as fast as they are run in.

Parole, itself, is under attack. The district attorneys of Manhattan, Bronx and Brooklyn co-authored an op-ed in the November 19 edition of The New York Daily News titled 'The Cruelty of Parole':

“Nationally, one out of every four people entering America’s prisons in 2017 was incarcerated not for a new crime, but for a technical violation. Those violations quickly add up when you have [4.4 million people](#) currently under supervision in the U.S. — [twice as many people](#) as are incarcerated in our nation’s jails and prisons. Gov. Cuomo stated, ‘New York jails and prisons should not be filled with people who may have violated the conditions of their parole, but present no danger to our communities.’ The New York State Bar Association wrote that violating so many people ‘is counterproductive and costly, both in human and financial terms, and should be promptly addressed through remedial legislation.’”

PEF President Wayne Spence, who worked for 28 years in the parole division, has led the union’s vigorous efforts to bring some realism to the debate over these legislative efforts.

“These elected officials are pushing their opinions, but they have never tried to supervise parolees,” Spence said. “They have no real experience in what that involves. And their call to greatly reduce penalties for parole violations are dangerous for both the public and the officers because it sends a loud and clear message to the parolee that it’s OK to break the rules and ignore the law.”

Parole officers are just trying to do their jobs of helping parolees succeed while still putting public safety first. The officers see and may share public outrage over issues of racial injustice or abuse of power by law-enforcement personnel. It is only fair to recognize that NYS parole officers are not the ones you see abusing their power on YouTube or the evening news. That is because they are caring, responsible and highly skilled professionals.

The biggest problem is that parole officers are constantly caught in the middle of these huge social changes and policy battles. Their only true advocate, defender and supporter is their union, PEF.

“I am a parole officer, Spence said. “I understand all too well just how dangerous and difficult this job is under the best of circumstances and how much harder it has become under the powerful strains of the pandemic, sinking economy and the just demands for racial equality. We at PEF are constantly responding to the alerts we receive from our members and the issues they face on their jobs.

“Parole officers have special challenges related to social distancing, masks and the need to frequently share vehicles and meet with other people on the job. We have made finding and advocating for their special health-and-safety concerns a priority during this pandemic. Our nurses aren’t the only ones who must take special care and who need PPE to do their jobs safely.

“Parole is never easy or simple,” Spence said. “It is always challenging and often dangerous. Our members deserve tremendous public appreciation for all of the hard, brave, professional work they do that never makes it into police reports and news stories. We want every New Yorker to know that parole officers are heroes every day they show up and just quietly do their jobs.”and a bright light peaking through the dark clouds that hang over all of us. We will not rest in our fight to keep you as safe as possible throughout this public health emergency.

COVID strikes Niagara Frontier parole office, sickening multiple members

By KATE MOSTACCIO

An outbreak of COVID-19 spread quickly through the Niagara Frontier parole office just before Halloween, with six PEF parole officers, two Intensive Supervision Officers (ISOs) and one member of the clerical staff testing positive for the virus.

The outbreak began on a Friday, when a parole officer was not feeling well but continued to work in the office, sources say. By the following Monday, that officer called in and had tested positive for the virus. Despite the reported positive case, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) did not close the office, instead opting to disinfect the building that evening.

According to PEF's Health and Safety Department, DOCCS should have been more aggressive in its response. PEF representatives urged DOCCS to quarantine and halt fieldwork and not to mingle Buffalo Parole Office staff assisting with Halloween sex offender details with the Niagara Frontier members awaiting test results.

"There was no way to maintain proper social distancing in the Niagara Frontier parole office," said PEF President Wayne Spence, a parole officer himself. "It's just not feasible. When that first officer reported their positive test, the office should have been shut down, disinfected and all our affected members told to quarantine and monitor at home."

Since the outbreak, DOCCS ordered three deep cleans of the office, PEF field staff report. Field staff also visited both the Niagara Frontier and Buffalo parole offices to ensure the availability of adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies and to distribute hand sanitizer and masks to members. During the visit, they noted proper entry protocols, including a temperature check and questionnaire.



Parole Benefits Webinar for PEF Div. 236

Tuesday Dec 15, 2020 6:00 PM - 7:30 PM EST

RSVP @ <https://bit.ly/3mxhTFv>

Parole members serve the community, supervise society's worst offenders

December 8, 2020



By KATE MOSTACCIO

PEF parole officers have a dangerous job, working with some of the worst offenders society has produced, but they are often overlooked, understaffed, under-equipped and unappreciated.

Serving warrants, clearing buildings, jumping out of cars and working with police and other law enforcement agencies in addition to their parolee supervision roles, parole officers are law enforcement officers even though they rarely get that recognition.

"The public in general doesn't know what we do and what we are," said Parole Officer Raymond Diamond, a 14-year PEF member and parole officer in the Special Offenders Unit in Rochester. "We're law enforcement officers, but we don't always get treated like law enforcement officers."

Diamond said people often use "probation officer" when referring to parole officers but noted that the jobs are quite different.

"We supervise people who have been in state prison, the people who have not done well on probation," he said. "Probation doesn't get murderers, serial killers and rapists. We get the worst that society has produced."

Diamond said the job of a parole officer is unique – a mix of social work and law enforcement.

"We are case managers with guns," he said. "We carry guns and wear bulletproof vests and we work hand in hand with other law enforcement agencies. We treat people with dignity and respect, but when the time comes to arrest a parolee and take them off the streets, we do that too and our job is dangerous. Sometimes we get hurt. We sign up for that."

Helping parolees reintegrate, protecting the community

To serve their client population best, parole officers need to guide them to appropriate services, monitor their compliance with conditions of their release and retain the ability to act if those conditions aren't met.

Diamond said 85 percent of parole's client population suffers an addiction.

"Those are important factors in crime," he said. "One of the first things we address is their need for services. In a perfect world, they would get out of prison and they would want to change their life. But, that's not this world; they need someone like parole officers to hold consequences over their heads."

Senior Parole Officer Susan Hrovat, a PEF member and parole officer for 12 years, said most parole officers care deeply about their clients and want them to succeed in society.

"Our goal is to get them back into the community, to identify their strengths and their areas of need," she said. "The main things with most offenders are addictions – money, drugs, sex. We are law enforcement officers and have all the ability to do anything another law enforcement officer can do, but with the additional bonus that we can conduct more searches. We can take their liberty away immediately if they violate conditions of release. That's a great responsibility."

Hrovat said parole officers work to identify symptoms preceding re-offense so they can act before a parolee commits another major crime, like rape or murder.

"People complain that we lock them up for dirty urine or breaking curfew," Hrovat said. "We lock them up because we are familiar with their history, their needs, what they are responsive to and what is making them relapse into criminal behavior."

For example, a parolee who runs the streets at night and constantly violates curfew is showing signs of relapse, she said.

"It's not just a guy coming home late because of a flat tire," she said. "It's a guy that on a regular basis is not coming home, is hanging around in areas with known criminal activity and is committing crimes."

Failure to attend treatment programs is a glaring sign that a parolee needs intervention and drug testing is a key tool to help prevent reoffending.

"These programs help support a person that may not have family," Hrovat said. "They may not have anyone else in their corner. Programs offer them help to identify and work through issues they have so they can redirect themselves away from criminal behavior."

The impact of COVID

Changes handed down by the state during the COVID-19 pandemic hinder the ability of parole officers to do their jobs effectively, Diamond and Hrovat said.

"Our hands are tied and there are no consequences," Diamond said. Working in the Special Offenders Unit in Rochester, Diamond supervises sex offenders and child abusers. A parolee he could have arrested for missing a treatment program pre-COVID, he now can't arrest until they hurt someone.

"There is a written document that said you can only arrest parolees for certain things," he said. "If people are on parole for a horrible crime and they have mental illness or drug addiction and they don't go to mental health programs or drug treatment, they are a danger to the community. Now, we have to wait until they hurt somebody. People are dying because of this."

[In March, DOCCS instituted new procedures](#) that “temporarily modified the issuance of violations to ensure that people who would be subject to release under these protocols are not detained in the first place,” according to the DOCCS COVID-19 Report website. The department also released low-level technical parole violators from local jails and, following individualized review, began canceling parole warrants for individuals with adequate housing and who pose no risk to public safety.

Diamond said there have been at least three murders committed by parolees in the Rochester area that may not have happened if the offenders hadn’t been released from prison due to COVID.

“It’s frustrating,” he said. “We’re seeing our cases, people we’ve known for years, hurt people and we feel helpless. We feel like we could have arrested them sooner.”

He said parole violators make up a large portion of the prison population and the state’s desire to reduce inmate density during COVID may help reduce the infection rate, but it endangers the community.

“The requirements were meant to keep the prison numbers down, but they didn’t lift them as the COVID numbers went down and things got better,” Diamond said. “The state prisons continued to not take people. People are dying because of this. There is no reason why prisons can’t take people cleared as COVID negative by a local jail.”

Changes implemented by the state limit parole officers to arrests for major infractions, such as possession of a deadly weapon, domestic violence, or hurting a past or current victim. Instead of being able to take a parolee off the street for a curfew violation or failing a drug test, parole officers must now await a new victim.

“Until we have a victim, we are holding off until the last moment to get permission to lock them up,” Hrovat said. “They are taking away our ability to redirect people and send them down a different path to keep them and the community safe.”

Diamond said not being able to have parolees come into the office for drug testing is also making their jobs harder.

“We have to test them to make sure they are not using drugs, not slipping back,” he said. “They’re not allowed to come in the office anymore. We’re not allowed to drug test them. It hurts us to see people getting hurt because we’re not allowed to do our job. We do help parolees and there are parolees who adore their parole officers. Part of that is lost when we aren’t able to effectively supervise them.”

Hrovat echoed Diamond’s frustration.

“If we know a guy is a drug addict and we’re not able to test them, we’re ineffective,” she said.

Bail reform, changing public opinion

Recent criminal justice reforms also hinder the work of parole officers.

“It used to be a senior parole officer could issue warrants. Absconder warrants, new crime warrants and technical warrants, like missing curfew, not being where they should be, being around

victims they can’t be around,” said Hrovat. “Now, we find a guy with a gun, he gets an appearance ticket and he’s back on the street. Bail reform sounds great but until you understand why we do what we do, it’s a dangerous trend.”

These changes may seem innocent, but they have significant impact on parole.

“A lot of reform is coming and I don’t think people understand just what parole is and what we do,” Diamond said. “We are all worried about the governor’s criminal justice reform and Less Is More. You’re taking away the ability of parole officers to arrest virtually anybody.”

The “Less is More” legislation would amend the executive law and the penal law, in relation to revocation of presumptive release, parole, conditional release and post-release supervision.

In a memo opposing the legislation, PEF wrote: “As written, the bill language makes it virtually impossible to incarcerate anyone for violating one of the few violations deemed significant enough to merit re-incarceration (i.e., testing positive for alcohol or non-prescribed drugs or controlled substances, failing to report, and failing to notify of a change in address).”

To add to the difficulty, parole is already struggling with subpar equipment and staffing.

“We’re always short-staffed,” Hrovat said. “We don’t always have the equipment we need. We’ve had cars where we can see the pavement through the floor in the back. We try to keep the equipment up, but we deal with the worst of the worst with sometimes not the best equipment and minimal staff.”

As law enforcement, parole officers are also facing rising tension in the arena of public opinion.

“It’s a little more dangerous now,” Hrovat said. “There is a culture of conflict between law enforcement and society in general sometimes.”

Diamond said he hopes society will judge each parole officer, and other law enforcement officers, by their actions and not the actions of other officers, painting them all with the same brush.

“We would like to be judged on the merits of the individual officer,” he said. “We come to work every day knowing we’re not popular and knowing we can get hurt. We want the same respect other law enforcement officers get from the public. We’re tired of being forgotten, not discussed, underfunded and not appreciated.”

Vehicle safety and COVID-19 cleaning, disinfection & safe operation

PEF members whose job duties may involve driving with a partner or transporting inmates, patients, clients, parolees etc., may be at additional risk for COVID while doing so. In addition to making sure the vehicle is cleaned and sanitized before and after each use, there are additional measures PEF members may take to safeguard themselves and their vehicle from COVID exposure.

TRANSPORTING INDIVIDUALS

- If transporting individuals known or suspected to have COVID-19, the agency is to provide PEF members with a N95 respirator and eye protection. If a N95 is not available, CDC also recommends a facemask and eye protection. Eye protection should not create a driving hazard.
- If transporting individuals without or not suspected of having COVID-19, the agency is to provide PEF members with a facemask.
- All passengers are to wear a facemask, over their nose and mouth. Agency should provide spare masks to give to passengers who do not have one.
- Sit as far apart as possible, if available, use a van to allow for more social distancing.
 - For example, have the passenger sit in the back seat on the other side of the vehicle from the driver
- If possible, install temporary barriers in the car
- Practice frequent hand hygiene and avoid touching your face. Ensure your agency is providing alcohol based hand sanitizer to use while in the vehicle.
- Ride with windows open, do not recirculate air, and use vents to bring in outside air (agency transfer policy and weather permitting).

WARNINGS

- Do not use ammonia-based cleaners on car touch screens or dashboards, as they can damage anti-glare and anti-fingerprint coatings.
- Do not mix bleach and ammonia or combine cleaning/disinfecting chemicals as doing so may lead to toxicity.
- Make sure staff are trained on the proper donning and doffing (putting on and taking off) of masks, gloves and gowns.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING VEHICLES

- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces in the vehicle at the beginning and end of each shift and between passengers. (Have a supply of plastic bags for garbage, paper towels, gloves, and disinfectant in each vehicle)
- Clean hard non-porous surfaces with soap and water or detergent if visibly dirty. Cleaning does not eliminate the coronavirus, only disinfection does.
- For soft or porous surfaces such as fabric seats, remove any visible contamination, if present, and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces.
- Disinfect with a product from the EPA's List N: Disinfectants for Coronavirus (COVID-19) suitable for the appropriate surface.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions to ensure products are used effectively and safely.
- The agency should provide alcohol based wipes to use throughout the day.
- Wear disposable gloves while cleaning and disinfecting.
- Keep vehicle doors and windows open while cleaning/disinfecting
- Wear a disposable gown when cleaning and disinfecting after transporting a known or suspected COVID-19 individual.
- For frequently touched electronic surfaces, such as tablets or touch screens used in the vehicle, remove visible dirt, then disinfect following the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products. If no manufacturer guidance is available, consider the use of alcoholbased wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol to disinfect.
- Remove gloves and other PPE after cleaning and disinfecting.
- Wash hands immediately after removing PPE with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use alcohol based hand sanitizer if soap and water is not available.
- If disposable gown was not used, remove and wash clothing as soon as possible



PEF Division 236 awards annual 2020 Neil Boyle Scholarships

December 8, 2020

PEF Division 236 awarded its 2020 annual Neil Boyle Scholarships to 10 college-bound students who are the sons and daughters of Division 236 members at the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.

This scholarship program was created more than three decades ago to honor the memory of Neil Boyle, a parole officer in PEF Region 9 who was the key figure in founding and organizing PEF Division 236 and whose organizing efforts also were instrumental in founding PEF in the late 1970s.

Recipients of the \$500 Neil Boyle Scholarship Awards in 2020 are:

- Kaylen DeJesus, daughter of Parole Officer Kisha DeJesus;
- Keith Robinson Edwards, son of Senior Parole Officer Jill Robinson;
- Cameron Hodson, son of Senior Parole Officer Robert Hodson;
- Blake Butler, son of Parole Officer Kori Waller;
- Michaela Joseph, daughter of Parole Officer Carla Andre-Joseph;
- Ethan Adeniran, son of Assistant Reentry Manager Sheryl Brown;
- Ian J. Donlon, son of Parole Services Program Specialist Sarah L. Dublin;
- Lauren Vandenburg, daughter of Deputy Chief of Upstate Parole Violation Megan Hickey;
- Sophie Morgiewicz, daughter of Senior Parole Office Gary Morgiewicz; and
- Lucas Zbytek, son of Parole Officer Scott Zbytek.

Duty Belt Anatomy



PAROLE NEWSLETTER



PEF Parole Officers in the News

Mask Delivery to Parole Offices

November 14, 2020

PEF Region 1 has been hard hit. COVID-19 numbers are incredibly high. But our members are still serving New York. This week, Regional Coordinator Michele Grier Silsby did a mask delivery for DOL members, and Field Representative Crystal Melvin and "Mask Deliverer" Stephanie McLean-Beathley visited Parole Offices in Buffalo and Niagara Falls.



Parole Officers Shot At

October 4, 2020

PEF can confirm that 2 parole officers were fired upon when conducting curfew checks in NYC. These are photos of their car from the WNBC-TV report. These essential NYS employees work in the Special Offender's Unit, which oversees some of New York's most dangerous gang members, sex offenders and organized crime out on parole. There is no doubt that bail reform has made the job of a PO more dangerous than ever before!



Parolee shot three times after resisting arrest, striking parole officer with car in Canandaigua

November 3, 2020

A parole officer was attempting to take a suspect into custody this morning when he decided to run, striking the officer with his car. The officer then discharged seven shots from his gun, striking the parolee three times.