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Statewide Crime Panel Needed, Broward Leader Tells Legislators

March 5, 1986 | By Marilyn Weeks, Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — Calling Florida's fragmented law enforcement system "woefully inadequate," the Broward County Crime Commission chairman told legislators Tuesday a statewide panel is needed to lead the fight against organized crime and public corruption.

"We don't have a coherent plan to fight organized crime," Frank Pinter told a House Criminal Justice subcommittee. "The effort is fragmented throughout the state, and unless we get organized as organized crime is organized, we're not going to be successful."

Pinter said the proposal would create an agency similar to successful crime commissions in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Phil Cohen, vice chairman of the Broward panel, said the success of the commissions in those three states has driven some of the organized crime activities southward to Florida. Pinter said that in one instance, 214 out of 350 subpoenas issued by one of the out-of-state commissions were served in Broward County.

"We're so fragmented. The battle is being lost, especially in South Florida," Pinter said. "The information in one crime computer is not in another. One agency doesn't know what the others are doing."

Pinter conceded that it is too late to set up a statewide crime commission this year, but urged the subcommittee to create a study committee to act before the 1987 legislative session.

Rep. Peter Deutsch, D-Sunrise, subcommittee chairman, said approval of a proposed constitutional amendment creating the position of statewide prosecutor could be the first step toward dealing with the concerns presented by Pinter. Legislators last year approved the amendment to go on the ballot this November.

"I'm committed to having an extensive review of a statewide commission before the 1987 session," Deutsch said. "We need to get rid of duplication, but we also have some territorial problems (among agencies)."

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement opposes the proposal, calling it unnecessary.

"With a statewide grand jury, the Governor's Council on Organized Crime, and the proposed statewide prosecutor, the state has all it needs," said Fred Schneyer, information and communications coordinator for FDLE.

Endorsed by the Broward County Chiefs of Police, the county's 28 municipalities, numerous civic and community groups, and 40 police chiefs around the state, the proposal for the crime

commission is not new. A bill for a statewide crime commission passed the House in 1978, but died in the Senate.

According to the proposal, the agency would:

Operate on a fulltime, year-round basis.

Have statewide subpoena powers and power to give immunity to witnesses.

Hold both public and private hearings, as needed, anywhere in the state.

The plan suggests a four-member crime commission, two members appointed by the governor and one each by the Senate president and House speaker, with each member limited to two, 4-year terms. The commission would name its staff, including an executive director and assistant, accountants, investigators, intelligence analysts, computer operators and secretaries.

Pinter acknowledged that each agency ``jealously guards its turf,`` and that there is some duplication, but, ``I don't care where it is or what they call it as long as they do it.``