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## *Report: Pay Gaps Key to Bolstering Police Ranks*

*Building Pipelines, Improving Management and Increasing Political and Community Support also Important*

**(November 9, 2022)** – Today, the Utah Foundation releases *To Protect and Serve: Meeting Law Enforcement Recruiting Challenges in Utah*. The report highlights the scope of the police shortage problem and explores ways that local governments and other stakeholders can address the issue.

Among the findings of the new report:

- Police departments in Salt Lake County appear to be facing unique staffing challenges. The trend among Salt Lake County local law enforcement agencies appears dire, with continually decreasing employment between 2018 and 2021.
- More than half (57%) of respondents to a law enforcement officer survey indicated that they were considering leaving their current agency or employer. Nearly one out of five reported having actually applied to work at another public safety agency during the previous 12 months.
- Pay is the most influential reason for law enforcement officers to consider switching to a job in the private sector. Officers also cited pay as the most influential retention tool.
- The average pay for local law enforcement officers in Utah in 2021 was nearly \$57,000. This compared to more than \$80,000 nationally, indicating that Utah's local officers are paid only 71% of what their national counterparts earn. The latest economic data suggest that recent Utah pay raises have not closed that gap.
- Given the sentiments that officers have expressed about pay, and given the gap between average pay in Utah and the national average, it appears that finding ways to increase pay is the core issue when it comes to both recruitment and retention. And of course, pay is pivotal to recruitment and retention when labor markets are tight.
- Over 70% of cities surveyed in 2022 report that they provided a pay increase the previous year or expect to do so in the coming year – and 62% of cities surveyed will do both. The average pay increase across both years is 13%.
- A survey of police chiefs concurred with cities: Departments have increased pay. This has helped somewhat with recruitment and retention. However, most indicated that they are short-staffed.
- Law enforcement officers in 2022 seem to be happier than they were in 2021, with higher personal morale, higher agency morale, and a higher likelihood that they would recommend their jobs to friends and family. It is unclear whether these sentiments are related to recent pay increases.
- A 2010 legislative change reduced retirement benefits. Officers with the better retirement benefits (those under the old system) were 33% more likely to plan to stay until retirement (when accounting for other factors such as age and experience). A generous retirement package was the second most influential factor as to why current officers chose the profession.

- Good management practices are pivotal to officer job satisfaction and can be implemented at no cost to the public. When asked about factors affecting job satisfaction (either positively or negatively), half of law enforcement respondents cited management practices.
- Building a pipeline of talent – a clear pathway to how to become an officer with frequent touchpoints – will serve to grow the pool of potential law enforcement candidates.
- Officers thinking of leaving the profession cited lack of support from public officials and the media. Better support from elected officials and the media could improve morale at no cost to the public.
- Law enforcement officers consider their job a public service, and that carries a lot of weight. It is the top reason law enforcement officers chose their profession. Very few consider law enforcement to be the wrong career for themselves.

Utah Foundation President Peter Reichard said the police recruiting challenges, particularly in Salt Lake County, require a multi-front approach. “Clearly, the negative commentary on police from the national media and politicians takes a toll, so creating a more supportive environment for police is critical,” Reichard said. “But at the end of the day, policymakers need to take a hard look at pay levels to ensure they can attract and retain officers.”

*To Protect and Serve* is available on the Utah Foundation website at [www.utahfoundation.org](http://www.utahfoundation.org). Special thanks to **The League of Cities and Towns** for providing project-based support.

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