Written by Erin Wilson
Monday, 20 August 2012 08:01

EAST ST. LOUIS – August 16, 2012. Governor Pat Quinn today signed a new law to create the Metro East Police District and increase public safety in the region. The new law will strengthen law and order in four Metro East communities. Today's action was the latest by Governor Quinn, who was joined by local legislators at the Illinois Army National Guard post, to improve public safety in Illinois.

“There is no place for corruption in East St. Louis, Alorton, Brooklyn, Washington Park or anywhere in Illinois," Governor Quinn said. “The Metro East Police District will bring the full force of law to these communities and better protect the residents of the region."

Sponsored by Sen. James Clayborne, Jr., (D-East St. Louis) and Rep. Eddie Lee Jackson, Sr., (D-East St. Louis), Senate Bill 549 establishes the Metro East Police District and the Metro East Police District Commission to oversee the district.

The 17-member Commission will provide oversight for the four municipal police departments and will tie funding to the meeting of standards set by the Commission. While all four departments will continue to operate independently, the Commission will establish financial and ethical rules for them, and will be responsible for applying for and spending state and federal appropriations and grants.

The Commission will be comprised of seven members appointed by the Governor, four members appointed by the Mayor of East St. Louis with city council consent, and one member each appointed by the Village Presidents of Alorton, Brooklyn and Washington Park, with village board consent. The Director of the Illinois State Police, St. Clair County State’s Attorney and Director of the Southern Illinois Law Enforcement Commission (or their designees) will serve as ex-officio members. Commission members will be unpaid.

The legislation is designed to respond to cases of corruption and crime in the region. Felony charges have been filed against 14 members of law enforcement agencies from these four communities in the past 18 months, according to the St. Clair County State’s Attorney’s Office. Offenses included stealing evidence, texting a fugitive to warn him police were moving in, offering to drop arrest charges against a female driver in exchange for a sex act, defrauding the state and theft of bulletproof vests.

“The double threats of violence and corruption have cast a shadow on these cities for a long, long time, one continuously perpetuating the other,” said St. Clair County State’s Attorney Brendan Kelly, who spearheaded the reform. “This law is a first step towards giving the people a fighting chance at justice.”

“As an educator in East St. Louis, I saw children who were doomed before they even had a chance,” said Rep. Jackson. “This law puts the crooks on notice: the bad old days are over.” The Metro East Police District is wholly in Rep. Jackson’s legislative district.

“This is a unique solution to an unacceptable problem,” said Sen. Clayborne, a former St. Clair County Assistant State’s Attorney. “Corruption in the criminal justice system will not be tolerated.”

The conditions in the four communities have also caught the eye of the Federal Government, which has prosecuted several official corruption cases there.

“I strongly support this legislation which will bring much needed reform to police departments in East St. Louis, Washington Park, Alorton and Brooklyn,” said U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL). “For too long, residents of these communities have lived in a climate of violence. I commend Senator Clayborne and Representative Jackson for spearheading the passage of this important reform legislation that will not only improve the safety and security of the Metro East area, but will also help the police departments conduct themselves with professionalism and without corruption. I thank Governor Quinn for signing it into law.”

“This is an historic moment for the Metro East region,” said Steve Wigginton, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois. “The formation of this commission is the beginning of a new era of professional law enforcement for four communities that desperately need it. From the beginning, State’s Attorney Brendan Kelly and I agreed that the status quo is unacceptable and we needed to bring historic change to law enforcement in the affected communities. I thank those stakeholders and elected officials for supporting our vision and bringing this commission to life.”

Metro East includes six counties in southwest Illinois and is home to 700,000 residents. Other proponents of the new law include the Illinois Municipal League, NAACP and Illinois Fraternal Order of Police. The law takes effect Jan. 1, 2013.

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