



Sheriff Clovis Watson, Jr.

Post Office Box 5489 • Gainesville, FL 32627

March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Dear ACSO Employees:

This period of transition, like any change, has been a challenge. You have met that challenge admirably and I am thankful for your dedication. The responsibility we share to fulfill the agency mission never takes a day off. You may have noted the long hours I have spent trying different configurations of staffing and supervision to meet the expectations of the taxpayers and employees, but you may not have seen the long hours I have spent negotiating benefits for you from the local, state, and national governments. As your Sheriff, I pledged a twofold responsibility: excellent service to the taxpayers and diligent care to the employees. I am committed to both and pleased to bring you good news on these fronts.

To recruit, retain, and reward our quality employees, we have implemented a 3% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to improve the Step Pay Plan. Past years, ACSO has seen zero, 0.5% or 1%, allowing our industry to lag behind over time. We're changing that. This will raise not only starting salaries for new hires, but increase the pay of all our employees, including extending the pay of those long-term employees who have reached step 20. Those who are not at step 20 will notice that their step will not advance this year, but their pay will raise nonetheless. This effectively increases every employee's maximum pay scale, resulting in greater pension benefits and DROP compensation upon retirement. I will continue to battle in Tallahassee to protect your pensions.

Recruiting and retaining quality deputies requires recruiting and retaining quality Field Trainers. We are pleased to increase the FTD specialty pay this year.

To minimize disruption to the lives of our current employees, we have simplified the take-home vehicle policy (ACSO 223) by automatically grandfathering in those who relied on past take-home vehicle policy, including even those who were outside the range of past policy. In order to balance the budget for raises and release our employees from the convoluted 2020 take-home vehicle policy, you will see the policy is now similar to what we've seen here for decades, requiring employees to live within Alachua County if they wish to take their agency vehicle home. This geographic requirement is common among law enforcement agencies, some of which have eliminated take-home options or started charging employees to take vehicles home, and serves the public interest in regards to response times and community membership. Keeping our vehicles in the county reduces fleet and fuel costs. For marked vehicles, this also serves to elevate the Sheriff's Office presence in the county, which is a known crime-deterrent service to the public.

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In order to make Higher Education (ACSO 337) more accessible and to encourage employees to avail themselves of this opportunity, we have increased the amount of the education allowance to \$2000 a year and redesigned it to be advanced to the employee for classes so our employees don't have to come out of pocket then apply for reimbursement.

As an additional benefit, you will notice that we have added two more paid holidays (ACSO 329) to your calendar, Good Friday and Juneteenth. I hope these will allow everyone to spend a little more time with their families in further recognition of the difficult and demanding jobs we do at the Sheriff's Office.

We have come far in our first year together. I look forward to paving the path for fulfilling careers in public service for all of you and I am grateful for this opportunity to be your Sheriff. I have extended these benefits, the largest enhancement for employees in ACSO history, to all our employees. The Sergeants/Lieutenants bargaining unit voted to adopt them. The salary increase, FTD pay increase, extra holidays, new vehicle policy, and educational advancement benefit was, unfortunately, not ratified by the Deputy Sheriffs, whose PBA bargaining unit voted down these changes (86-43 with 69 not voting) pursuant to their union right. Though they have voted these benefits down, I have re-extended the offer should they reconsider – not only because I believe they deserve it, but because each time I go to the County Commission to raise pay, I can build on what we achieve each year. This currently offered benefit is over \$502,205 just for non-supervisor deputies, a drastic increase for current and future Deputy Sheriffs at ACSO and a major incentive for recruitment and retention.

We're providing vital services to our community while facing global pandemic, nationwide employment shortages, and now a foreign war. Look to your buddy on the left and right to acknowledge the "new normal" that we depend on one another to endure. It is not normal. It is exceptional. I hope to continue bringing you more benefits worthy of the sacrifices you and your family make in the name of safety for a public who doesn't always understand.

Respectfully,



Clovis Watson, Jr.  
Sheriff