



Arizona House of Representatives

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Representative Justin Pierce (R-District 25)

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DPS entering period of potentially acute staffing shortage

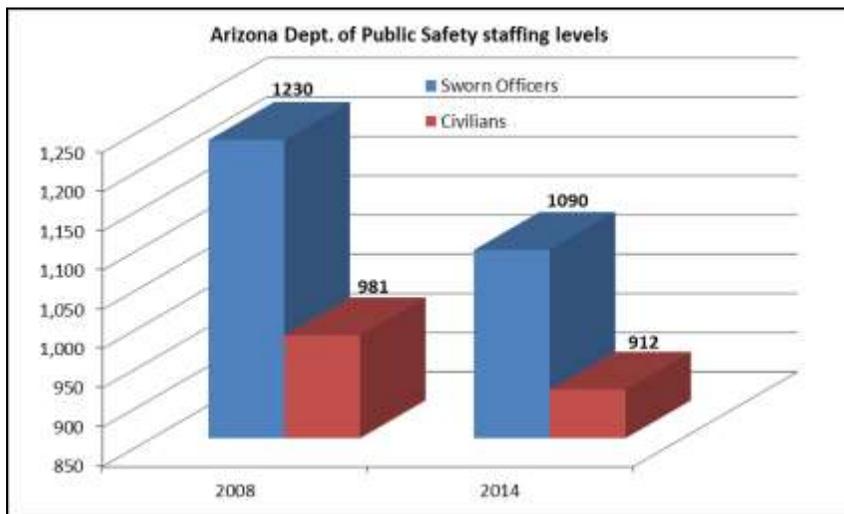
Public safety is the first role of state government. Without a strong public safety sector, the right to life, to say nothing of its enjoyment, becomes more tenuous, especially to those with limited resources.

As Chairman of the Public Safety, Military and Regulatory Affairs Committee for the Arizona House of Representatives, I know that public safety professionals are not motivated by a desire to get rich, but by a desire to protect us and our freedoms. At the same time sworn officers of the law should receive a level of financial stability and benefits that recognize the risk these men and women take each day.

Until this last session, the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS), our premier law enforcement agency, which patrols our highways and provides a number of crime enforcement services to counties and communities throughout the state, had not seen a pay increase since 2009, when there was a Special Line Item appropriation of \$1.2 million for sworn officer raises.

Thanks to strong support from Speaker of the House Andy Tobin, R-Prescott, the fiscal year 2015 budget included a one-time appropriation of \$3.3 million for DPS, with the intention of giving all Department personnel a 2 percent pay raise.

This one-time increase may not be much, but it marks a step in the right direction, particularly in light of employment trends and the possibility that staffing needs could spike sharply in the coming years. Since the 2009 recession DPS has seen vacancies for sworn officers and support staff increase significantly. The budget tightening and hiring freeze that the agency has gone through has led to nearly a 10 percent decrease in its workforce, dropping from 2,211 employees in 2008 to 2,002 employees in 2014, figures that include full-time, part-time and non-appropriated employees.



The problem in attracting and retaining these highly skilled professionals comes down to a very large wage differential between what DPS can offer and what other law enforcement agencies, both in-state and out-of-state, are offering. In some instances the wage differential is more than \$10,000 per year, according to the Arizona Highway Patrol Association (AHPA). AHPA conducts a salary comparison every year prior to DPS submitting its budget, and based on last year's comparison, DPS is 23 percent below the average law enforcement salary.

Putting DPS on financial parity with comparable employment opportunities will become even more important in the next few years as the number of the agency's professionals eligible for retirement is projected to increase significantly.

More than 20 percent of DPS employees currently enrolled in the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS) will be or already are eligible to retire in the next two years, according to information provided by PSPRS. As of July 16, 2014, more than half of the employees in this group has already hit the 20 year mark and could retire immediately. Over the next two years the other half will become eligible to retire.

Keep in mind that DPS positions, both sworn and civilian, are highly specialized. Consequently, it takes up to a year at least, sometime longer, to properly train a new employee.

Demographic changes and crime trends will continue to impact public safety and challenge DPS into the foreseeable future. A sudden shortage of DPS professionals could lead to serious problems in carry out basic safety and justice functions. I earnestly hope that future legislators and citizens will recognize the need for future pay increases at DPS.

Highlights of Public Safety Legislation passed by House of Representative during Fifty-first Legislature Second Regular Session

- Provides a means for victims of domestic violence and other crimes to keep their residential address confidential (HB 2100, signed)
 - Prohibits pointing lasers at aircraft (HB 2164, signed)
 - Improves law enforcement information sharing in order to keep weapons out of the hands of individuals who have been adjudicated mentally ill (HB 2322, signed)
 - Supports legal and social services for crime victims (HB 2625, signed)
 - Improves the ability of law enforcement to investigate and prosecute "cold" murder cases (older cases that have proven difficult to solve) (HB 2382, signed)
 - Empowers law enforcement to prosecute criminals who engage in human trafficking as well as protect the victims (HB 2454, signed)
 - Allows for the creation of specialized courts to deal with the unique needs of the mentally ill and also with veterans (HB 2457, signed)
 - Supports the innovative Drug Treatment Alternative to Prosecution (DTAP) program in Pima County (Budget)
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