

I want to discuss the issue of the Sheriff's Memorial which is planned to be constructed at the new Area Two substation. There seems to be confusion and misinformation regarding this project. That confusion and misinformation has led to significant differences of opinion when this topic is brought up. I want to try to offer some clarification for the membership.

The memorial project is not the FDSA's project. This is an undertaking that was started by the Sheriff's Sergeants Association. From what I can gather, there seems to be some discussion that this is morphing into an agency-wide type of project, but to be clear, it is my understanding the funding is all private. The design, development, and fundraising were all started by the Sergeants Association. This was a large undertaking and I commend them for their vision on this.

There was a presentation given to the FDSA on November 2, 2022 during our regular Board of Director's meeting. During that presentation a request was made by Sheriff Zaroni asking the FDSA to donate \$100,000 towards the memorial project. The FDSA Board has discussed this on several occasions since then, trying to figure out the best involvement and course of action for the FDSA and its members. We have agreed that writing a check for \$100,000 is not the most responsible thing to do.

In recent weeks, I have also heard numerous rumors about private meetings I have had with Sheriff Zaroni, and Former Sheriffs Magarian and Mims, regarding this project. I want to clarify some of the misinformation on this.

Sheriff Zaroni asked me a few months ago, in passing, if the FDSA had decided on the donation request. I explained to him that \$100,000 is too much to ask from our association. In response, he simply asked for me to let him know when we figured out what we wanted to do.

Sheriff Magarian and I meet from time to time, as I lean on his leadership skills and respect his opinions, guidance, and historical perspective on things here at FSO and in our job field. I had a meeting with Sheriff Magarian regarding Peace Officer Memorial topics along with this Memorial Project. Sheriff Magarian asked if the FDSA has had the presentation and what thoughts we had about it. Sheriff Magarian did voice his displeasure with not bringing the FDSA on as a partner with a project this size, but we agreed that while it would have been better if the Sheriff's Sergeants Association had brought us on as a partner early on, that was no longer an issue to be addressed. I explained to him nobody on the FDSA Board has a problem with the project, and certainly no problem with the concept of a Sheriff's Memorial at the new Area Two substation. However, the "ask" of the FDSA was too much and the FDSA Board was not willing to commit that type of money. I told Sheriff Magarian that the FDSA Board was continuing to discuss how we might be able provide support for the project.

Sheriff Mims and I have not met or discussed this project. The last time this was mentioned by her was on November 2, 2022.

Since the email Sheriff Zanoni emailed to the entire agency, many people have reached out to ask where the FDSA stands with the project, and what involvement – if any – we will have. Some of these people were strongly in favor of the FDSA supporting the project. In response, I truthfully and consistently stated that the FDSA is trying to find the best fit for the FDSA with this project. However, I also fielded calls from people that were negative about the “asks” being made of the FDSA in relation to the project and wanted to know why we are wasting time talking about it. Many of those individuals expressed that if people want to participate, they will participate. There were some critical opinions as to why this is going out to all Sheriff’s employees, and some are being guilted into spending money on challenge coins or a brick paver.

I have also heard a lot of rumors and statements (all made anonymously) that I am meeting with members of this community telling people not to participate in this project. The reason these statements are being made anonymously is that they are not true, and the people making such statements know they are not true. I have not dissuaded – and have no reason to dissuade – anyone from giving towards this project. I want to ensure there is clarity on this. There is nothing secret about that.

I have fielded questions from some members of the FDSA regarding more general “support” of this project. But to be clear, we have not been asked to “support” the project in some general sense. We have been asked, quite specifically, to contribute \$100,000 to show our “support”. I asked the FDSA Board of Directors to reach out to members to gauge interest/support for such a donation. So far, not a single member we have spoken with has been in favor of making that donation.

The FDSA board has determined that writing a check for \$100,000 from a member run and funded organization is not consistent with our fiduciary duties. FDSA is an organization that has line-item budgets that include many costs including repairs, salaries, and benefits and services to provide to members. We also fundraise like most other non-profits do. Since 2008, when I became President of the FDSA, our fundraising cause has been the FDSA Peace Officer Memorial Fund. Since that time, we have raised over \$800,000 to help families and co-workers of our deputies killed in the line of duty. That is our cause.

I commend the Sergeants for this undertaking and believe they have a great vision for building this memorial. The FDSA Board of Directors feels there is an opportunity to partner on a component of this project. We have been round tabling this for a few months now and feel we have a direction that can be extremely beneficial for everyone. I will wait to report out what that is once we have an opportunity to meet with the Memorial group and see if there is an agreement to our proposal. I, along with your Board of Directors is optimistic about this.

Peace Officer Memorial in Courthouse Park

FDSA and FPOA were the two organizations who designed the Peace Officer Memorial in Courthouse Park. This was in the year 2000. We have continued to support that memorial and unfortunately have had to add names to it, along with two rock wings due to expansion. We have been discussing partnering with FPOA and doing a large improvement at the memorial for a couple years now. Things seem to start finally coming together with that.

We met with Jim Olson who is the President of the Fresno County Memorial Foundation. I expressed to Jim of the two groups wanting to donate funds to help construct a flag pole at the Memorial Park. Jim was elated to hear this and explained that has been one of the missing pieces to the Fresno County Peace Officer's Memorial. I will report out what the cost of this is and design once that is figured out by the FCPOM. Stay tuned for more information regarding this project.

Legal Defense Fund and FDSA's renewal

The PORAC Legal Defense Fund is the nation's oldest, largest, and most respected public safety legal plan. Serving more than 143,000 members nationwide, PORAC LDF remains committed to protecting the rights and benefits of its members since 1974. The Fund is a non-profit Trust that provides legal service benefits for public safety personnel, and currently has reserves of more than \$51,000,000.

The providers include the most skilled and experienced attorneys. There is a complaint procedure and follow-up surveys that underscore LDF's commitment to its members' satisfaction.

The PORAC Legal Defense Fund is an ERISA Trust providing legal service benefits for public safety personnel. Whether you are the target of a civil or criminal action or are involved in a critical incident. The LDF is run by and for peace officers, we understand the challenges of life as a peace officer, because we have been there. Just a few dollars per month gets you access to unsurpassed legal defense and, most importantly, the peace of mind to focus on your duties as a peace officer knowing you are protected by the LDF.

PORAC LDF recognizes that when a public safety officer is criminally prosecuted, the amount needed to fund the defense should not be capped, limited, or otherwise curtailed. Whether the case costs \$100,000 to defend, or \$1,000,000 to defend, LDF keeps its long-standing promise of never skimping when your life and career are on the line. Numerous cases have cost LDF more than one million dollars for its participants. Scores of cases have been funded for more than \$100,000.

The most important time for legal representation is the minutes and hours which immediately follow a critical incident. How, when, and whether to give a statement to investigators following the discharge of a weapon, death in custody, or use of force, is one of the most important decisions which could affect your future liberty and freedom. PORAC/LDF recognizes that its members need the benefit of legal counsel immediately – not the next day. Emergency legal representation by experienced panel attorneys is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for our members.

FDSA has the Plan 1 option with two riders, one for out of course and scope to cover off duty incidents that may happen. We also have the rider for sworn members to cover them for SB2.

I want to report that our premium has decreased for the upcoming plan year (July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024). The reduction goes from \$36.15 per month to \$31.50 per month. This \$4.65 per month reduction equals a reduction from \$16.69 per pay period to \$14.54 per pay period. There are groups in the state and nation on this same plan, paying upwards of \$55-75 per month for the same coverage. I want to thank all the people involved with this. Meaning - employees, representatives, attorneys, etc. everyone plays an important role in the legal defense coverage for our members. This is experienced based rating, and it is the best money spent when/if you may need coverage to protect your employment. I am proud of this accomplishment and look forward to see if we can get it even lower next renewal.

Conclusion

I want to ensure the open door and transparency myself and the FDSA provides to our members. There is nothing our members cannot learn in regards to current issues. Attending our monthly board meetings allows members to be informed of current issues. I understand, for some, making meetings is difficult – we all have lives that involve work and family. However, we do offer a Zoom option for our members to be able to tune in.

As I have said time and time again, I am always available to all of you anytime of the day or night. Many of you here know this and have taken advantage of this. Whether it's an in-person meeting for a cup of coffee, phone call, text message or email. I am committed to this organization and to all of you who I represent. I will drop what I am doing to ensure you get the attention needed from me regarding the issue you bring up. Do not lose focus of that, because since becoming your president and representing all of you at the local, state, and national level – I have never forgotten that part.

Truly Yours,

Eric Schmidt