

# RE: Help Stop the Political Persecution of Officer Ernie Freestone

This letter is in support of the Plumsted police officer pictured on the right—Officer Ernie Freestone. This picture was taken after Officer Freestone had just assisted the New Egypt First Aid Squad in delivering the baby he is shown holding. Officer Freestone has said that this moment was among one of his proudest in service to our community. Many of you with children in our schools will recognize Officer Freestone from the time he spent as our School Resource Officer. Others among you may remember Ernie from the years of dedication and respect he has shown our community since joining the Plumsted Police Department in 2001.



Officer Ernie Freestone holding a baby he had just assisted in delivering.

Unfortunately, Officer Freestone has become caught up in our township's toxic political atmosphere. Ernie has now been off active duty, *without pay* since January of 2008! Surely, you must be wondering what very serious offense Officer Freestone must have committed to warrant such harsh treatment, right? After all, you may recall that prior to his recent resignation; Lt. George Titko received seven months of full paid leave while he was being investigated by the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office for charges against him.

Actually, Officer Freestone has done nothing wrong. Rather, he is the victim of political retribution for exercising his First Amendment right of free speech. The following is a chronology of Officer Freestone's personal nightmare:

## The Background

- In October of 2006, Officer Ernie Freestone was instrumental in securing the local PBA's backing of a political candidate, who was, at the time, running against the incumbent, Mayor Ron Dancer.
- During this time, our dedicated police force had been working for years without a contract. In fact, for 18 months the Township would not even meet with the PBA to discuss the contract.
- Two weeks after the PBA endorsement of Mayor Dancer's opponent was made public, the Township suddenly settled its contract with the PBA and wrangled a "retraction" of the PBA endorsement.
- After this set of events, Officer Freestone was warned by his fellow officers, as well as by Lt Titko personally, that the "township wanted him gone" since he was "speaking out against the township and mayor."

## The Setup

- In November of 2007, one of Officer Freestone's fellow police officers advised him that Lt Titko had discussed a law enforcement magazine article he had recently read that outlined a "Step By Step Guide" about how to use a "Fitness for Duty Exam" to "rid a police department of a 'problem officer'."
- This officer noted Lt Titko had stated, "*This is how I am getting rid of that f\*#@! Freestone. I can't wait to show Ronnie [Dancer].*"

## The Persecution

- Two short months later—in January, 2008—Lt Titko advised Officer Freestone that he was being placed on "medical leave" for being "stressed out and depressed." Ernie was sent to a hospital for an examination,

after which the hospital released Officer Freestone advising that he was **not** a threat and that he was fit for duty.

- In addition to the hospital's initial assessment, Officer Freestone has been cleared by no less than five (yes, #5) separate medical professionals over the course of the past year as "**fit for duty**."
- The only "evidence" the township has brought forth as justification of Officer Freestone's "medical leave" was from one doctor secured and hired solely by the township. This "medical professional" administered psychological profiling tests to determine Officer Freestone's fitness for duty. Ernie Freestone passed all of these tests with flying colors. Yet, this "doctor" still rendered an "opinion" that Officer Freestone was unfit for duty—based not on the standard, accepted psychological tests that should be used and that Ernie Freestone passed—but rather based solely on his "opinion" formed in large part by Lt Titko's statements about Officer Freestone's fitness for duty.
- Since that time, the last doctor Officer Freestone saw for an evaluation was mutually agreed upon **ahead of time** (by the township's attorney, Officer Freestone's attorney, and the termination hearing officer) as being the final arbiter as to Ernie Freestone's fitness for duty. This physician fully cleared Officer Freestone as "fit for duty without any reservations."
- To date, the township has yet to reinstate Officer Freestone.

### **The Continuing Politics**

- This persecution of Officer Ernie Freestone has continued for almost 20 months now under the guidance and leadership of our Plumsted Township Committee, Committeeman Eric Sorchik (the township's police liaison), and Mayor Ronald Dancer.
- In addition to all the politics outlined above, during the termination hearings for Officer Freestone that began in May 2009, several police officers have testified **under oath** that they heard threats from Lt Titko about Officer Freestone's job and that they believed these threats originated with the Mayor – Ron Dancer.

It is now **long past time** for the political games with regard to Officer Freestone's employment to stop—he deserves to be reinstated immediately. Ernie Freestone has a family that he needs to provide for—two small children and a wife who has been battling cancer. Over the course of the past 18 months of "medical leave" without pay, Ernie's house has gone into foreclosure—all as a result of the fact that Officer Freestone dared to publicly oppose the Township Committee and Mayor.

We are urging as many citizens who are able to turn out at the September 2 Township Committee meeting to demand that the township finally treat Officer Freestone with the fairness that he is entitled to by reinstating him to his job at once. Please join us:

**Plumsted Township Committee Meeting**

8:00 PM, Wednesday, September 2, 2009

At the Municipal Building, 121 Evergreen Rd, New Egypt, NJ 08533

Warm Regards,  
Friends of Ernie

For more information see,

<http://twitter.com/PlumstedNews> and

<http://apps.facebook.com/causes/235974/39251452?m=6d54c0aa>