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Florida Police Chiefs Association Announces 2023 Legislators of the Year

Tallahassee, Fla. – The Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA) announced the 2023 Legislators of the Year and several special legislative award recipients at the FPCA's 71st Annual Summer Training Conference and Exposition awards banquet held in Bonita Springs, FL.

“The Florida Police Chiefs Association is honored to recognize those public servants who demonstrate their commitment to policies that support and improve law enforcement and public safety in Florida,” said FPCA President and Clermont Police Department Chief Charles "Chuck" Broadway.

“This year, we are also honored to recognize several individuals who, through their dedicated leadership, ensured the sanctity of our democratic process,” said FPCA Immediate Past President Fellsmere Police Department Chief Keith Touchberry.

Receiving the awards were:

2022 -- 2023 Legislator of the Year Awards:

- Representative Demi Busatta Cabrera
- Senator Ed Hooper

- Representative Benny Jacques
- Senator Danny Burgess

2022 -- 2023 Distinguished Service Awards

- Senate President Kathleen Passidomo
- House Speaker Paul Renner

Guardian and Warrior Executive Director Awards

- Representative Mike Giallombardo
- Colonel Seth Montgomery
- Senate Sergeant At Arms Damien Kelly
- House Sergeant At Arms Russell Hosford

Representative Busatta Cabrera and Senator Hooper sponsored legislation which ultimately ended up as part of Senate Bill (SB) 7024, to restore retirement benefit equity to first responders who enrolled in the Florida Retirement System after July 1, 2011. Due to the financial crisis, in 2011 the legislature increased the retirement age and years of service necessary to obtain full benefits for new hires. Restoring these benefits will help Florida agencies compete to recruit the most capable and dedicated officers, including those from states where this benefit inequity doesn't exist.

Sponsored by Representative Jacques and Senator Burgess, House Bill (HB) 935 was FPCA's top legislative priority for 2023. This groundbreaking bill aims to prevent the arbitrary termination of a chief of police without a transparent process that includes written notice and a public hearing. While many states have protections for police officers, firefighters, and fire chiefs, and even though most police chiefs are classified as "at-will" employees, Florida explicitly exempts chiefs from protections under its law enforcement bill of rights. Now, when a chief's employment is in question, the reasons will be a matter of public record and clearly communicated in a public hearing where community members have an opportunity to be heard.

As leaders of their respective chambers, House Speaker Paul Renner and Senate President Passidomo not only worked diligently to ensure passage of HB 935 and SB 7024, but they also showed tremendous concern for the wellbeing of first responders and their families by expanding the time window to participate in Florida's Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP) and increasing the benefit accrual rate. These changes will allow first responders to more easily access the benefits they sacrificed so much to earn.

The Guardian and Warrior Executive Director Awards were established for FPCA to recognize those public servants who have made special contributions to upholding both our constitutional liberties and the legitimacy of law enforcement as a guarantor

of those liberties.

Representative Mike Giallombardo, a previous recipient of FPCA's Legislator of the Year award, was a prime co-sponsor of HB 935 in 2023, and throughout the session was a passionate and effective advocate for its passage among his colleagues in the House. Time and again he has proven himself to be a dedicated, battle-tested supporter of law enforcement officers and the law enforcement profession.

During the 2023 session, the Florida Legislature deliberated on several contentious issues that generated a great deal of citizen input. Some of that input came in the form of civil protests, but some of those protests were not civil, and instead threatened both the safety and security of elected officials, state employees, and visitors, and the legislature's ability to conduct its business.

Colonel Seth Montgomery of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Capitol Police, House Sergeant At Arms Russell Hosford, and Senate Sergeant At Arms Damien Kelly ably led their respective staffs to maintain security and decorum in the Capitol Complex, including the House and Senate chambers, galleries, and committee meeting rooms, while ensuring that citizens were able to exercise their constitutional rights to publicly testify and petition their government.

About the Florida Police Chiefs Association

The Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA) is the nation's pre-eminent law enforcement professional association, speaking for over 1,300 of Florida's top law enforcement executives, and providing guidance and leadership for the future of law enforcement and our communities. The FPCA serves municipal, airport, college and university, and tribal police departments, as well as private businesses and security firms and federal, state and county law enforcement agencies across every region of the state. For more information about the FPCA, please visit www.fpca.com.

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