



SHERIFF'S OFFICE
WINDHAM COUNTY
SHERIFF MARK R. ANDERSON

WINDHAM COUNTY POLICING PILOT

THE LEGISLATURE'S CRITICAL ROLE IN SUPPORTING PUBLIC SAFETY

SUMMARY

The Windham County Sheriff's Office seeks legislative authorization for a 5-year pilot using the county tax mechanism to fund public safety services for participating towns. The pilot enables towns to join voluntarily, and efficiently and transparently share public safety costs. It offers professional public safety services at an affordable cost through an innovative funding mechanism. A Council of Government (COG) ensures democratic local control, while the county tax provides efficient collection. Non-participating towns are protected and the pilot would sunset after 5-years, allows testing without permanent commitment.

THE CHALLENGE AND SOLUTION

Most Windham County towns experience challenges in affording adequate police coverage. State Police are stretched thin with 1 officer per 168 square miles. Response times are measured in hours, not minutes. The solution is a COG form of governance over law enforcement services, creating economies of scale for participating towns, consistent budgeting for the Windham County Sheriff's Office, and leveraging the Sheriff's Office infrastructure.

BENEFITS TO WINDHAM TOWNS

- Law enforcement services at an affordable cost
- Coordinated services across town lines
- Shared administrative burden
- Regional coordination and mutual aid
- Democratic control through COG - 1 vote per town
- No startup costs like a municipal department
- Economies in scale in administration and costs
- No individual contract negotiations
- Towns create the terms of the COG after legislative approval
- Participating towns have equal voices on the COG
- COG determines the appropriate level of services and associated costs

THE PROCESS FLOW

- Legislature approves 5-year pilot program to stand up COG form of governance at the local/county level
- COG participating towns meet and determine scope of service and budget
- COG submits budget to Assistant Judges
- Assistant Judges bill and collect from member towns
- Sheriff delivers services per COG specifications



LEGISLATIVE ASK

1. Create session law to authorize the creation of the COG structure of governance in Windham County
2. Enable Windham County and the Assistant Judges implement the COG budget via county tax for public safety purposes
3. Implement a 5-year pilot period with a sunset clause to enable the legislature to determine whether the pilot should continue based on demonstrated effectiveness

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORIZATION: The Windham County Sheriff's Office needs the Vermont Legislature to approve this pilot program in 2026. Please join our mission and voice your support for this innovative solution to Windham County's public safety challenges.

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WINDHAM COUNTY POLICING PILOT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: *What is a Council of Government (COG)?* A: A COG is a voluntary association of local governments that work together to provide shared services more efficiently. Towns maintain their independence while cooperating on specific services like law enforcement, dispatch, and emergency management.

Q: *Why only a 5-year pilot?* A: The 5-year timeframe (July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2031) allows enough time to properly implement and evaluate the program while protecting towns from permanent commitment.

Q: *Which towns can participate?* A: Any Windham County town without its own police department can voluntarily join. Currently, that includes 19 of the county's 23 towns.

Q: *Is participation mandatory?* A: No. Participation is completely voluntary. Each town decides whether to join through its normal democratic process.

Q: *How does voting work?* A: Each participating town gets one vote regardless of size or population. This ensures small towns have equal voice with larger ones. The Selectboard Chair (or their designated representative) casts the vote for their town.

Q: *Can a town leave if it's not working?* A: Yes. The program would include exit provisions allowing towns to withdraw if the COG doesn't meet their needs.

Q: *How is this different from county government?* A: The COG is completely separate from county government. It's a voluntary association of towns, not an expansion of county authority. The county budget and Assistant Judges' roles remain unchanged.

Q: *How much will this cost per town?* A: The final cost will depend on the level of services the COG determine is necessary. However, an estimated cost is \$175-225 per resident annually is estimated for full services. This compares to \$350-750+ for a municipal police department or the current \$143 for minimal State Police coverage plus additional contract costs.

Q: *How is the cost divided among towns?* A: The specific formula will be determined by member towns, but likely will consider factors like population, grand list, and service levels desired. Each town can choose service tiers based on its budget.

Q: *Will this raise property taxes?* A: The impact depends on your town's current spending and chosen service level. For most towns, the COG provides more services for similar or slightly higher cost than current partial coverage contracts.

Q: *How do we know this will work?* A: That's why it's a pilot. COGs work successfully in other states. The 5-year test lets us adapt the model to Vermont's needs and prove its value before permanent commitment.

Q: *Why not just expand our current sheriff contracts?* A: Individual contracts are inefficient - each town gets limited hours instead of expanded hours and scope of services and regional coverage. The COG provides an opportunity to expand services in a coordinated fashion, and at better value.

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