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State's largest police union signals intent to file major lawsuit against high-level elected officials in Southeast Texas for illegal "union-busting" actions

AUSTIN — The state's largest law enforcement labor union, the Combined Law Enforcement Associations, or CLEAT, is signaling its intentions to file a major lawsuit in state district court for illegal "union-busting" actions by high-level elected officials in Southeast Texas.

"In recent weeks, it has become evident that the highest level of elected officials are actively conspiring to violate the fundamental constitutional rights of the unionized county employees," said Charley Wilkison, Executive Director of CLEAT.

"No matter how powerful or important you are the law is clear," said Wilkison. "You cannot use official oppression or your position to deny the hard-working women and men of the Orange County Sheriffs Office their legal rights to collectively bargain. You cannot negotiate in bad faith, and you cannot use punitive actions against their working conditions."

"Bad faith bargaining, coercion, and stripping away settled conditions of employment during negotiations is a time-tested anti-union strategy designed to break the local union, intimidate the local union members and achieve a certain outcome."

CLEAT has filed two collective bargaining contract grievances this week against Sheriff Jimmy Lane Mooney and the County of Orange, Texas, on behalf of the sheriff's department employees.

The grievances allege failure to follow the law regarding Chapter 174 of the Local Government Code that governs procedures during collective bargaining negotiations. The other grievance alleges punitive actions against employees.

The filing of the grievances demonstrates CLEAT's commitment to follow the law and bring the parties back to the negotiating table in an effort for a good faith effort to obtain an employment contract. If the county continues to violate the law and rights of the unionized employees, then CLEAT will go forward with the union-busting lawsuits.

"The voters of Orange County made the decision to give union rights to their sheriff's office employees in 1990. It's the law. Even the politicians must follow the law with respect to the constitutional and union rights of the working people who protect and serve their communities," said Wilkison.