

Testimony Prepared for the
House Appropriations
By: Donnell Preskey, NDACo
February 1, 2023



RE: HB 1307 "Back the Blue" LE Grants

Chairman Vigesaa 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 1307 and requests the committee to adopt the amendment presented by Rep. Shannon Roers Jones. The bill as amended will position the state to truly accomplish the intended goal being set out in this "Back the Blue and **Brown**" initiative.

The greatest change the amendment makes is removing the 50% match from a city or county and instead providing "Back the Blue" grant funding directly to the local law enforcement agency based on the number of licensed officers. This is an important change primarily because of timing and effectiveness.

Local governments set their budgets for 2023 a few months ago. Very few counties approved bonuses for officers. Only four of 36 counties that responded to a quick survey indicated they provided bonuses. If the amendment is not adopted, a very slim number of counties will be able to utilize the grant this year, therefore not accomplishing the intent of this initiative. While counties could plan to provide bonuses to qualify for the grant during their next budget cycle; this will delay the funds going to departments and officers until 2024 or closer to 2025.

It's also important to recognize that some counties don't have the resources to provide bonuses to their law enforcement. If the bill is not amended, those officers would be put at a greater disadvantage and more than likely lead to those officers leaving to go to another department that was positioned to take advantage of the incentive.

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. Again, as outlined in the amendment, the Chief or Sheriff would have the discretion in deciding how to use the funds for hiring and retention bonuses or paying tuition for trainees.

Bottom line, the proposed amendment will allow for "Back the Blue" funds to be utilized for how they truly are intended. We strongly support the amendments to HB 1307 as this will provide every local law enforcement agency with "Back the Blue" funds that can be utilized in a timely manner to hopefully secure the workforce necessary to keep our great state safe.

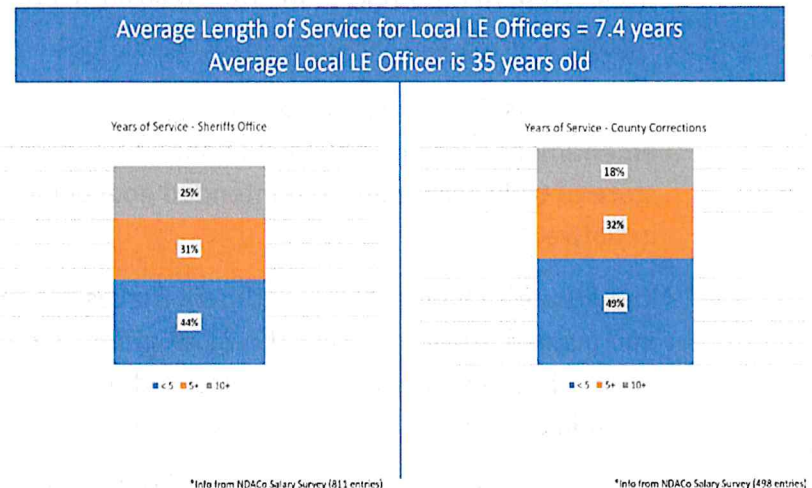
NDACo conducted a survey of local law enforcement on recruitment and retention during the 2021-2023 interim. The survey was sent to Sheriffs, Jail Administrators and Chiefs. The data represents responses from 66 local law enforcement departments including 44 Sheriffs and Jail Administrators and 22 Chiefs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