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Meeting Law Enforcement
Recruitment and Retention Challenges in Utah

NOVEMBER 2022

TO PROTECT AND SERVE

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INTRODUCTION

Businesses in Utah have for years reported that they have difficulty finding enough skilled employees to meet their needs. In a 2018 survey, the Utah Foundation found that this difficulty was the top issue “holding businesses back.” But this problem is not unique to the private sector. Local and state governments face a similar challenge, particularly in filling law enforcement positions. It seems to have become even more acute in recent years.

This report highlights the scope of the police shortage problem and explores ways that local governments and other stakeholders can address the issue.



KEY FINDINGS OF THIS 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.

METHODOLOGY

The Utah League of Cities and Towns provided three of this report’s surveys: a 2020 survey of the public regarding views of police and their work, a 2021 survey of public safety officers, and a 2022 survey of cities on their public safety needs and practices. The Utah Foundation created two additional surveys in late 2022: an update of the 2021 survey of public safety officials and a survey of police chiefs’ departmental salaries and staffing. Each of these latter two surveys were sent to departments around the state with the help of the Utah Chiefs of Police Association. This report also often cites a sixth survey – a 2019 national survey of police departments. For details on each of these surveys, see the appendix. In addition, this report uses numerous secondary sources of information, as noted throughout.

The report focuses on law enforcement officers. All of the data herein pertain to them. However, much of the report could also apply to other public safety officers and firefighters. Indeed, survey data analysis for this report show similar results among all public safety officials.

BACKGROUND

The national Police Executive Research Forum has reported that it is increasingly difficult to find and retain police officers, and many local law enforcement agencies are working shorthanded.¹ Quarterly data collected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that national police employment among local law enforcement agencies peaked in 2019 and has been slowly decreasing since.² For all Utah local law enforcement agencies except those in Salt Lake County, employment seems to have peaked in 2018, shrunk for two years, and then increased beyond the 2018

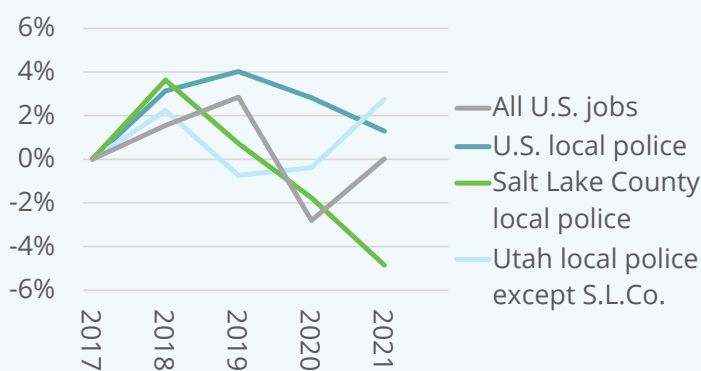
peak by 2021. But the trend among Salt Lake County local law enforcement agencies appears dire, with continually decreasing employment between 2018 and 2021. (See Figure 1.)

These data point only to recent decreases in employment levels in the midst of a long-term challenge. Staffing is an ongoing challenge.

Employment levels tell only part of the story. In a May 2021 national survey, nearly 200 departments reported that their staffing levels were at 93%. While more officers were hired compared to the previous year, there were more resignations and retirements over the same period.³ This is an improvement over the previous period when agencies reported a reduction in hiring paired with an increase in resignations (18%) and retirements (45%) from 2019 to 2020; not only were police agencies hiring fewer people, but existing employees were leaving at faster rates.

Utah local law enforcement employment has generally bucked the national trend since 2019 – but not in Salt Lake County.

Figure 1: Average Annual Employment as a Share of Average 2017 Employment for Local Law Enforcement, with All Jobs as a Comparison, 2017-2021



Source: Utah Foundation analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

How Many Law Enforcement Officers are Needed?

Different sizes and types of cities require different levels of policing. Further, departments themselves take varying approaches to determining their own needs. Some will hire more officers in response to higher crime rates. Some have minimum staffing levels set by policy. Others will hire as many as their predetermined budget allows or by following a rule of thumb regarding the size of the population. Yet others will model their needs based on 911 calls and other measurements of demand.⁴ There are tradeoffs and benefits with each of these methods.

The Department of Justice recommends a performance approach, based partially from modeling the needs highlighted by 911 dispatch calls.⁵ However, this may be the least used method among police departments.⁶

Ultimately, it is beyond the scope of this report for Utah Foundation to analyze the needs of each local government to calculate the number of law enforcement officers that local governments need. Utah's cities range between downtown metros and built-out bedroom communities, from rural towns to fast-growing urban-rural transition areas. Law enforcement officer needs will vary widely. Nonetheless, the Utah Foundation reports two estimates. One is based on 2022 survey results of Utah cities of current openings. Another is based on the 2022 survey results of police chiefs regarding the difference between current officers and the total number of authorized officers.

Half of the Utah cities surveyed in 2022 report that they need more officers: 21 of the 42 respondents in the survey (50%) had at least one vacant police officer position; in total, those 21 cities had openings for 61 positions.⁷ Cities that reported no current openings tended to be smaller, but there were exceptions. If non-respondent cities had the same ratio of openings, that would leave a total of 141 open police positions for Utah cities.⁸ These estimates do not include openings among federal, state or county police agencies. In fact, the Utah Highway Patrol alone recently reported that it was understaffed by 74 troopers across the state and had managed to hire only 34 troopers the previous year.⁹

A survey of police chiefs in October 2022 found that the median department was at 95% of its authorized number of officers, suggesting that most departments are not in a staffing crisis.¹⁰ (Authorized officers are the number of officers the city has authorized the department to hire.) The difference between the number of officers currently deployed and the number of authorized officers is estimated to be 235 individuals.¹¹ In addition, the survey asks whether the number of authorized officers was sufficient. Nearly two-thirds (63% of respondents) indicated that they needed at least 10% more than their current level of authorized officers. Based on police departments' desired levels, local departments in Utah would need between 60 and 600 officers beyond the current level of authorized officers.

While these are only approximations, there appear to more than 200 open positions – very similar to the estimated 235 officer difference between current officers and authorized officers. Add to this the shortage reported by police chiefs, and Utah needs somewhere between 275 and 835 officers in 2022. This is a broad range, but it is not a consensus estimate. The difference between the number of officers authorized and the desired level of police chiefs illustrates how estimates of need can vary – even in the same locality. If lower estimates are more accurate, the problem of retention and recruitment may not be as dire as some claim. To some degree, local departments may want to be just short of full authorized officer levels to allow flexibility in planning. However, if larger estimates are more representative of Utah's needs, it would be a clearer illustration of the need to bolster recruitment and retention practices.

Evaluation of Officer Needs

The first critical step a department must take is to evaluate how many law enforcement officers it needs. This is difficult to determine. Simple rules – such as law enforcement officers per capita – fail to address more nuanced contexts. For example, Eagle Mountain and Murray have the same sized population, but Murray is a built-out retail, health care and employment hub in the center of the Salt Lake Valley while Eagle Mountain is a bedroom community on the periphery with a majority of residents employed outside the city.¹² While they have the same population size, they face vastly different law enforcement needs that a per-capita estimate would not consider.

Crime rates are used as benchmarks of success for many law enforcement agencies, but they may not be the optimal method of evaluating officer needs. If officers become more inefficient and crime rates rise, this method would call for additional officers. The converse is true: If officers become more efficient and crime rates fall, this method would call for fewer officers.

Basing staffing levels on what a community can afford and sets aside in its annual budget seems practical, but it is detached from the communities' actual needs. As mentioned earlier, the U.S. Department of Justice recommends basing staffing levels on workload. This is one of the most difficult ways to evaluate how many officers a community needs as departments would need to examine the community services, model that demand over time, and determine how that demand would change based on different staffing levels. Such an analysis would take time and effort, but it may be a prudent investment as communities face recruitment and retention pressures.

Civilian Support

A key part of evaluating law enforcement needs is to assess the services that a department provides to its community and the level of internal, departmental services. Next, the department evaluates which of those services must be provided by sworn law enforcement officers and which services may be provided by civilians. Civilianizing certain police department functions solves the workforce crisis in two ways: Civilian employees may cost less to employ and local governments may recruit from a broader range of fields.¹³

Many cities facing budget reductions from the 2008 recession took a closer look at how civilianization might help them provide the same level of services at a lower cost.¹⁴ From a 2018 census of local departments, about 35% of full-time police-department employees were civilians – an increase of about seven percentage points over the previous two decades.¹⁵ But that varies significantly from department to department.

Departments broadly use civilians for: administrative or operational tasks such as receptionists, file clerks and dispatchers; analysis planners and researchers; public and community representatives; crime scene processors or forensic lab employees; crime victim service providers such as victim advocates; uniformed first responders to non-violent calls for service, such as automobile accidents, cold burglary scenes, theft or vandalism; and command staff and strategic leaders.¹⁶ Civilians might serve as crime scene technicians, district detectives, cold case detectives, internal affairs investigators, forensics unit employees, executive secretaries, fleet support employees, recruitment/human resources, academy instructors, IT specialists, fiscal services employees, background investigators, crime analytics researchers, public relations, records management employees, and 911 dispatchers.¹⁷

The benefits of civilian workers depend on the characteristics of each department and the degree to which departments in Utah are already civilianized. There may be

financial savings, but it may also ease staffing problems by pulling from a larger pool of employees. Depending on their role, civilians may not need to meet the higher standards required by sworn law enforcement officers. It might also provide an avenue for younger Utahns to work in law enforcement before they are able to become sworn officers at age 21.

Recruitment and Retention Challenges

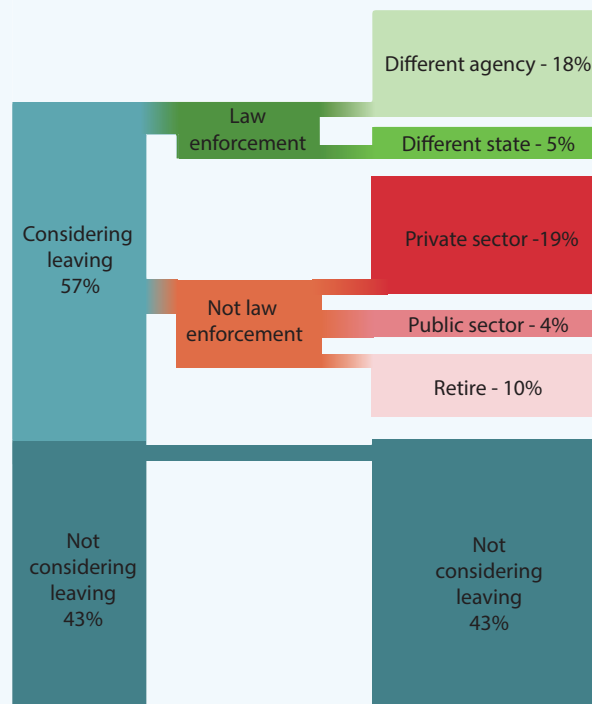
Nationally, there has been a decrease in applicants for police officer positions.¹⁸ This is due in part to a decline in military personnel as a source of applicants for departments, as well as the decline of so-called “police families” where children follow their parents into the force.

Furthermore, Utah’s unemployment rate has generally been low for the past six years. And the past 10 years (with the exception of the pandemic recession) have been below the state’s 46-year average.¹⁹ With so many jobs available to Utahns, many potential law enforcement officers may choose to work in the private sector, or in occupations that offer higher wages, more safety or preferable work schedules.

As to retention, a 2021 survey of Utah law enforcement officers shows that 19% of all respondents reported having applied to another public safety agency in the previous 12 months. In the same survey, more than half (57%) of respondents indicated that they were considering leaving their current agency or employer. About 23% of respondents would remain in law enforcement (with some thinking of moving to a different state); 23% were considering leaving law enforcement for a different type of work; and 10% were considering retirement. Of the 23% of respondents considering a different type of work, the vast majority were thinking of searching for another job in the private sector, while the remainder were considering another job in the public sector. (See Figure 2.)

Most law enforcement officers were considering leaving their jobs, with many looking to leave law enforcement altogether.

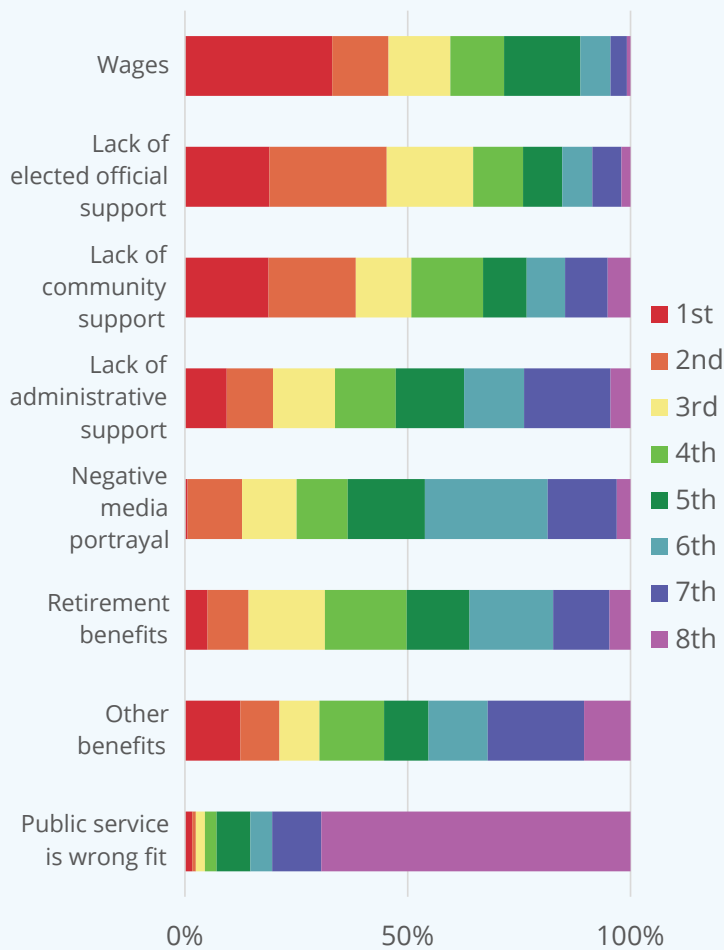
Figure 2: Flowchart of Law enforcement Officials’ Job Considerations, 2021



Source: Public Safety Officer Survey, Utah Foundation calculations.

Law enforcement officers who considered leaving for the private sector focus on pay, along with a lack of support from public officials and the community.

Figure 3: Most Influential Factors When Thinking About Leaving for the Private Sector, Ranked 1st to 8th, 2021



Source: Public Safety Officer Survey, Utah Foundation calculations.

Those respondents thinking of leaving the public sector were asked to consider several reasons as to why they wanted to leave and then rank those reasons. By far the *least* influential reason for leaving is that “public safety is not the right career,” with nearly two-thirds of law enforcement officers ranking it last among the eight items. Broadly speaking, few officers are considering leaving because they do not believe in the mission. Instead, other factors are pushing them out – such as wages and a lack of support from public officials and the media.²⁰ (See Figure 3.)

Whether or not respondents considered leaving was strongly linked to their job satisfaction. The plurality of respondents (47%) reported a moderate amount of job satisfaction, while another 32% reported high satisfaction. But even among those with a high level of job satisfaction, one-third were considering leaving. By contrast, 94% of those with low job satisfaction were considering leaving.²¹

In a similar vein, almost half of all respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed that their individual work morale was high – only one third disagreed. However, half disagreed that overall morale at their agency was high. This follows a trend often observed where a population at large might think that a broad economic or political situation is not good, but that they personally are doing just fine. Similarly, two-thirds of respondents would not recommend their job to family or friends. Broadly speaking, the survey results indicate that many law enforcement officers who are satisfied with their jobs personally do not think that others are satisfied or would be satisfied in the role.

Setting Expectations: Recruitment/Retention

A competitive economy means that many, if not all, employers face challenges in finding their dream employees. To some degree, police departments must face the realities of economic cycles that affect all employers. During times when unemployment rates are relatively high, they can be more selective regarding new recruits. They can also implement higher standards, such as requiring higher levels of education or physical fitness. However, they will feel the pinch along with other employers when unemployment is low.

Just as there is the hard reality of the market, there is also the hard reality of public finance. Governments collect taxes and fees from residents, visitors and businesses that pay for services. They have a responsibility to take only as much as they need, and to use funds efficiently and responsibly. During times of tight labor markets, elected officials may need to communicate with residents that they have a tradeoff: The local

government can raise taxes to pay high enough wages to hire the police officers they need, reallocate those funds from some other service, or accept a lower standard of service from their law enforcement officers as they adjust to what current staffing levels can reasonably provide. Accordingly, police departments, governments and Utahns need to understand that – in the words of a law enforcement officer survey respondent – “you get what you pay for.” That respondent went on to note that “if you pay for a quality employee, you get quality work.”

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

This report details the many challenges in recruiting and retaining law enforcement officials – and includes possible approaches to overcoming each of the challenges. We address a number of approaches, including those shown in Figure 4.

Increasing Pay

Municipalities have limited budgets. When pay increases come up, municipalities face choices – like whether to hire fewer officers, reallocate money from other government services or raise local taxes. Having a larger pool of potential candidates ensures that cities can pay officers a reasonable amount without breaking the bank. In response to an open-ended question describing their biggest problem with recruiting and retaining city employees, 57% of respondents to the League’s 2022 survey of cities mentioned pay, budgets or competing with the private sector.²²

In the 2021 survey of Utah public safety officers, among those thinking of leaving their departments, the most influential reason for doing so was the potential for higher pay elsewhere. Similarly, pay was the most common factor cited by those respondents with negative job satisfaction.

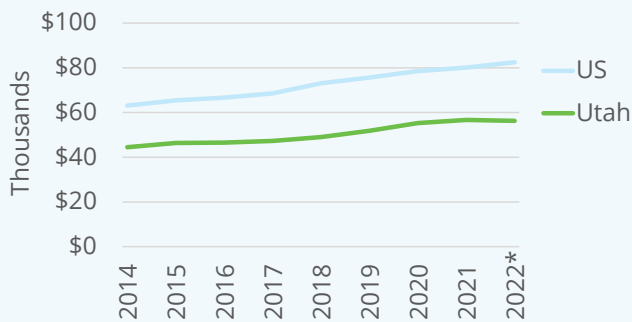
Challenges and solutions by strategy type (recruitment or retention) and policy location (state or local).

Figure 4: List of Solutions Addressed in this Report

	Recruitment	Retention	State	Local
Re-evaluation of need	x	x	x	x
Increasing pay	x	x	x	x
Addressing retirement benefits	x	x	x	x
Post-retirement employment rules	x	x	x	
Addressing personnel risks	x	x	x	x
Improving management practices	x	x	x	x
Easing baseline requirements	x	x	x	x
Bridging the pre-21 gap				
Early engagement	x		x	x
Law enforcement exploring program	x		x	x
Apprenticeships	x		x	x
AmeriCorps and police pipeline	x		x	x
Utah Peace Corps	x		x	x
Criminal Justice Programs	x		x	x
Recruitment incentives	x		x	x
Temporary service models	x		x	x
Marketing	x		x	x
Building public support	x	x	x	x
Rallying support from elected officials	x	x	x	x
Other retention solutions		x	x	x

Pay for Utah officers has been increasing, but stands at about 70% of the national average.

Figure 5: Average Annual Pay for Officers, 2014 to First Quarter 2022



* Pay is averaged except for the first quarter 2022.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Utah Foundation calculation.

The average pay for local law enforcement officers in Utah in 2021 was \$56,732. This compares to \$80,119 nationally.²³ Accordingly, Utah local law enforcement officers are paid only 71% of what their national counterparts earn. Previous Utah Foundation research on other job sectors has found that Utahns may receive lower wages because Utahns are younger than their national counterparts. In addition, compensation ratios between pay, retirement benefits, health benefits and other benefits vary across states.²⁴

While pay in Utah has been increasing in recent years (and is expected to continue in the near future), pay increases in Utah seem to mirror the national rate of increase. Utah's local police officer wages have been roughly 70% of the national average of local police officers for the past eight years. In fact, based on the first quarter of 2022, the latest data available, Utah may be falling further behind. (See Figure 5.)

The economists' go-to answer to a labor shortage is to increase pay. That will draw people considering similar occupations, delay retirements and perhaps even bring back officers who have retired. During a worker shortage, pay becomes pivotal. Indeed, many Utah departments are now responding with pay increases. In a survey of Utah cities, two-thirds of respondents reported increasing the wages of their police officers in fiscal year 2021-2022. These pay increases ranged from 2% to almost 25% – averaging around 10%. Two-thirds of respondents (the same cities with the exception of two) reported that they expected to increase wages in the coming fiscal year. These expected pay increases ranged from 3% to 25% – averaging just under 10%. Combining all the cities increasing pay with those that expect to increase pay over this two-year period results in 71% of respondents reporting that they have or expect to increase pay. Those pay increases range between 2% and 37% – averaging 13%. That seems pretty big. But compared to the national average, Utah remains on the low end of the scale.

Based upon data collected from chiefs of police in the summer of 2021, the average starting wage was about \$21 per hour.²⁵ It is now closer to \$26 per hour.²⁶ Estimates of the average starting wages in the U.S. for 2022 range between \$27 and \$33 per hour.²⁷

In the October 2022 chiefs of policy survey, 62% of departments had increased starting pay since January 2021 by more than \$5,000. Another 33% had increased starting pay by some amount between \$0 and \$5,000. About 10% of chiefs suggested that it had helped increase recruitment “at lot,” while another 60% said that it had helped “a little.” The other 30% said that it did not help.

The recent pay increases appear to be more effective when it comes to retention. In the same 2022 survey, 67% of chiefs said that they had also increased pay for experienced officers since January 2021 by more than \$5,000. Another 29% had increased pay for experienced officers by some amount between \$0 and \$5,000. About 15% of chiefs suggested that it had helped increase recruitment a lot, while another 58% said that it had helped a little. Pay helped with retention even more; about 27%

chiefs of suggested that it had helped increase retention at lot, while another 65% said that it had helped a little.

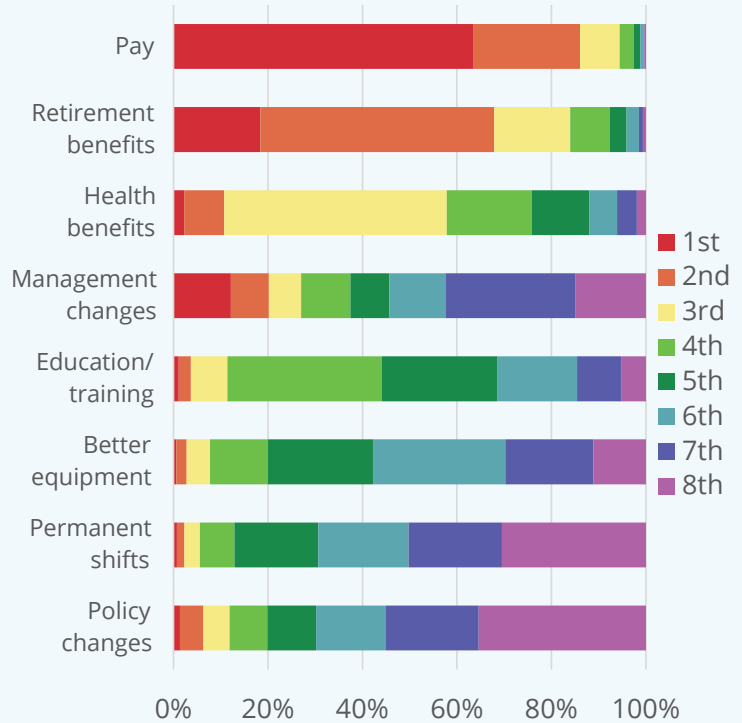
While the 2021 survey of public safety officers indicated that pay is not the reason they became officers, it was the most influential decision among those considering switching to a job in the private sector.²⁸ Retirement and other benefits were considerations, but they tended to be middle priorities.

When these officers were asked more directly “what should your agency do to retain your employment,” pay was the first on the list for nearly two-thirds of respondents and among the top three (of eight items) for about 95% of respondents. The second and third most important factors were retirement benefits and health benefits. (See Figure 6.)

When asked how their agencies should spend new funding, the average breakdown by respondents was that 45% should be used for higher wages and another 23% for retirement benefits and 11% for health benefits. (See Figure 7.) In a follow-up October 2022 survey among 222 law enforcement officers that received an average wage increase of 12%, there was no real difference in their preferred allocation of new spending. Even after having received a recent 12% raise, these officers still would have put 45% of new funding toward pay, 24% to retirement and 11% to health benefits.²⁹

When law enforcement officers were asked what would keep them around – it’s the pay.

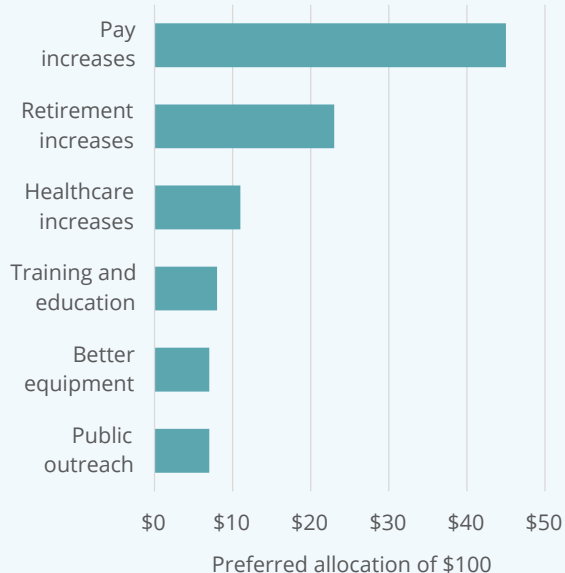
Figure 6: Most Significant Actions Departments can take to Retain Employees Ranked 1st to 8th, 2021



Source: Public Safety Officer Survey, Utah Foundation calculations.

Law enforcement officers want 45% of any new dollars to go to pay.

Figure 7: Average Disposition of \$100 of New Funding Among Competing Priorities, 2021



Source: Public Safety Officer Survey, Utah Foundation calculations.

2010 CHANGES TO RETIREMENT BENEFITS (WITH 2019 AMENDMENTS)



Standard retirement packages in the private sector tend to revolve around a defined contribution retirement package. That is, the employer and, in most cases, the employee contribute a defined amount in each paycheck to retirement benefits. In the past, a common model also included a defined benefit model, where the employer guaranteed benefits at retirement. Defined benefit plans have remained common among government jobs, though many governments are also pivoting to defined contribution plans (or a hybrid approach).

Utah's law enforcement officers' benefits are defined by state code Title 49. Employees hired before July 1, 2011, have benefits described as Tier I. Employees hired on or after July 1, 2011, have benefits described as Tier II. Tier I was a defined benefit plan that allowed retirement after 20 years with a defined benefit of 50% of their peak wage with additional years increasing the share of the peak wages.³³

Tier II has two options. A defined contribution plan of 14% of base salary to a standard 401(k) account. The alternative is a defined benefit plan where employees can retire after 25 years and receive 37.5% of their peak wages with additional years increasing the share of the peak wages. Combined with other factors requiring employee contributions for Tier II employees, the 2010 changes to the retirement system means law enforcement officers hired after July 1, 2011, put in more work (working for an additional five years) but get less in return. If a Tier I and a Tier II employee both worked for 25 years and then retired, the Tier II employee would walk away with only 73%-81% of what the Tier I employee was receiving in retirement benefits. (The 2019 amendments didn't apply retroactively, so individuals hired earlier will accrue fewer benefits)³⁴. The Tier II employee would have to work another three to five years to achieve the same benefit.³⁵

While this might make retirement packages more affordable for state and local governments, it diminishes the upside of being a law enforcement officer. However, to the extent that local governments counter reduced retirement costs with upfront pay increases, working officers may enjoy higher morale, particularly given the reported concerns about pay. This would be of particular importance for Tier II employees.

These law enforcement officers were also asked if they agreed that their pay increases from 2021 and 2022 made them more likely to keep working in their department for the next five years. A robust 66% agreed with the statement. Unsurprisingly, those who received larger wages were more likely to agree. Only two of the 68 respondents who received a 20% or greater wage increase disagreed with the statement.³⁰

Officers were less likely to report having considered leaving their department during the past 12 months (44% compared to 58% of officers surveyed in 2021). They were more likely to report that their job satisfaction was high (49% compared to 32% in 2021). They were more likely to report higher morale (68% compared to 49%). They were more likely to report higher morale among their agency (54% compared to 30%). They were also more likely to recommend the job to friends and family (35% compared to 17%).³¹

Because the highest three years of pay influences retirement benefits, some departments are worried that officers nearing retirement will stay for three more years (after the large pay bumps) and retire all at once. This is only a problem in that it may cause staffing hiccups if a larger-than-normal share of officers leave a department all at once. In the October 2022 chiefs of police survey, 41% of departments responded that they were "a little concerned" while 5% responded that they were "very concerned." At the same time, this is something that departments can see coming and take mitigating measures.

To summarize the results of the law enforcement officer survey: Officers join because they believe in the mission and it seems like a good fit. They leave primarily because their positions do not pay enough to meet their needs. If we take the responses at face value, retirement benefits, health benefits and other benefits do help, but the primary focus should clearly be on pay. While departments are having challenges in recruiting even with higher pay, at some level pay can become decisive in recruiting as well. In other words, the pay increases still may not be high enough to expand the pool of applicants.

However, local governments have budget constraints that do not always allow staffing at desired levels based on market rates. Over 70% of respondents from cities in the 2022 survey reported they have or plan to increase wages. Some of these increases are quite substantial. Over 57% reported in an open-ended question that they were struggling to pay their employees at current market rates.³²

While pay raises have the added knock-on benefit to officers of increasing retirement benefits (which are based upon pay), it therefore results in an increased retirement cost.

With that said, better support from elected officials and the media could improve morale, recruitment and retention – and it costs the public nothing.

Addressing Retirement Benefits

Based on survey results, retirement benefits are linked to job satisfaction, retention and recruitment. (See Figure 12 later in this report to see how retirement is linked to recruitment.)

In the 2021 survey’s open-ended comments where Utah law enforcement officers explained their job satisfaction, about 8% cited perceived inadequacy of retirement benefits as a factor that lowered their job satisfaction.³⁶ When Utah law enforcement officers explained how retirement lowered their job satisfaction, they were almost uniformly referring to receiving the reduced Tier II benefits as compared to the Tier I benefits. When looking at law enforcement officers who plan on staying until retirement (20 years for Tier I and 25 years for Tier II), Tier I employees are 33% more likely than Tier II employees to say probably or definitely yes as opposed to maybe, probably not or definitely not.³⁷ That is after accounting for other factors including age, experience, type of public service employment or retirement plans. Retirement benefits were also tied for the second most influential factor when current law enforcement officers were asked why they became officers.

A bigger pot of retirement gold at the end of the employment rainbow could increase the share of officers who would stay until retirement. Legislative changes in 2011 decreased that pot. (See sidebar for more details.) The state revisited those changes in 2019, walking back some of the decrease. However, the changes were not retroactive, leaving those hired between 2011 and 2019 in a gap. That said, groups are working with the Utah Retirement System and the Utah Legislature to “catch up” those officers in the gap.

Nonetheless, departments are not limited by state legislation. Some departments are providing funds to cover the “employee contributions” required by the state.³⁸ Other departments are funding Tier II officers at the same level they fund Tier I officers, putting the additional funds in traditional defined contribution retirement vehicles.³⁹

Setting aside the specifics of previous and current retirement changes, generally speaking, larger retirement benefits would come at the cost of pay increases by eating into the local government’s compensation capacity. It is critical to view compensation as a totality and calibrate the mix of pay and benefits to ensure that high quality employees can be recruited and retained. In fact, to the extent that additional funding becomes available for retirement benefits, serious consideration must be given to directing the funds toward the biggest issue – pay – instead.

It is critical to view compensation as a totality and calibrate the mix of pay and benefits to ensure that high quality employees can be recruited and retained. In fact, to the extent that additional funding becomes available for retirement benefits, serious consideration must be given to directing the funds toward the biggest issue – pay – instead.

Post-Retirement Employment Rules

An alternative approach would be to address rules around retirement. Before 2010, police officers faced little restriction on employment after retirement. This led to a practice of “retiring in place” where officers would officially retire, draw from their defined benefit plans, but continue to work in the same job for another agency – police chiefs could even continue in their role at the same agency. Since the 2010 retirement changes, retiring in place is no longer an option. Law enforcement officers have no restrictions on post-retirement employment in the private sector, but stiff limits on working in the public sector within 12 months of retirement and moderate limits afterward.⁴⁰

Law enforcement officers’ post-retirement plans also influence whether they plan to work until they are eligible for full retirement benefits. Law enforcement officers who plan to continue to work in law enforcement after their mandatory one-year cooling off period are 26% more likely to plan on working their full 20 or 25 years than when compared to those who would work in the private sector after retirement.⁴¹

Before 2011, police officers could retire and withdraw retirement benefits while still earning a full wage in a new department. This allowed higher “wages” (actual wages plus retirement disbursements), but not at the direct expense of departmental budgets. (Note: this shouldn’t be confused with early retirement, which does result in higher departmental retirement contributions) It is hard to measure the impact this change had on officer retention. However, the 2021 survey suggests it might have played a substantial role. As with retirement benefits, departments are limited in what they can do to change this policy because it is defined by state statute. It would require action by the Utah Legislature.

Addressing Personal Risks

Law enforcement officers put themselves at a higher level of risk than the civilian population. This higher level of risk has real effects on individuals and their families. The FBI reports a nearly 60% increase in officers killed in the line of duty in 2021 – to 73 nationwide.⁴² A study of white male police officers in New York state found their life expectancy was shorter than their non-police counterparts by nearly 22 years.⁴³ By another measure, the occupational fatality rate for officers is three to five that of the national average.⁴⁴

A related concern may be the risk of making a mistake that leaves an officer’s career and reputation in tatters. Officers are sometimes faced with making split-second decisions in high-stress circumstances. A wrong decision in such a moment could lead to the injury or death of a civilian. While such mistakes may be career-ending, there is no associated financial protection for officers. On the contrary, they may face jail time.

Further, many officers suffer physical and mental health ailments as a result of their service. In a national 2020 survey of 434 police officers, 12% reported a lifetime mental health diagnosis and 26% had current symptoms of mental illness.⁴⁵ If an officer had to kill someone or significantly injure someone in the line of duty, they have been shown to have a significant increase in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms and an increase in depression symptoms. These symptoms lead to increased thoughts on suicide.⁴⁶ More police officers die every year from suicide than from being killed in the line of duty.⁴⁷

A law enforcement officer responded in the open-ended portion of the 2021 survey that “the pay, the associated risk and the intense workload have a profound negative impact.” There may also be family pressures for current or potential officers to find a safer profession.

Most risk management appears to be a matter of department policies. Implementing risk management policies, learning lessons from near misses and receiving accreditation from applicable organizations can help mitigate some of the risks officers face daily.⁴⁸

That said, while a few comments in the open-ended portion of the 2021 survey of Utah law enforcement officers mentioned this topic, it was not comprehensively addressed. It is not clear how much of an impact the additional risk of being a police officer in Utah weighs in decisions of employment.

As a compensatory measure for the higher levels of risk that law enforcement officers take on with their jobs, departments often offer additional benefits to those that are injured or killed in the line of duty. This can help offset some of the concern prospective law enforcement officers may have regarding the effect that a higher level of risk may have on their families. That said, the surveys have not revealed whether officers perceive their current benefits as inadequate. When asked how new funding should be spent, 8% referenced education and training and 7% mentioned equipment. However, it is not clear whether those comments were related primarily to training and equipment that mitigate risks to officers.

Proposed legislation in 2021 would have made Utah officers financially responsible (up to \$50,000) for civil lawsuits against them.⁴⁹ Such policies would add to the personal risk carried by sworn officers. One police chief with whom the Utah Foundation spoke suggested that these types of laws hurt retention; a similar law in Colorado seems to have pushed some of that state’s officers to seek Utah employment.

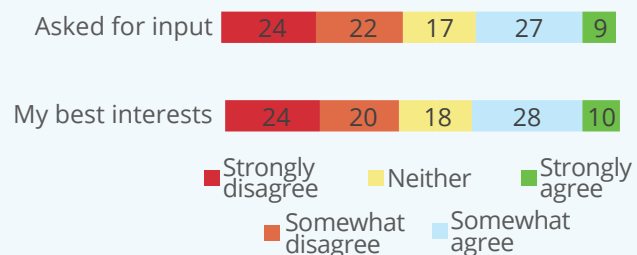
Improving Management Practices

As with any job, management can play a role in both retention and recruitment. If managers are indifferent to employee concerns, employees will naturally look for employment elsewhere. In the 2021 survey of law enforcement officers, respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that “the agency I work for considers my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me.”⁵⁰ Overall, respondents were somewhat split, with 44% disagreeing with the statement while 37% agreed. However, among those who agreed with the statement, three times as many only somewhat agreed versus those who strongly agreed. In other words, a minority agree with the statement, but even those who agree tend to be unenthusiastic. A second question returned similar survey responses percentages regarding whether decision makers ask respondents for input on decisions that affect them at work. (See Figure 8 for both questions.)

Management can be an issue in any industry. One study by a leadership-development consulting firm estimates that more than half of people who quit their jobs do so because of their bosses.⁵¹ There are similar national findings from Udemy⁵² and Gallup.⁵³ Utah data bears this out as well. In the 2021 survey of Utah law enforcement officers, more than 50% of respondents either praised or criticized their management as a contributing factor toward their job satisfaction (respondents could mention multiple items).⁵⁴ (See Figure 9.) Management was by far the most fre-

Some officers disagree that departments consider their best interests or ask for officer input.

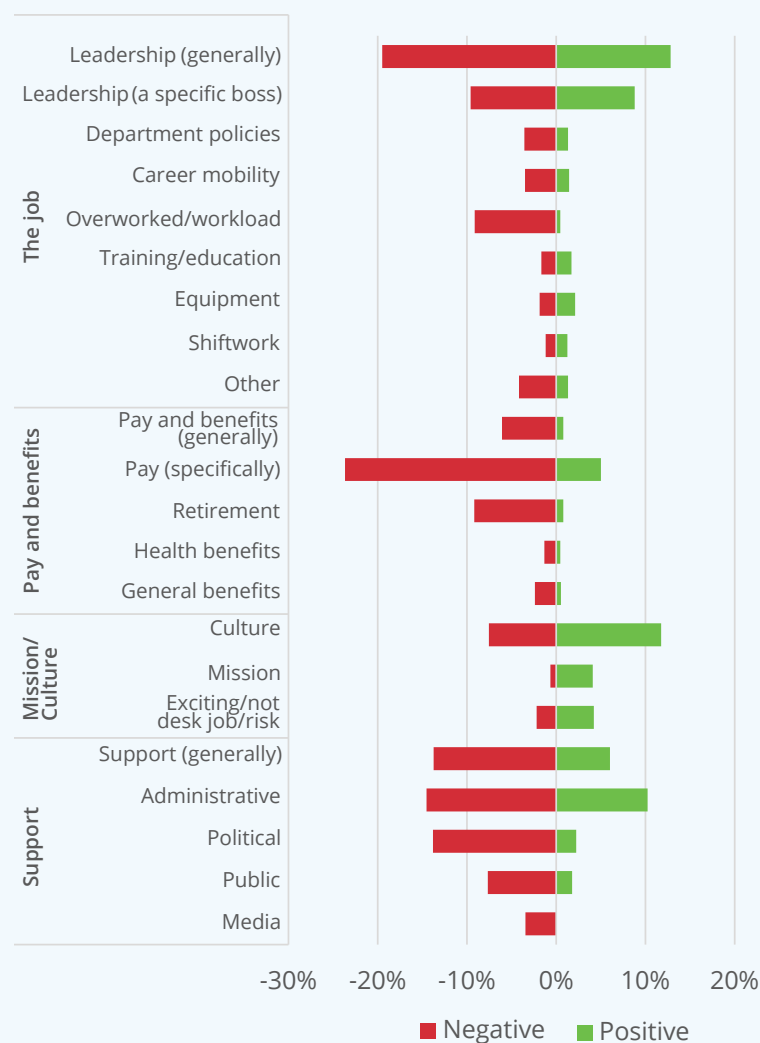
Figure 8: Share of Officers who Say: “The Agency I Work for Considers my Best Interest When it Makes Decisions that Affect Me” and “the Agency I Work for Asks me for Input on Decisions that Affect Me at Work,” 2021



Source: Public Safety Officer Survey, Utah Foundation calculations.

When explaining their job satisfaction (either good or bad) half referred to management practices and a third referenced pay.

Figure 9: Share of Open-Ended Responses Addressing the Following Topics (Multiple Items Could be Mentioned), 2021



Note: While conversations with law enforcement officials pointed to negative officer perceptions of the prohibition of tattoos, beards and wearing vests over clothing (as opposed to under clothing), these were rarely if ever mentioned by survey respondents with regard to their satisfaction.

Source: Public Safety Officer Survey, Utah Foundation calculations.

quently mentioned contributing factor to job satisfaction. The next most common response was pay, mentioned by 30% of respondents; pay was also mentioned as the most significant factor in retaining their employment.

There are additional concerns regarding management and the unique circumstances in which police officers find themselves. There could be concern regarding the legal liability or lack of training a department offers. Further, many potential candidates may feel uncomfortable with the expanded role police officers play in society. While they might feel they can commit to be an emergency responder or help protect people from criminals, they may feel less capable of breaking up homeless encampments, stepping into family matters when called to address domestic disputes, and other similar emotionally stressful situations. While every job has its menial tasks, some officers might also resent the paperwork and administrative burdens associated with the job, particularly if these responsibilities increase significantly due to policy changes. Based on the 2021 survey of Utah law enforcement officers, solid management practices go a long way in improving job satisfaction. As mentioned, fully half of the survey respondents indicated that management practices were the reason for their level of satisfaction. As an example, one officer reports that he is highly satisfied because “good management (makes decisions to better department and officers when possible).” On the other end of the spectrum, a bad manager has the potential to destroy a department. One officer complained about “having administrators in place which bully, belittle, harass, and show extreme favoritism. Currently, [NAME REDACTED] is the single problem and cause of the drastic decline in staff morale over the last 3 years.” While departments might face limitations in terms of what they can pay officers or provide in benefits, they can control who manages officers.⁵⁵

Some law enforcement departments have reported that small managerial or departmental details can sometimes draw law enforcement officials to their department from other departments. These details could be departmental regulation on tattoos, facial hair, or whether body armor should be worn on top of or under uniforms. While these details individually may do little to attract or retain officers alone, they may have a larger impact when part of a broader campaign to show managerial support of the rank-and-file officers. They could also carry more weight at times when police officers are in high demand.

Easing Baseline Requirements

The requirements for police officer hires are substantially higher than most jobs. Candidates must pass background checks, psychological and physical evaluations, and other requirements. Stringent requirements are necessary in such a profession. However, they may limit the pool of potential law enforcement officers.

Carefully analyzing which job requirements are absolutely necessary and lowering or removing requirements with a lower level of priority could create a larger pool.

In the national survey of departments, fewer than half (42%) reported they had changed their minimum standards in the past five years. Of those, 54% relaxed standards for prior drug use. Agencies also reduced educational requirements, physical standards and standards regarding previous criminal and traffic violations. They also relaxed the rules on facial hair and tattoos discussed above. (See Figure 10.)

Lowering the minimum age is also a requirement that would open up the labor pool. But this change would have to be made by the Utah Legislature. There are 23 other states that allow police officers younger than 21, and 19 of them allow police officers as young as 18.⁵⁶

Bridging the Pre-21 Gap

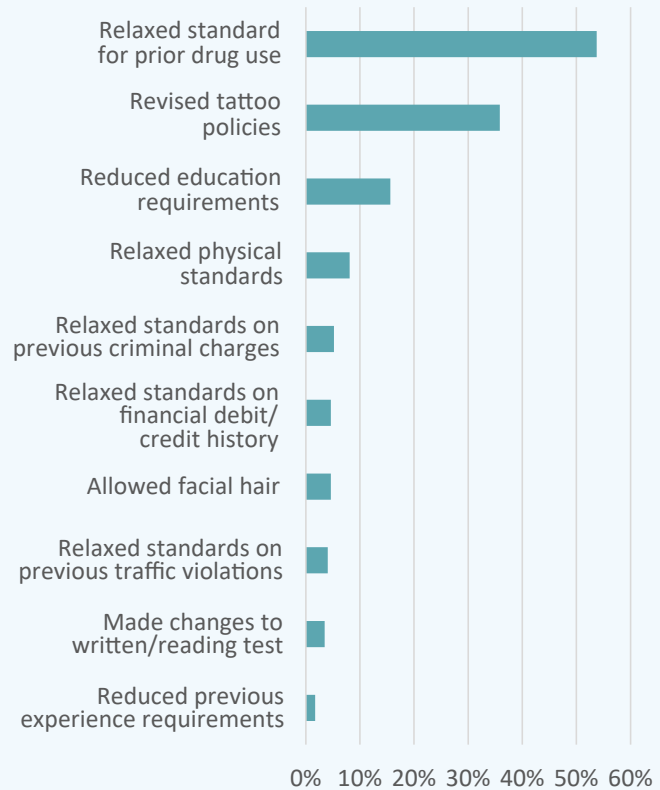
While local police departments do not require college degrees, Utah law requires potential cadets to be over the age of 21. For those who attend college, their education keeps them on track and busy. However, for those without college plans, there is a substantial gap between high school graduation and when they can become police officers. This three-year gap represents a long duration of time that if not constructively filled, may provide opportunities for younger Utahns to get into trouble – and many types of convictions can disqualify a candidate for police service.

There are two primary methods of dealing with the 18-to-21 gap. The first is education. Many future law enforcement officials see college as a standard part of their life experience and will elect to go that route. In many ways, college is the ideal path to fill the gap until potential law enforcement officers reach an age that they could qualify as law enforcement officials.

The second way to address the age gap is to create or expand pathways and pipeline programs. This leads future law enforcement officials into programs or jobs that help them advance their law enforcement careers before they are able to become law enforcement officers. There have been some small efforts made to address this issue, formal and informally.

Over half of police departments that reduced their employment standards in the past five years focused on prior drug use standards.

Figure 10: Standards Modified in the Past Five Years, Nationally



Source: Police Executive Research Forum.



CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT AND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Utah's Concurrent Enrollment has provided a college experience for high school students since the late 1980s. Students meet with their counselors to register and then apply directly to the institution of higher learning with which the high school partners.⁵⁷ Students from all of Utah's districts and many charter schools participate in the program. The program includes three law-enforcement related classes:

- Introduction to Criminal Justice
- Criminal Law
- Law Enforcement / Criminal Investigations

There are an average of 7,000 students each year enrolled in criminal justice classes in high school.

Utah's Career and Technical Education courses are typical high school courses, but which focus on post-high school employment. The CTE Protective Services pathway includes the following courses:

- Criminal Justice, Intro
- Law Enforcement
- Criminal Law
- Careers in Law Enforcement
- Corrections

In addition, students who pass their courses may receive credit for a CTE internship or an apprenticeship.

Sources:

- Utah State Board of Education. Welcome to Early College. Concurrent Enrollment (CE), 2022, <https://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/earlycollege?mid=1354&tid=2>.
- Utah System of Higher Education, Concurrent Enrollment Master List, 2020, <https://ushe.edu/concurrent-enrollment-master-list/>.
- Utah State Board of Education, Utah Career and Technical Education Career Pathway Chart, 2022-2023 School Year, Protective Services, <https://www.schools.utah.gov/file/47da6ba6-c8bf-4879-9d3a-e7749225cf8b>.

A potential pathway has opened with a recent legislative change that allow corrections officials to begin employment at 19 years-of-age. These jobs have the added benefit of involving similar training to law enforcement officials.

Additionally, some departments are seeking to expand early engagement, youth police programs and apprenticeships.

Early Engagement

Expanding a pipeline of law enforcement candidates might start with children.

Departments can collaborate with educators to help with messaging regarding law enforcement, and law enforcement classes could be used to identify good candidates early. This might happen through school resource officers already in place in many public schools, or could also be part of a joint outreach program encouraging more students to consider a career in law enforcement.

Many children have their first touch with law enforcement careers through their schools' Concurrent Enrollment (CE) courses and Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes. Departments might seek to expand engagement with and enrollment in these courses. Further they might seek to expand the offerings for CE courses and CTE corrections-specific classes. See the sidebar regarding CE and CTE in Utah.

Law Enforcement Exploring Program

The Law Enforcement Exploring Program engages youth ages 14 to 20 seeking careers in the criminal justice system. These programs support training, activities, competition, physical fitness, practical experiences, personal growth, character development, good citizenship, patriotism and respect for the rule of law.⁵⁸

At least five Utah departments offer the program: Salt Lake City, Sandy, Park City, Unified and Provo.⁵⁹ The Salt Lake City Police Department eligibility requirements include: parental approval, a background check, a 2.0 or higher GPA and no serious school discipline record.⁶⁰

The participants in most Exploring programs are more diverse than the surrounding community and existing departments, are more likely to be young women than are current law enforcement officers, and often have parents without college degrees.⁶¹

Departments across the state might consider offering their own Explorer programs to solve recruitment problems or jointly offering such programs.

Apprenticeships

There may be a place for apprentice programs. Apprentice law enforcement officials might provide services to a department as a file clerk or in some other way with limited levels of interaction with dangerous situations. As they advance in their apprenticeship program, they might be able to participate in more advanced duties with an assigned partner, or under strict rules of engagement in non-confrontational situations. Another possibility is to partner with a local private security firm to allow potential law enforcement officers in the age gap to receive some experience there before they become eligible to become law enforcement officials.

AmeriCorps and Police Pipeline

AmeriCorps is an independent U.S. agency that places paid volunteers in a variety of positions – including with police departments. AmeriCorps volunteers are aged 18 and older, which is a perfect opportunity to bridge the pre-21 gap. Departments and cross departmental partnerships have developed a variety of programs, from engaging volunteers on a path to become police officers to special programming. For instance, in Florida, the Clearwater Police Department allows volunteers to work hand-in-hand with officers in departments and schools in an effort to prevent and reduce crime in higher crime areas.⁶² And in the Southeastern U.S., the Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative aims to pair volunteers with departments to support police-led opioid reduction and overdose prevention programs in seven states.⁶³

Utah Police Corps

Another approach to recruitment might be to look back 20 years at the Utah Police Corps program. It was a college scholarship program provided to candidates who work as police in state or local departments for at least four years. It covered education and living expenses. The program was funded by the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs. It resulted in at least 106 highly trained officers in the region, with the addition of 12 cadets in six Utah departments on July 18, 2003.⁶⁴

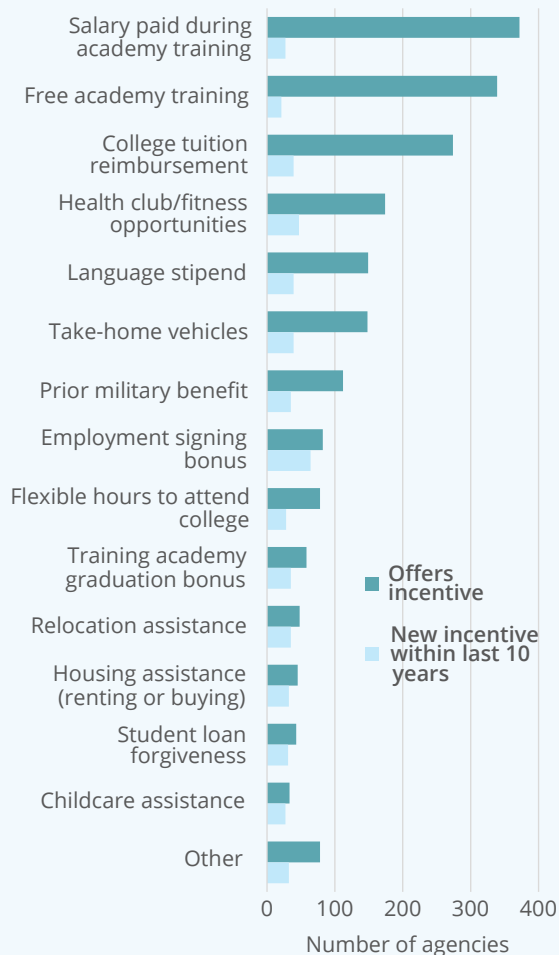
Criminal Justice Programs

Higher education could provide a more robust source for the law enforcement pipeline. Weber State University's program offers an associate degree program, several bachelor's programs – including forensics and crime scene investigation – and a master's degree program. The relatively new criminology program at the University of Utah in the Sociology Department is so popular among students that it overtook the applicants in the sociology program. Other colleges offer such programming as well, including Salt Lake Community College, Southern Utah University, Utah Tech University, Utah Valley University and Westminster.

Law enforcement officers teach some of the courses. This offers students the real-world experience from criminal justice professionals, at the same time providing a recruitment platform for departments. The popularity of these programs suggests the need for an expansion. Law enforcement agencies with staffing shortages should seek to make connections to these programs and their students.

Paying salaries during academy training and free training are the top recruitment incentives nationally.

Figure 11: Recruitment Incentives, Nationally



Source: Police Executive Research Forum.

Recruitment Incentives

While salaries and retirement benefits are the most straightforward way of enticing new applicants, many respondents in the League’s city manager survey highlighted how their efforts to recruit and retain employees relied on bonuses and other benefits.⁶⁶ As noted, based on the survey of law enforcement officers, while the average preference was to spend 45% on new pay and another 23% on improved retirement benefits, with another 11% on improving health and other benefits (see Figure 11). While pay is the most upfront and visible form of compensation, other benefits, perks and bonuses play an important role in defining the total compensation package. In some cases, benefits may offer a substantial boost in compensation but in a way that does not proportionately increase departmental budgets; these are not always strictly monetary. For instance, some police departments allow officers to take home vehicles – potentially offsetting a sizeable household cost.

In the national survey of police departments, most reported that they offered a paid salary during academy training, free academy training and college tuition reimbursement. Many, but less than half offered health club and fitness benefits, a language stipend for fluency in a non-English language, take home vehicles and benefits for military service. However, these are not new tools. Most departments offering these benefits report that they are longstanding recruitment benefits – not new ones. Other benefits that

are less common, but tend to be more recent additions, include employment signing bonuses, relocation assistance, housing assistance, student loan forgiveness and childcare assistance.⁶⁷

One less-common incentive is now available in Utah. The Utah Legislature set aside \$5 million to be awarded to law enforcement officers who are first-time home buyers, with a grant limited to \$25,000.⁶⁸ This works out to just under 5% of the median Utah home price in 2022. There have been six grants awarded with another 20 pending; about two-thirds of recipients would not have been looking for a new home but for the grant.⁶⁹ Homeownership tends to strengthen roots in a community, potentially promoting officer retention.

Educational benefits, meanwhile, can help funnel potential candidates toward the profession and build a sense of loyalty among those who have received those benefits. The benefits could include monetary assistance for tuition, fees and books for prospective officers – or even student loan forgiveness or paying for college



RECRUITING MILLENNIALS

Millennials represent the largest generation in the U.S. workforce. There has been discussion in the public arena as to whether Millennials have a distaste for public service. Further, as discussed in this report, surveys show a higher distrust of police among Millennials. However, a Deloitte study suggests that Millennials are not less passionate about their jobs in government, nor do they have higher turnover rates. Similarly, a Harvard Business Review article suggests that Millennials have similar career goals to older generations. A survey of Millennials in public service jobs indicates that they have high overall job satisfaction and expect to stay in their current positions as long as their benefits are not cut.

When Utah law enforcement officers were asked why they become law enforcement officers, younger respondents and those who have served fewer years were more likely to list a desire to serve at the top of their reasons than their counterparts.⁶⁵ While generations may have different preferences or expectations, it seems there is little to support the idea that younger generations are less likely to become police officers solely based on a lack of public service mentality. That said, it may be particularly important among younger Utahns to elevate perceptions of police and the law enforcement profession generally.

Sources:

- Fry, Richard, 2018, "Millennials are the largest generation in the U.S." <https://pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/11/millennials-largest-generation-us-labor-force/>.
- Viechnicki, Peter, 2015, "Understanding Millennials in government: Debunking myths about your youngest public servants," Deloitte, https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/millennials-in-government-federal-workforce/DUP-1450_Millennials-in-govt_vFINAL_12.2.15.pdf.
- Pfau, Bruce, 2016, "What do Millennials really want at work," Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org/2016/04/what-do-millennials-really-want-at-work>.
- Bond, Tyler and Kelly Kenneally, 2020, "Millennial state & local government employee views on their jobs, compensation & retirement," National Institute on Retirement Security, <https://nirsonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Final-Millennials-Issue-Brief.pdf>.

in advance. Helping make education more affordable could increase the pool of potential candidates – and could help diversify the departments. Pricier types of educational benefits might work well as a legislative initiative. The Utah Foundation has been advised that a group of stakeholders is working on this effort in Utah.

When Utah cities were asked what they were doing to improve recruiting and retention, a quarter replied that they were focused on market-rate salaries and a quarter also highlighted their attempt to build a quality work environment. One-sixth mentioned additional benefits including fully paid health plan, HSA contributions, or gym discounts. Twelve percent mentioned employment development or educational incentives. Cities also mentioned longevity, referral, and sign-on bonuses. They also mentioned expanding their recruitment efforts by recruiting through new mediums or hiring full time recruiting staff.

Temporary Service Models

Law enforcement officers face unique risks in their profession. Some have pointed out that many of those risks may be similar to the risks faced by members of the U.S. armed forces. To that point, there are many programs across the nation designed to help departments recruit individuals with military experience.

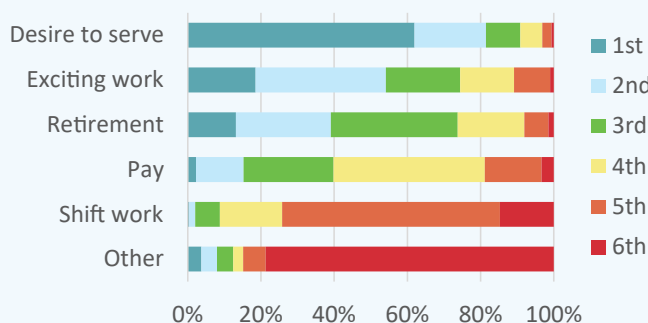
One option police departments could consider is a military service model. Potential candidates could agree to a specific term of service – eight years is the standard term among the U.S. armed forces. At the end of those eight years, their defined contribution retirement could be fully vested and they could choose to renew their contract or find employment elsewhere. Other benefits may be offered to encourage a full eight years of service.

While a term of service may appear to work counter to retention efforts it could increase interest in the job because a lower level of perceived commitment is required. It may also open the way for burned-out employees to leave before problems arise.⁷⁰

In 2015, the United Kingdom began the *Police Now* program whereby university graduates serve as police in challenging communities under a two-year commitment. After an intensive summer academy session, program participants shadow an officer for 28 days and then become neighborhood officers. Thousands of officers have participated each year, and over 80% have continued on the job beyond the two-year period.⁷¹

When law enforcement officers are asked what inspired them to become officers – it was the community service and sense of adventure.

Figure 12: Most Significant Factor to Becoming a Public Service Officer, Ranked 1st to 6th, 2021



Source: Public Safety Officer Survey, Utah Foundation calculations.

Marketing

In the 2021 survey of Utah law enforcement officers, the most common reason for becoming law enforcement officers a desire to serve.⁷² (See Figure 12.) The second most common answer was that it seemed like an exciting or adventurous job. The retirement benefits essentially tied with the exciting and adventurous nature of the job. The pay only came in fourth place, followed by the draw of shift work. This poor showing may be due to starting pay levels; while pay may be good, it may not be attractive enough to be a primary driver toward a career in law enforcement.

There was an option for law enforcement officers to include an “other” statement. Many of these responses pointed toward the idea of giving back to the community or helping others – reflecting the desire to serve. Also, many comments focused on the variety of the

work, or that it was not a typical monotonous desk job – reflecting the exciting or adventurous nature of the work. Common answers that went beyond the standard choices also included job stability and the camaraderie/brotherhood/belonging.

Based on the survey data, a recruitment strategy that focuses on public service and the active, “adventurous” nature of the job will be attractive to prospective candidates.

Here we should note that the survey data shows inadequate pay is a top concern of officers, but that it sits in fourth place as their reason for initially joining. This suggests that pay has not been sufficient in at least some departments to serve as a robust marketing tool. In other words, marketing efforts should emphasize other aspects – or local governments should increase pay to a level sufficient to use it as a draw.

One approach to marketing might be through joint pathways ventures modeled after the private sector. During the past decade, a number of companies in several major Utah industries decided to coordinate rather than compete in order to build their prospective labor pool. As an example, composite manufacturing companies such as Boeing, Northrup-Grumman and eight others came together with the state education system to create a pathways program. Students enroll in specific coursework their junior and senior years of high school, complete internships, and upon completion of the program earn certificates and guaranteed interviews with each of the participating companies. While a pathways program for a law enforcement officer would have to look different, the interesting aspect is that companies who are in fierce competition with each other in terms of hiring employees decided to work together to build a larger pool of prospective candidates.

Police departments could cooperate regionally or statewide to run joint-marketing campaigns. For instance, Utah counties have the potential to lead in recruitment, not only for their own sheriff deputies, but in driving collaboration among their municipalities. Alternatively, departments that share a dispatch center will usually already have strong relationships that could aid coordinated action. Pooled resources may allow for marketing campaigns of a scope that individual departments cannot muster alone. Such collaboration could streamline overlapping efforts of reaching out to high school CE and CTE classes and criminal justice college programs.

Building Public Support

The support of the public can affect both the retention and recruitment of police officers. Historically, the public has been supportive of police officers, but that support has faded in more recent years. The share of Americans who say they trust the police “a great deal” or “quite a lot” fell from 64% in 2004 to 48% in 2020 – the lowest level since Gallup has been tracking the question beginning in 1994.⁷³

Multiple high-profile use-of-force incidents spurred social unrest and a media frenzy across the country. Perceptions of police took a major hit. Additionally, modern cop dramas often portray officers as engaging in unethical conduct. Negative portrayals of law enforcement officers in the media may repel potential employees who would want to create a positive impact in their community and undertake work that they feel will be respected by the public.

Negative perceptions are particularly acute among certain populations. In a survey of registered Utah voters, 53% reported they trusted the police a great deal. However, that number was only 35% among both non-white Utahns and Millennial Utahns. These negative perceptions may limit potential recruits among these groups. Since Millennials are the largest proportion of the workforce, that impact could be substantial.

However, it is important to distinguish local perceptions from national dramas. In a 2021 statewide survey of registered voters in Utah, only 13% of respondents reported that police misconduct was not at all prevalent at the national level, while 46% of respondents reported that police misconduct was not at all prevalent in their local area or town.⁷⁴ This indicates that local law enforcement agencies have a far higher baseline level of trust with which to work.

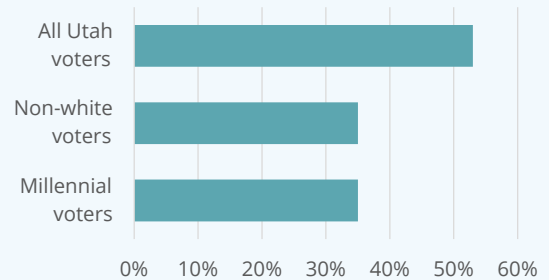
The same survey showed overwhelming support for higher police-community relationships. There was also broad support for police-community interactions through public presentations, community events and community service projects.⁷⁵ Law enforcement officers also report that their agencies largely have positive relationships with their communities. Two-thirds reported a good or excellent relationship with their community, while only 8% reported their agency had poor relations with the community.⁷⁶

Some programs to further build these local relationships could include: interacting with district or precinct citizens advisory councils to discuss neighborhood policing issues; periodically assigning officers to work with neighborhood organizations to highlight resident issues and neighborhood leadership; providing cultural training for officers in areas with high contact of immigrant communities; developing a contact list of neighborhood and community leaders that can quickly be reached during times of crisis; assigning officers that are present during significant police activities that can answer the questions of observers.⁷⁷

The most straightforward method of combating negative public sentiment is finding ways to have good interactions with members of the community. At the most basic level, departments should be working toward this goal by providing high-quality police services that meet citizens’ needs. There are opportunities where this may be relatively easy to accomplish. Some of those might be: facilitating interactions while attending special events; creating more opportunities for positive interactions that school resource officers have with the students they serve; hosting community service events such as Salt Lake City’s “shop with a cop” where police officers

Millennials and non-white voters are much less likely to trust the police.

Figure 13: Share of Respondents who Trust the Police “a Great Deal,” 2020



Source: Survey of Utah registered voters.



DEPARTMENTAL CONSOLIDATION

If some police departments consolidated across municipalities, that might offer the possibility of creating a pipeline for officers from a larger community. In addition, this could help increase departmental resources and would expand the personnel pool for greater officer and civilian support specialization. It could also make more room for advancement within the department. However, there are downsides to such a move, including municipal independence and a decrease in community connectiveness.

A local agency, Unified Police Department, is an example of an agency that consolidated multiple municipalities in a cost-cutting effort. “By combining a variety of police services such as SWAT, Forensics, Records, Public Information and Training under one organization, communities can share the costs with other participating communities, saving local governments money and reducing the tax burden of citizens.”

In a similar manner many municipalities contract with their county to provide police services.

There are also examples of consolidated departments that are seeking to un-tangle their organizations, including from the Unified Police Department. These decisions are complex and would require research on a case-by-case basis. These types of analyses are outside the scope of this report.

Source: Unified Police Department, https://updsl.org/page_about.php.

help children do their Christmas shopping; creating police activities leagues where police interact with young people through coaching sports; helping with students with homework – particularly for CE and CTE criminal-justice related courses; and other youth enrichment activities.⁷⁸

Another program is in works to increase communication among police and the community members they serve. Utah stakeholders are working on a campaign called *Listen, Explain, Cooperate, Communicate*. The program aims to foster good community relationships by training officers to earn community cooperation and engaging community leaders to work with police. Legislative action in 2023 could help fund the campaign.⁷⁹

Rallying Support from Elected Officials

The retention of police offers may also be hindered by a perceived lack of political support. Clearly, workers are much more likely to remain working in an environment where they feel valued and supported. If law enforcement feel like their local elected leaders are not supportive of the public service they provide, they may be inclined to move to another locality with more supportive political leaders, or perhaps find a job in the private sector. When asked about the most common reasons Utah law enforcement officers considered leaving their positions for the private sector, the lack of support from elected officials was the second highest ranked item. It was the second most common factor contributing to lower job satisfaction.

Political support is clearly tied to government budgets. A “defund the police” effort took root in multiple cities across the country, spurring perceptions that officers’ services were not valued in those communities.

Changing the nature of politics is beyond the scope of this report. But it would be helpful for politicians to highlight the necessary role police officers provide in the community. They could help highlight how the community needs more service-oriented individuals to come help make their local police force great. The survey of law enforcement officers provides evidence that political support leads to higher job satisfaction.

Other Retention Solutions

The Police Executive Research Forum asked departments across America what benefits they specifically provided to increase retention. Professional development was the most common option, with 85% of departments reporting offering the benefit. Others included increased overtime opportunities, opportunities to work temporarily in a variety of units or assignments, pay increase at service milestones, increased pay for college degrees and relaxed residency requirements. Less common benefits included participation in deferred retirement programs, more flexible scheduling systems, frequent promotional examinations, reducing time-in-grade requirements for promotion eligibility and flexible retirement or pension options.⁸⁰

Another retention solution for departments is to create career development pathways. Having a path to follow and goals to achieve can help employees remain engaged in their career. Tempe, Arizona, has individual development plans for every employee to track past training and set future goals. Supervisors play an important role in providing mentorship and aid in developing the targeted skills.⁸¹ Along similar lines, career progression might seem more limited in smaller agencies. Roanoke County, Virginia, implemented skill-based progressions with respective pay increases so officers can progress within a rank.⁸² In any public service employment arena, it is critical to create a system of incentives to reward high performance and increase job satisfaction. That may require increased managerial flexibility to recognize and promote excellence in law enforcement.

CONCLUSION

While police departments across the nation are facing challenges in finding enough qualified employees, those specific challenges vary from location to location. This report represents a menu of actions local governments can take to help address specific problems – whether recruitment, retention, or building a pipeline of potential applicants.

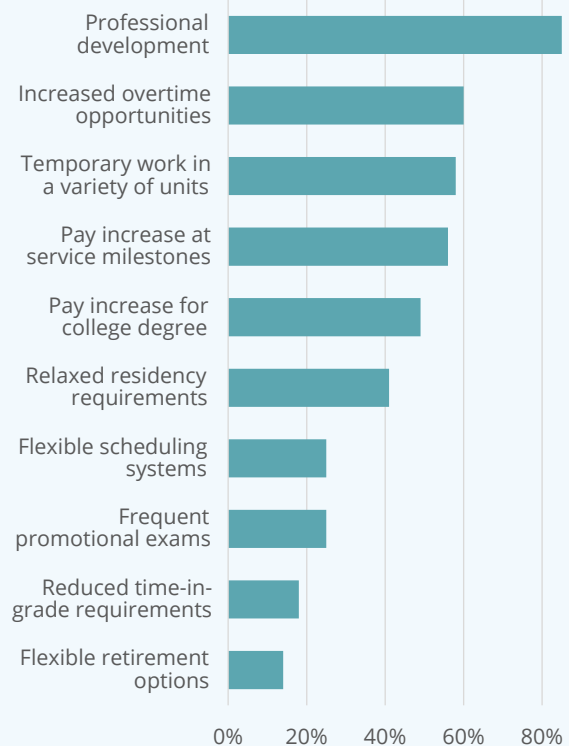
Utah law enforcement officers are paid about 71% of what their counterparts nationally receive. Pay, retirement benefits and health benefits were the top three items when Utah officers were asked what their department could do to keep them around. It is important to look at these components of the compensation package as a whole, calibrating the deployment of limited available funds to maximize recruitment and retention.

Pay is the main reason law enforcement officers consider switching to a job in the private sector. It is the most influential retention tool. Utah's police departments have increased pay. This has helped with retention. However, departments remain short-staffed.

Law enforcement officers in 2022 seem to be happier than they were in 2021. It is unclear whether these sentiments are related directly to pay increases. While pay

Nationwide, professional development tops the list of retention benefits on offer.

Figure 14: Share of Departments Nationally Offering the Following Retention Benefits



Source: Police Executive Research Forum.

Given the sentiments that officers have expressed about pay, and given the gap between average pay in Utah and the national average, finding ways to increase pay is the core issue.

increases appear to help with retention more than recruitment, this may be because starting pay remains too low to serve as an effective recruitment tool.

Given the sentiments that officers have expressed about pay, and given the gap between average pay in Utah and the national average, finding ways to increase pay is the core issue. The full compensation package is important to officers. However, if more of the compensation pie goes to retirement, there is less available for pay increases.

Beyond compensation packages, 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 candidates. In terms of recruitment, a focus on helping and protecting the community and making a difference appear to be influential. Though the prospect of retiring with public benefits is also influential.

When thinking about their job satisfaction, nothing was as influential as managers and administrative policies for Utah law enforcement officers. Having a strong show of support from the community, the media and politicians would also help. The best way to improve retention by municipalities with limited funding may be to ensure that they have good managers in place.

Overall, police departments and their respective governments need to accept that in tight labor markets it is hard for all employers to find enough qualified employees. Local governments and departments will have to prioritize the funds they do have and may need to engage their communities about the realistic expectations of the service level current local taxes can support.

APPENDIX

Survey of Utah registered voters

In 2020, Y2 Analytics carried out a survey of Utah registered voters for the *Love Listen and Lead Committee* to assess the public's view of police. The survey was carried out from October 22 to November 11 through online and live telephone interviews. The sample included 1,463 responses and oversampled non-white Utah voters. The survey was administered online.

Public safety officer survey

In 2021, the Utah League of Cities and Towns surveyed 2,687 public safety officers, the majority of whom were law enforcement officers. The body of this report details only the law enforcement officers' responses. The survey was administered online.

Survey of Utah cities

In 2022, the Utah League of Cities and Towns surveyed 42 cities regarding their staffing needs, and recent and expected increases in staffers wages – including the needs and wages of public safety officers. The survey was administered online.

Survey of Utah police chiefs

In October 2022, the Utah Chiefs of Police Association surveyed 41 police chiefs. The survey was administered online.

Survey of Utah public safety officers

In October 2022, the Utah Foundation surveyed 220 law enforcement officers, as well as other public safety officials and fire fighters. The body of this report details only the law enforcement officers' responses. The survey was administered online.

Survey of American police departments

In 2019 the Police Executive Research Forum surveyed 412 police departments representing 45 states, Washington, D.C., and Canada.

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