



VERMONT SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION
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TO: Members of the Vermont House of Representatives – Government Operations Committee

FROM: Keith D. Clark, President

SUBJECT: Vermont Sheriff's Position as it relates to H.765 –An act relating to eliminating the part-time certification of law enforcement officers

DATE: February 27, 2014

The Sheriffs in the State of Vermont oppose H.765 as introduced. We object to the proposal due to: cost, recruitment, retention, and lack of a defined problem.

The sheriffs in the state have historically and currently utilize part-time deputies for nearly all operational activities to include prisoner and mental health transports, traffic control, commercial vehicle escort, court security, contract patrols, civil process and other services. The elimination of the part-time certification program would significantly hinder our ability to provide affordable and responsive services to our constituents and to the State of Vermont.

COST:

Sheriffs in this state are uniquely funded as compared to sheriffs throughout the country. Per statutes we do not receive financial support from the county or the state for deputies. Our funding for deputies comes from our ability to provide contract services to public and private entities to include the State of Vermont.

We are not able to place deputies on our roster full-time unless we have a funding source that supports them. We base our contract rates on all the costs necessary to place a deputy in uniform. This includes the cost of training. If the sheriffs were required to utilize only deputies that were "full-time" certified even for part-time or per diem assignments, the associated costs for training to that level would necessitate passing those increased costs to our customers. In these times of constrained and limited budgets, both locally and at the state level, the Sheriffs believe their ability to obtain contracts would be reduced, forcing the individual sheriffs' to reduce staffing and services.

RECRUITMENT:

Due to the funding mechanisms, Sheriff's in Vermont typically do not maintain a full-time on-duty staff. We utilize on-call or per-diem deputies to meet the need as it arrives. Most of our deputies have other employment or commitments. Each deputy may not always be available so it is necessary to maintain a large roster of deputies to call. To recruit someone and ask them to take 16 to 18 weeks off from their regular job or a semester of from school in order to obtain a Law Enforcement certification which may provide them a few days of work throughout the year is not reasonable. Sheriff's currently find it difficult to recruit part-time deputies with the current training requirements, eliminating the part-time certification would make it nearly impossible.

RETENTION:

Sheriff's Offices have traditionally been known as "training grounds" within the law enforcement community. Many municipal police officers and State Troopers started their careers as part-time deputies. Once they have proven themselves as a part-time deputy and or attended the full-time training program they are recruited away by agencies that can offer better benefits and opportunities. If all deputies were full-time certified we believe

there is a greater likelihood the deputies will be recruited and hired by agencies that want to save money and hire individuals who are already certified. This would increase the cost to the Sheriffs and reduce our ability to maintain a quality staff.

LACK OF DEFINED PROBLEM:

Each sheriff has spoken with or emailed his county's representatives to determine what issue or problem had arisen which resulted in the introduction of H.765. From the conversations and correspondence there does not appear to be a clearly defined problem.

The predominant response has been there is a difference in the number of hours or weeks of training a part-time officer or deputy receives as compared to a full-time certified officer. This is not a problem, but an opinion based on limited understanding of the duties, responsibilities, supervision, and training part-time deputies receive. The belief that part-time certified officers are "less than fully trained" and "dangerous", because they have not attended a minimum of 16 weeks of training at the Vermont Police Academy is not borne out by complaints or identified problems related to levels of training.

If there was a clearly defined problem such as inordinate number of deadly shootings, false arrests, ethical violations or criminal behavior by part-time officers or deputies; the sheriffs would be more open to supporting the elimination or significant alteration to the part-time certification process. However there has not been any such data or reports to such affect.

We are currently in a period of time where we are seeing a substantial increase in criminal activity to include a dramatic rise in heroin and opiate related crime. The last thing the State should be doing is reducing the number of sworn, qualified law enforcement officers able to respond to Vermonters in need. In closing the Vermont Sheriff's Association requests the Vermont legislature and this committee to carefully consider the implications of eliminating or dramatically changing how officers, deputies, and troopers are certified.

Thank you for considering our position.