

Testimony Prepared for the  
House Appropriations  
By: Donnell Preskey, NDACo  
January 18, 2023



**RE: HB 1184 Law Enforcement Appreciation Grant**

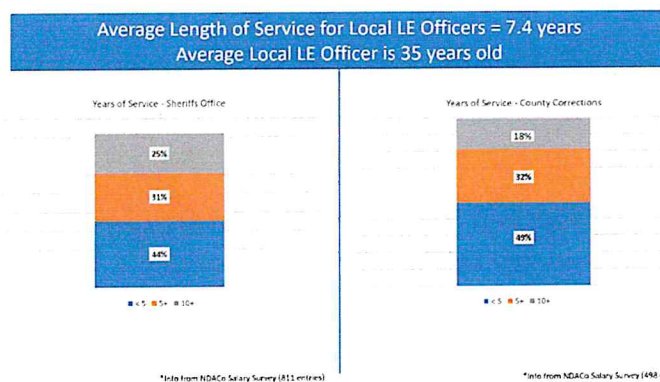
Mr. Chairman and committee members, I'm Donnell Preskey with the North Dakota Association of Counties. In my role at NDACo, I serve as the executive director for the North Dakota Sheriffs and Deputies Association.

The Sheriffs & Deputies Association supports HB 1184 and requests a Do Pass recommendation. In our discussions with county commissioners and Sheriffs, the recruitment and retention of officers and correctional staff is one of the greatest issues they face. An interim study was done on this issue, but unfortunately no recommendations came from the committee. However, to assist that committee NDACo conducted a survey of local law enforcement.

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.

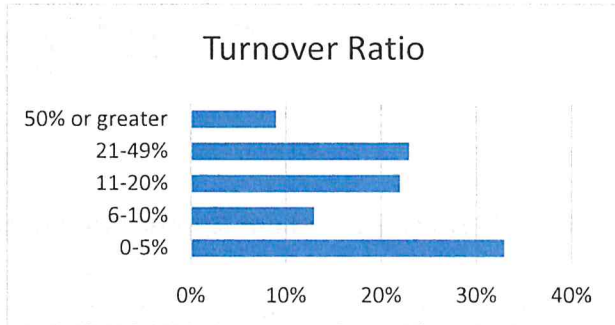
The data tells us what we already knew, it's a struggle to find men and women to enter the law enforcement field. It is a high stress, highly scrutinized job with a schedule that is less than desirable. In addition, our locals have a difficult time competing with salaries in other professional fields. As you know, our local agencies are funded by local property tax dollars – where the pressure is high to keep budgets level and taxes low.

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 proposal in HB 1184 provides a bonus to law enforcement if they have served at least 4 consecutive years. This time frame is very important. The first five years is the most critical in retaining officers.

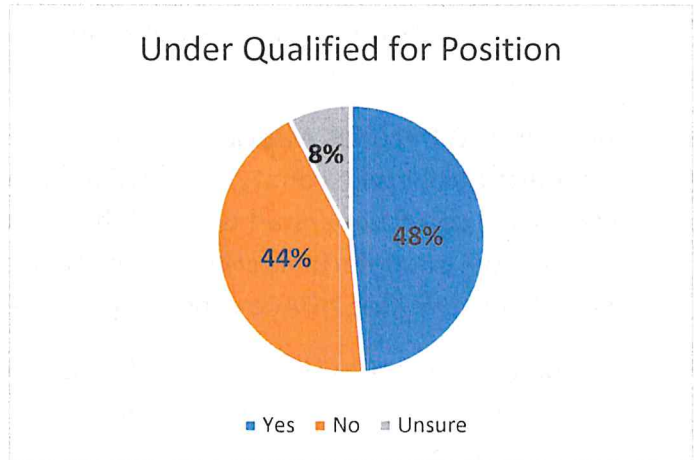
When looking at the years of services for both the Sheriff's Office and County Corrections, they both show that the bulk of the employees (80%) have under 10 years of experience. This obviously illustrates the degree of churn in employees in both areas.



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 reasons officers are leaving their jobs. According to the latest NDACo Salary Survey, the average salary for our county law enforcement folks serving at the Sheriffs 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 \$128,000 (3 times as much). You can imagine how it is more challenging to retain officers in rural counties that tend to require longer hours, more on-call, and where there is a lack of housing.

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.

The appropriation attached to this bill is hefty. But seriously as a state, we can’t afford to not address this critical situation. This does translate to public safety. Your consideration of funding to assist in retaining officers in the law enforcement to help keep our communities safe is appreciated.