

Government Finance Committee
House Bill 1494 Comments
February 9, 2022

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I'm Captain Jody Skogen, and I serve as the Administrative Services Commander for the Highway Patrol. I've prepared a general overview related to the recruitment, retention, turnover, and training of Highway Patrol officers. The data I'm sharing with you today reflect trends and averages from 2016 through 2021. Our agency currently consists of 193 authorized full-time positions, 159 of which are licensed officers.

RECRUITMENT

I'll begin by discussing our recruitment efforts. Recruitment of Highway Patrol troopers takes place year-round and is best described as a blend of proactive and spontaneous efforts. Our proactive recruitment efforts include utilization of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn as well as active participation at career fairs. We also utilize common forms of paid media, including television, radio, newspaper, and billboards. Our agency creates marketing ads which highlight the rewarding as well as the challenging aspects of serving as a trooper. These paid media recruitment efforts typically coincide with our application acceptance period, ensuring potential candidates can apply when their interest is peaked.

History has shown our most effective form of recruitment is linked to the spontaneous efforts initiated by our employees. These employees market our agency through their interaction with the public and in the professional way they carry themselves and perform their duties. These recruitment efforts play out throughout the year, and employees are encouraged to capitalize on recruitment opportunities whenever they present themselves. We offer internships, and we also encourage potential candidates to simply ride along for a few hours, giving them direct exposure to our work environment and our mission. Our website contains valuable information regarding our mission and the benefits of serving as a trooper. Visitors to the Highway Patrol website are encouraged to share their

email address with us if they wish to be notified of job announcements in our agency. We currently have 455 people who have visited our NDHP Career page and registered to be notified of when our next trooper hiring process begins. We will share job related information with them, as well as detailed application instructions, later this spring when we post our job announcement.

The Highway Patrol provides a \$2,500 sign on bonus to all recruits who successfully complete probation. An additional \$2,500 bonus is given upon initial employment to any candidate who has previous law enforcement experience. Years of service credit salary adjustments are granted, up to a maximum of three years, to new hires who have previous law enforcement experience. Current employees who recruit a trooper applicant who successfully completes probation receive a \$1,000 recruitment bonus.

The hiring process for troopers is extensive and lengthy, and we continue to look for efficiencies that will not risk compromising the integrity of the process. Our objective is to hire troopers once per year. The posting of our job announcement usually takes place in March to coincide with college graduates getting ready to enter the workforce. You will find a recent job posting attached, should you wish to refer to it. We have completed five hiring processes since 2016, and we've averaged 102 applicants per process. Our hiring process includes administering written tests which evaluate aptitude in arithmetic, reading comprehension, grammar, and writing. Successful candidates must clear a background investigation, as well as pass a job-related interview, a psychological evaluation, a medical examination, as well as meet our minimum fitness standard. Conditional offers of employment are made in July, and final offers are made in August.

RETENTION

A variety of factors affect the retention of our sworn personnel. Key factors include competitive salaries and benefits, a healthy work/life balance and diverse assignment opportunities within our agency. We encourage every officer to strive to work towards their strengths and interests by seeking to excel in some area of responsibility. The Highway Patrol has opportunities to serve on the Emergency Response, the Crash Reconstruction, the K9, or the Criminal Interdiction team. We have officers assigned to the Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program, to serve on our Honor Guard and Dignitary Protection teams. Our agency has a cultural

liaison officer, drug recognition experts, pilots, size and weight enforcement officers and a Homeland Security Coordinator. Many of our officers become instructors and teach a variety of law enforcement related topics.

Equity funding for salaries was provided during the last legislative session. A targeted approach was utilized to ensure the largest increases went to our senior troopers. We also utilized the equity funding to increase on call pay from \$2.00 per hour to 1/5 of an officer's hourly rate. The additional funding helped to better our salary position amongst law enforcement in the state. Performance bonuses are utilized to reward exceptional work effort or accomplishments. The Highway Patrol equips its officers with squad cars, which are a critical component to effectively perform our mission. Our agency is committed to employee wellness and has an excellent retirement system. We have transitioned from eight to ten-hour shifts, a decision that has been well received and has resulted in a stronger work/life balance. The transition from eight to ten-hour shifts resulted in officers receiving an additional 52 days off per year.

TURNOVER

The Highway Patrol is authorized 159 sworn positions, a decrease from 172 authorized sworn in 2016. Since 2016 we have had 44 officers depart our agency, an average of 7.3 departures per year. The average annual turnover rate of our sworn positions during the past six years is 4.5%.

Of the 44 officers who have departed since 2016, 17 retired, 17 resigned and 10 were terminated. The average years of service for those who retired is just over 26 years. The average service time of an officer who chose to resign was 5.53 years, while the average service time for a termination was 5.22 years.

EDUCATION

Recruit troopers report to the Law Enforcement Training Academy (LETA) in mid-September. Their education is divided into two phases. Phase I is called the Basic academy, while Phase II is called the Highway Patrol academy. The LETA mission is broken into two categories, the first of which is to ensure that students are provided with a basic understanding of the social, legal, political, and ethical contexts within which law enforcement services are provided. The second mission aspect is to provide students with the technical competency to perform the duties

of a peace officer in the State of North Dakota to an acceptable level within standard professional norms. During the Basis academy Highway Patrol recruits train alongside newly hired officers from other law enforcement agencies. Basic students receive academic and dynamic scenario-based training, with the goal of them demonstrating proficiency in the Terminal Performance Objectives (TPO's) established by the North Dakota Peace Officer Standards Training Board. This board is commonly referred to as the North Dakota P.O.S.T. Board. The Basic academy culminates with a graduation ceremony, during which officers who have demonstrated proficiency with their TPO's and maintained academic and physical standards receive their North Dakota Peace Officer license.

The Highway Patrol academy is a 10 to 12-week program which begins immediately after the Basic academy ends. During the Highway Patrol academy our recruits build upon the skills developed during Basic, but they also receive advanced training in medical care, crash investigations, emergency vehicle operations and commercial motor vehicle safety regulations.

Highway Patrol recruits begin field training upon completion of the Highway Patrol academy. Each recruit is assigned to work with a field training officer. Our field training officers help transition the recruits from the classroom to the squad car by riding with the recruits for approximately their first two months of working the road. By the completion of the FTO program our new-hire troopers have demonstrated competency with performing both routine as well as high stress work-related tasks.

Training for Highway Patrol officers continues throughout our entire career. Our officers receive training in a variety of different formats that vary from shift meetings at the regional level to annual department in-services. We also utilize online training when applicable. Our officers logged over 23,000 training hours during 2021.

I mentioned earlier that newly hired law enforcement officers must demonstrate proficiency with the Terminal Performance Objectives established by the North Dakota P.O.S.T. Board. I attached the Basic Training Curriculum to this testimony, should you wish to refer to it.

This completes my commentary, and I'll answer any questions you may have for me at this time.

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STATE PATROL TROOPER (2021 Hiring Process)
North Dakota Highway Patrol

Location: Statewide
Salary: \$4,604 to \$5,303 per month depending on experience
Closing Date: April 25, 2021
Projected Hire Date: September 22, 2021 depending on experience

Sign On Bonus! Previous law enforcement experience may receive a \$2,500 sign on bonus when hired; all individuals hired may receive \$2,500 after the successful completion of a one-year probationary period.

SUMMARY OF WORK

The mission of the North Dakota Highway Patrol is to make a difference every day by providing high-quality law enforcement services to keep North Dakota safe and secure. We value loyalty, integrity, commitment, respect, professionalism, and accountability. We provide for public safety through education, responding to emergencies, protecting people and property, enforcing motor vehicle and criminal laws, and promoting good community relations. Hired candidates will begin the Law Enforcement Training Academy on September 22, 2021, or November 29, 2021 if already POST Licensed.

DUTIES AND TASKS

Some of the many duties and tasks required of officers include the following:

- Knowledge and enforcement laws, rules and regulations.
- Respond to and investigate motor vehicle crashes, incidents, potential safety hazards.
- Interdict transport of drugs, contraband, and other criminal activities.
- Inspect commercial vehicles, drivers, and cargo; issue permits for oversize vehicles.
- Respond to hazardous material incidents, natural disasters, and other emergencies.
- Community and media relations promoting traffic safety.
- Participate in the prosecution of offenders, working with attorneys, courts, and administrative hearings.
- Participate in the training of law enforcement personnel at the Law Enforcement Training Academy.
- Opportunities for specialized duties including Reconstructionist, Tactical Response Unit, Armorer, Firearms Instructor, Canine Handler, Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program (MCSAP) Inspector, or Department Aircraft Pilot.

Further detailed information on duties and responsibilities of troopers can be found at <https://www.nd.gov/ndhp/careers/ndhp-trooper-duties-and-responsibilities>.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

1. A citizen of the United States for not less than two years.
2. Age 21 by completion of the Academy.
3. Bachelor's degree OR associate degree combined with 2 years work experience dealing with the public OR associate degree combined with 2 years military service. We will accept 60 semester hours in place of an associate degree. Good verbal, written and interpersonal communication skills.
4. Vision correctable to 20/30 or better, normal color vision and depth perception.
5. Unrestricted driver's license except for corrective lenses; revocation or suspension in the last 3 years are ordinarily ineligible for appointment.
6. Willing to perform work involving personal hazards and irregular hours including night shifts, weekends and holidays.
7. Must not have been convicted of a criminal offense that would harm the integrity of the Patrol. The following convictions will disqualify an applicant: felony, domestic violence, Class A misdemeanor within the last 5 years, Class B misdemeanor within the last 3 years. Any applicant that fails to disclose driving and criminal background information will be automatically disqualified from further consideration.

APPLICATION PROCESS

If you meet all the minimum qualifications **please submit your cover letter, resume, and unofficial college transcript with your application.** Applicants claiming *Veteran's Preference* **must** upload a legible copy of report of separation DD Form 214 or NGB 22 showing Character of Service.

Applicants determined to meet with the minimum qualifications will be contacted by email to set up a written examination at our Regional Offices between April 28-30, 2021, and the online National Police Officer Selection Test (NPOST). **Individuals must bring a current state-issued driver's license with a photo or current state-issued photo identification card to the written examination. Photocopies will not be accepted.**

Applicants who successfully pass the NPOST and Wonderlic Personnel Test will be scheduled for a 30-minute oral interview. Further information on our entire hiring process can be found at <https://www.nd.gov/ndhp/careers/ndhp-trooper-hiring-process>.

Applicants who experience technical difficulties during the application process should contact recruiter@nd.gov or 701.328.3290. For more information or if you need accommodation or assistance in the application or selection process contact 701-328-2447 or ndhphr@nd.gov.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

The North Dakota Highway Patrol does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, genetics, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services and complies with the provisions of the North Dakota Human Rights Act.