

VERMONT STATE POLICE
Office of the Director



Memo

To: Trevor M. Lashua, Randolph Town Manager
From: Colonel Matthew T. Birmingham
Date: March 14, 2023
Re: State Police Coverage for Municipalities

As we are all vividly aware, we are currently experiencing one of the most challenging periods in the history of our profession. In addition to an ever-changing law enforcement landscape, and amid a global pandemic, our collective law enforcement staffing levels have fallen across the state in recent years.

Departments throughout the state, including the state police, are losing officers at a rate that significantly exceeds our ability to hire and train replacements. In 2021, the state police lost three sworn staff for every one hired, while our applicant pool shrunk from an annual target of 700 applications to approximately 300.

In response to hiring and retention challenges, some agencies have curtailed shifts, altered services, and as a result of accelerating staffing impairments are in danger of significant service interruptions. In recent months a number of municipal departments have inquired about state police assistance with shift coverage and response to calls for service.

Our desire to help is stymied by the fact that we are experiencing the same challenges. We are currently operating at our lowest staffing levels in decades.

While I want to be clear that we will always be available to assist with any incident or investigation that requires a specialized component of the state police, such as our special teams, Major Crime Unit, Crime Scene Search Team, Technology Investigation Unit, Arson Investigation Unit and others, our ability to absorb daily policing services in areas where municipal departments have historically operated is very limited.

In the event that your staffing levels impair your ability to staff shifts, together with partners, we have developed a list of options and alternatives to consider before relying on VSP to supplement your response capacity. In order to mitigate the impact on our operations in over 200 communities statewide, we ask that you and your municipal leadership implement all of the following:

- Reorganize all available sworn personnel to patrol functions, eliminating detective divisions, specialized units, and specialized assignments. We are aware of the impacts these alterations would have, but observe that emergency response is the most essential work we do.
- Ensure that all patrol shifts are operating at optimized staffing levels, while simultaneously maximizing the use of overtime to assist with shift coverage.
- Create an on-call system using existing local resources to cover open shifts and/or calls for service.
- Contract with other local or county law enforcement agencies for additional coverage.
- Borrow / hire officers on a limited basis from surrounding agencies to cover shifts at an overtime pay rate to make the work more compelling.
- Engage surrounding law enforcement and municipal leadership to establish regionalized policing efforts and shared services to the greatest extent possible.

If these and any other viable options have been exhausted, and there are no reasonable alternatives available, the state police will assist with calls for service using the following methodology (subject to change based on experience, staffing, and ongoing statewide assessments of need):

- 1. VSP will respond to violent crime, in progress crimes, or other calls that are clearly emergencies.**
- 2. Your department must establish a call-screening system by a sworn officer prior to state police involvement. That officer must ensure the call for assistance meets the criteria established in #1 above.**
- 3. Once the state police receives a call for assistance, we will respond. We will not be responsible for determining whether a response is required.**
- 4. Troopers are on-call between 2:00AM and 8:00AM. Response times will vary greatly, and you should anticipate responses might take as much as an hour in some instances and in some locations.**

5. While executing these emergency procedures, your department must continue to seek alternatives to improve your staffing situation, and not rely on measures outlined here as a long-term solution.

6. We will evaluate this process on a weekly basis and make any adjustments that are necessary.

To request VSP assistance, your senior municipal official should send an email to Major Jim Whitcomb at james.whitcomb@vermont.gov. This request must include an attestation that all six bullet points above have been implemented.

Despite the challenges we all are facing, we are committed to continuing to work together to provide high quality law enforcement services to the citizens of Vermont.

As always, please feel free to call me with any questions or concerns.