

# Luzerne County

P E N N S Y L V A N I A

**Sheriff Michael A. Savokinas**  
 LUZERNE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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To Citizens and Members of the Media,

With a heavy heart and deep regret, effective today, Tuesday September 01, 2009 at 4pm, I am resigning my position as Luzerne County Sheriff. I have informed Governor Rendell of my intentions this morning.

I do this after many weeks of soul searching, since one of the highlights of my law enforcement career has been serving the people of Luzerne County as their Sheriff.

In spite of this, I feel I can no longer do justice to my job without the co-operation of the current county commissioner leadership. They seemed more concerned with budget and tax cuts which in the Sheriff's Department costs the taxpayers more in money and more importantly protection.

During the past two years, my office has seen significant cuts in money and staff. A prime example of these cuts is the \$200,000.00 reduction in the Sheriff Department's budget before I even took office. Service also suffered as twenty part-time and four full-time employees were laid off. These employees were vital in helping to maintain efficiency and safety in this vital office.

Another reason for my resignation is that the powers that be and some in the news media seemed intent on ruining my reputation. The incident that illustrates this is when drugs were found in one of the department's vehicles by me and my deputies. Although not standard police procedure, this incident was reported to Luzerne County's Chief of Detectives, the Wilkes-Barre Police Department, and the Duryea Police Department. I took these extra steps to protect my name and the reputation of the Sheriff's Department.

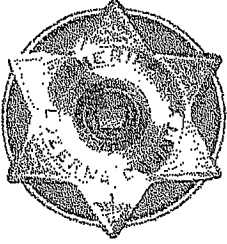
The FBI was contacted to investigate this matter. Some in the media used this story to further drag my reputation through the mud. When this story broke, it was implied that I was a drug user. As the story circulated, I was forced to explain to my 11 year old son that I do not use drugs. In fact, I have spent countless hours fighting the war on drugs throughout my seventeen years in law enforcement in various capacities. To ease public concerns, I publicly challenged anyone in the local news media to pick a date and time for me to be drug tested. I am still waiting for them to contact me over this challenge.

I believe these drugs were planted as a possible political vendetta since something similar happened to me a few years ago. At that time, the now former Avoca Police Chief attempted to set me up by fabricating a story of drug use and sales from my family restaurant. These stories were proven to be untrue with the arrest, removal, and conviction of the then Avoca Police Chief.

When I campaigned for the office of Sheriff, there were several issues that I felt needed to be addressed and corrected. The most important issue was the real estate division of the office. According to an audit done by then County Controller Mary Ann Petrilla, numerous accounting errors along with sloppy and poor bookkeeping were sited. The biggest concern of the audit was a major discrepancy regarding hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars that were never turned over to the general fund between 2005 and 2007. This resulted in the tax payers losing thousands of dollars in interest.

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I spoke with the Commissioner Chair Woman personally to request a forensic audit. Her reply was "If you can find it in your budget, you handle the matter." My administration then contacted the FBI and State Auditor General in an attempt to clean the mess that was left from the previous administration.

Six months later, my administration located and turned over approximately \$436,000.00 to the Luzerne County General Fund. As of August 2009, an additional \$530,000.00 was also turned over. These monies should have been detected by the County Controller's office and the previous Sheriff Department's administration between 2005 and 2007.

The second issue that has plagued my administration was a NO bid copier contract which was costing the taxpayers in 2006 \$487.00 per month. This contract was for sixty months at a cost of approximately \$29,220 over the course of the contract. Shortly after I took office, this contract was cancelled.

This past January, my office placed out the legal and fair bidding requirement per County policy and procedures in advertising. This was done for the first time in thirty years and resulted in a savings of approximately \$200,000.00 per year. This became an issue with County Chairwoman who attempted to undermine my decision to award this contract to the lowest bidder. Several months later, Luzerne County awarded all of its advertising to the same newspaper my office had awarded its ads. The result has been additional substantial savings for the taxpayers.

Another major area of contention that I brought to the attention of County Officials dealt with the security of our Courthouse and other county owned buildings. There are currently untrained men and women, through no fault of their own, risking their lives daily. This is a vital concern that I raised with some county officials which fell on deaf ears.

In the past year, I have seen Security and court related offices filling positions and hiring new staff. With crime on the rise in our county, my office continues to see a larger case load with fewer employees. I feel this is a matter of public safety.

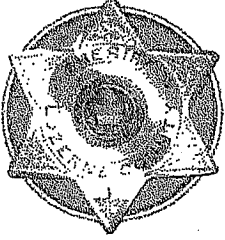
Throughout my tenure as Luzerne County Sheriff, I have been committed not only to serving and protecting the people of this county but also assisting the vast number of law enforcement agencies throughout Luzerne County.

Recently, the Chairwoman and staff, questioned my authority regarding assisting other outside law enforcement agencies. The result had been another "witch hunt" that caused the counties' insurance carrier to inform me that I was acting outside of my realm and that I placed the county at risk due to inadequate coverage. Thru research of the insurance policy, I concluded that the insurance carrier was incorrect. My belief was validated when my office was requested to assist police with security at the Pittston Tomato Festival. The county solicitor informed me that the Insurance Company had erred and my office always had adequate coverage.

The final incident cemented my decision to resign my position as Luzerne County Sheriff was when my wife and I vacationed this summer in Las Vegas for our wedding anniversary. I was contacted by members of the news media questioning my integrity by asking me if the vacation was paid for with county money. The truth is that my wife had paid for the trip. The accusations were fruitless and there was no evidence to base them on. I see this as another lie orchestrated by county officials and given to the media for political gain.

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I feel my presence in this seat has created and continues to create unnecessary distractions. When I ran for this seat I wanted to change the office for the better, but it's apparent that the majority county commissioners are more worried about budget cuts than the safety and protection of county residents. I can no longer watch as crime rates grow only to have Commissioner Urban criticize me in the paper saying I need to be more concerned with administrative duties rather than crime fighting. At this time, my presence seems to be a distraction for my already over-worked staff.

In closing, I wish to thank all my deputies, staff members, family, friends, supporters and to the residents of Luzerne County for giving me the opportunity to serve you as your Sheriff. I believe that I am leaving the office in much better condition than how it was left to me.

Enclosed is list of the Luzerne County Sheriff Department accomplishments since I took office in 2008.

Sincerely Yours,

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