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## Key Colony cops move toward union

By RICHARD TAMBORRINO Special to The Citizen

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The Key Colony Beach police force, a team of five, who filed interest cards in early May to begin the process of unionizing, ratified the move in a 5-0 vote on September 26. This police force was the lone remaining law enforcement group in Monroe County that was not unionized.

Andrew M. Axelrad, general counsel for the Dade County Police Benevolent Association (PBA), who is handling the union efforts, told The Keys Citizen that “the PBA prevailed 5-0” and that “the city has 15 days to appeal, but they won’t”, since, as he stated, “there’s nothing to appeal”. He added that negotiations between the group and the city will now commence.

The Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC), consisting of three commissioners appointed by the governor to oversee state labor relations, reviewed the KCB police force’s constitutional right to collectively bargain on July 7. Public employees’ right to unionize is written in the Florida Constitution in its very first article in Section 6.

KCB’s fiscal year 2023-24 budget may now require further adjustments, since the city of Marathon recently increased the three-year Fire/EMS contract with KCB by \$150,000 in year one, with additional increases in years two and three expected. A three-year collective bargaining agreement will now be negotiated,

which could result in both higher pay for its officers and a “new baseline of benefits” now that unionization has been ratified Axelrad said.

This ratification would also appear to pave the way for the promotion of officer Jamie Buxton to the vacant KCB sergeant position, which has been pending throughout the negotiation process. At the June City Commission meeting, it appeared to be a foregone conclusion she would earn that promotion but has been delayed since then. Axelrad had raised the issue of her promotion with City Administrator Dave Turner in early August, with Turner claiming he needed to maintain the status quo while the union negotiation process was ongoing.

Axelrad doesn't know specifically what prompted this police force to seek unionizing, he said. However, Turner communicated a series of potentially punitive directives against the KCB police in early May before the unionizing process even began. Directives like requesting that officers leaving the city complete a new form each time they do so and questioning the substantiation of having take-home vehicles, plus regimented Sunset Park patrol orders and maintaining the cleanliness of vehicles for spot checks all likely contributed to their decision.

No meetings between the PBA and the city have yet been scheduled.