

Testimony Prepared for the  
Senate Workforce Development Committee  
By: Donnell Preskey, NDACo  
March 15, 2023



**RE: HB 1307 “Back the Blue” LE Grants**

Chairman Wobbema and committee members, I’m Donnell Preskey with the North Dakota Association of Counties. In my role at NDACo, I serve as the executive director for the North Dakota Sheriffs and Deputies Association.

The Sheriffs & Deputies Association strongly supports HB 1307 and appreciates the work of the sponsors to support local law enforcement through this “Back the Blue and BROWN” initiative. We worked with Representative Shannon Roers Jones and the House Appropriations committee on amendments that the House adopted. The bill as it stands now, truly will accomplish this bill’s intentions. It will provide funds to every local police and sheriff’s office to use for hiring and retention bonuses. The House also expanded the bill to allow for the funds to be used for recruitment and retention of corrections officers.

Based on information from the North Dakota Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Board, there are 1,750 licensed officers employed by city and county agencies (that includes individuals working in multiple agencies). Therefore, the \$5 million translates to \$2,850 / an officer. But it’s important to note that as this bill was developed, the Chief or Sheriff has the discretion in deciding how to use the funds for hiring and retention bonuses or paying tuition for trainees.

A summary of data collected from Sheriffs and Chiefs on recruitment and retention issues in the state is included on the back side of this testimony. It outlines the challenges our local agencies are having in hiring and retaining officers.

This bill will have an impact in our state. Every local law enforcement agency will be provided “Back the Blue” funds that can be utilized in a timely manner to hopefully secure the workforce necessary to keep our great state safe.

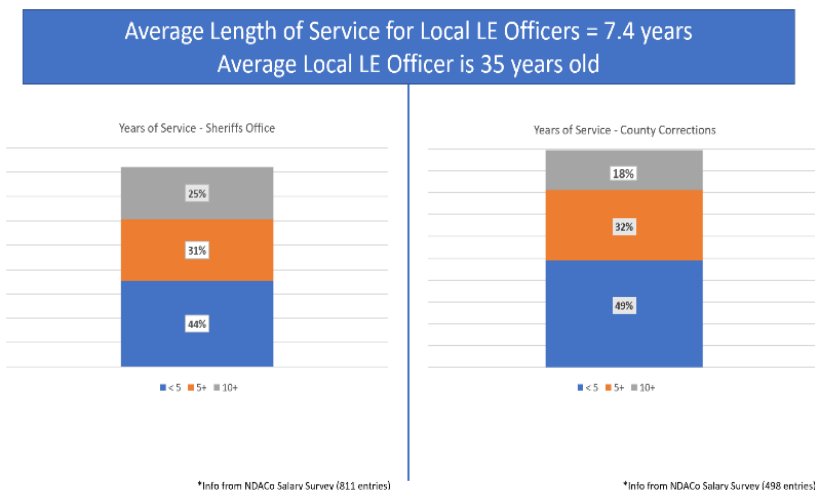
NDACo conducted a survey of local law enforcement on recruitment and retention during the 2021-2023 interim. The survey was sent to Sheriffs, Jail Administrators and Chiefs. The data represents responses from 66 local law enforcement departments including 44 Sheriffs and Jail Administrators and 22 Chiefs of Police.

The data illustrates the struggle local agencies have in hiring individuals. Based on the 66 departments responding to the survey, there were 1189 licensed officer positions budgeted for in 2021, and at any given time about 10 percent of the positions were open.

The average local law enforcement officer is 35 years old and serves for 7.4 years. The first five years are the most critical in retaining officers.

Of the County Sheriff's Office and County Corrections Employees, 80% have under 10 years of experience.

Most of the responding agencies experienced a less than 5% turnover ratio; however, a substantial number of agencies experienced somewhere between 11% and 49% turnover.



Based on the responses and narratives provided by Sheriffs and Chiefs, the struggle of dealing with vacant positions is constant. Almost 60% indicated that they “always” or “usually” have a delay in filling positions because of lack of applicants and interest. Even more concerning is that when asked if they have filled a position with a candidate, they felt was under qualified at the time – nearly half answered “Yes”.

Pay is the greatest reason officers are leaving their jobs. According to the latest NDACo Salary Survey, the average salary for our county law enforcement folks serving at the Sheriff's Office and Jail is \$58,000.

A significant discrepancy is evident when you compare the salary ranges in small vs large counties. For example, A chief deputy in Griggs County makes \$42,000 while a chief deputy in Williams County makes \$112,000 (3 times as much).

Most officers leaving their jobs are going to another local department – highlighting again the competition for these positions within our state and between departments. The second greatest draw is a non-law enforcement position.

Pay and benefits were ranked as the top assets in retaining officers. In addition, almost half of the respondents commented that increasing pay and benefits was a necessary strategy to attract and retain workers.