

*Probation Officers Association of Ontario*  
**P R E S I D E N T ' S M E S S A G E**  
**May 2005**

The spring has been very busy for your Association. We have made significant progress in several areas which will be covered in this report.

Firstly – after nearly a decade, we have been successful in our endless advocacy to return to the full-funding model for the POAO Symposium! As you'll see in the letters enclosed from both ADMs (MCSCS and MCYS), there is full funding available for this year's Symposium for a maximum 200 POs in MCSCS and 100 POs in MCYS. It was 1995 when we last had such funding levels on the adult side, and youth justice has been without full funding for the past couple of years. This is a significant gain for the profession, Association, and the membership, and demonstrates recognition of the important role that the Symposium plays in professional development of front-line staff. Please keep in mind the POAO membership deadline of June 30<sup>th</sup> as the Ministries will pay the member rate only for registration.

We are fully cognizant of the fact that this positive news is tempered by the current bargaining situation; however hope that POs will enjoy the benefits of this funding model and attend what will undoubtedly be another successful conference. This year's Symposium takes place in Kingston - further details are enclosed in this Monitor issue as well as on the website.

As I have mentioned in previous correspondence and meetings, we were working with the producers of W-5 to develop a show on Conditional Sentencing issues. This show aired on April 23, 2005 to over 1. 2 million viewers and the feedback has been most positive to date. If you missed the opportunity to view this program, there is a link from our website to the program on the CTV site. We continue to monitor Conditional Sentence issues and are hopeful for change in this legislation.

Another very positive development was our role in delivering a workshop at the Ontario Conference of Judges. As previously referenced to the membership, we had endeavoured to play a role at this gathering to open up discussions between the judiciary and ourselves, and provide information to a large group in one session. The organizers followed up on this offer and we spent several months developing a workshop including education about our profession, Pre-Sentence Reports and sentencing issues, and ways that both professions can assist each other.

Unfortunately after investing significant time into the development of this initiative, I was unable to attend and present due to personal reasons. My thanks to Don Larman, VP, for presenting on my behalf on very short notice, and Mark O'Sullivan who was originally scheduled to present with me. Feedback from the Justices indicates that Mark and Don did an excellent job with this three-hour workshop. We believe there is an established

relationship now that will allow for more open lines of communication and future educational opportunities.

The POAO Research Project is progressing well. The response rate to the PO Survey was high – over 45% which is much higher than expected. My thanks to all of you who completed the survey – your input is most valuable! The initial report outlining survey results is now complete and will be available at a later date. The results are very interesting and will be beneficial for all to view. Professor Roberts and I have submitted an article on these results for publishing and will keep you informed if this is successful. In the next stage of the project, we have been conducting focus groups as well as individual interviews with Crown, VWAP and Police Representatives. When all information has been gathered, analyzed and written, we will release the final report making many recommendations for improvement to the system and to working relationships.

The Provincial Budget Consultations occurred in the winter, and I appeared at the February 8<sup>th</sup> session and followed-up with a written submission which can be found on our website. Unfortunately we did not receive any hiring announcements regarding additional POs (as promised in the Liberal election campaign) and we continue to advocate for this promised to be fulfilled.

The Province announced an investment in resources for mentally ill offenders which is positive; however our long-standing issue has not been addressed in this announcement. We continue to request that while service providers are funded to deal with such clients, there must be some type of mandatory expectation for them to provide services for high-risk mentally ill offenders in the community. Our front-line professionals continue to be in situations with high risk, hard-to-serve individuals placed on probation without appropriate mental health supports in place. This exposes the community to greater risk as the client isn't appropriately managed. We have been providing this input directly and are hopeful that some agreement could be made in this regard when the new funding is allocated.

PO Week is once again approaching. While we realize the current environment isn't optimal for planning events in your community, we encourage your participation as it is essential that we continue to enhance our profile in communities around Ontario. In addition, this is great time to enjoy the fellowship of colleagues and criminal justice partners, while participating in events and contributing to charities.

On the safety and security front, the Community Visit Risk Assessment Advisory Group has not yet met due to the bargaining situation. I am a member of this committee and will continue to keep you posted of any developments.

The Performance Standards Committee has not met since the end of March. Our discussions have been around Pre-Sentence Reports, assessments and other duties of

the PO as well as hiring and staff supervision issues. An update will be provided when one is available.

We have also been requested by MCSCS to participate in the development of the PAR Conference occurring in November of this year. At this time, we have not participated in these meetings again due to the bargaining situation.

Specific to the youth justice side, we have held quarterly meetings with ADM Deborah Newman and her staff. In addition, we had a separate meeting with Cathy Paul specifically to discuss Extrajudicial Sanction (EJS) issues and the development of other optional provisions of the YCJA such as ISSP. We are pleased that the model the Ministry has embraced for ISSP is the one POAO has promoted (that ISSP be case managed by a PO); however our concerns with EJS continue. There are still no clear answers coming from MCYS or MAG with regards to current pilot projects under development. We continue to emphasize the benefits of going with the direct service delivery model for EJS, and encourage the Ministry to reinvest any savings realized from terminating such agency contracts into needed community programming. We are still perplexed by the assignment of a Support Staff as CLO at the Newmarket Courthouse, with the title of Extra-Judicial Sanctions Coordinator. The Ministry has responded to our concern by reviewing this situation and a response will be forthcoming.

Other issues discussed with YJS specifically are the development of a Safety and Security committee, similar to MCSCS, of which we will be a member. We have also expressed concerns around lack of available technology in remote areas and resultant workload impact, on-going YCJA issues, and other issues related to the transition. POAO prepared a response to the CFSA review which is available in the Position Papers section of our website.

POs were recently made aware through the media of the discussions between the Province and Federal Government around functions of Ontario Parole being assigned to the National Parole Board and Corrections Canada. We have opposed this initiative for a variety of reasons including lack of continuity in service, contradiction between this plan and the offender-focused model (which emphasizes a continuum from institution to community), as well as our on-going goal of protecting the integral role of the PO. Our official response to this issue will be on the website. Please do not hesitate to provide your thoughts on this issue to me directly.

As always, POAO is not involved in the bargaining process itself. However, we are hopeful that the members of our profession are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. To all of you during these difficult times – stay strong, take care of yourselves, and stay together.

All the best,  
Cathy Hutchison