



PHOENIX LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSOCIATION

The Professional Association of Phoenix Police Officers Since 1975

What follows are the remarks delivered at a press conference held at the PLEA office on Monday December 5th by PLEA President Ken Crane to address the ongoing manpower and staffing crisis being experienced by the department.

My name is Ken Crane and I presently serve as the President of the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association.

We believe the cornerstone of any vibrant thriving city is a solid public safety infrastructure. Without fully staffed and well trained Police, Fire, and EMS services any city will struggle with attracting and keeping businesses and residents. Without a properly staffed police department the safety of your police force is compromised and service to citizens is greatly diminished. The Phoenix Police Dept. is currently in the midst of a manpower and staffing crisis and the responsibility for this crisis lies squarely at the feet of the City Manager, Mayor, the City Council. The police dept. has just begun its third city wide re-bid of police manpower. A re-bid is a term used to describe a department wide re-shuffling of manpower to balance out staffing needs.

City leadership, like the crew of the Titanic, have ignored warning signs over the last several years regarding manpower and staffing issues. This, despite the fact that the crew of the ship, in this case, police management and police labor have been ringing the warning bells for years. A major police department that is on its third re-bid of manpower in six years is but one indicator that the organization is in crisis. Staffing has dropped to such razor thin levels that the smallest disruption in the allocation of personnel upsets the balance of the whole organization necessitating these re-bids. City management has been all too aware of this and has consciously decided to defer police hiring for over six years. It's the adage of you either pay on the front end or pay on the back end. The city opted to pay on the back end and now the chickens have come home to roost. Staffing is decimated and overtime costs are skyrocketing. Employees across the department are overworked and experiencing burnout which creates a domino effect leading to a drastic decrease in the morale of the organization. Patrol squads are dangerously understaffed. Just as important, are the tax paying citizens who must suffer with diminished quality of police service because an understaffed, patrol force struggles daily to keep up with service demands. Supervisors struggle daily to get patrol squads staffed and can't get people to show up or hold over even with the incentive of overtime pay.

The public has been misinformed and fed partial truths as to the true state of affairs regarding the staffing of the police department. Allow me to walk you through some numbers. Before we do, it is important to note that the responsibility for all policy matters to include raising and appropriation of funds, levying of taxes and contracting of debt lies squarely with the Mayor and City Council. The City Manager is essentially the city's CEO responsible for the general administration of all city business. This is laid out in the excerpt from the City of Phoenix Employee Handbook that is a part of your packet.

For this next portion, the stats I am using can be found in the manpower and staffing handout in your packet. These numbers were provided to us by the department.

Police Manpower was at its peak in 2008 with 3,388 sworn officers. After Oct of 2008 the PD was essentially put on a six-plus year hiring freeze. The PD started hiring again in February of 2015. At that time our total sworn manpower was 2,772, a net loss of 616 sworn officers. Since 2015, we have hired 447 people. This sounds great but the number is deceptive as it doesn't include how many of these new hires were lost in the academy, the FTO process, or just failed to successfully complete probation. During this same time, the PD was still experiencing a steady stream of retirements. Our current level of sworn personnel is 2,722. So, after hiring 447 we now find ourselves in a manpower deficit of minus 50 from where we were when we first began hiring in 2015. While other cities around the valley were experiencing the same economic down turn they at least had the foresight to hire for attrition. Phoenix refused to hire for attrition which has been a major factor in the crisis we now find ourselves in.

The City can artificially stretch our current staffing level to 2,856 if they include officers in training (OIT's) and recruits currently in the academy. This is not an accurate representation of the true manpower numbers. The ultimate goal is to get the total PD sworn staffing up to 3,125. However, the reality is that we need to get back to at least 3,388 to adequately staff the two new precincts paid for by the taxpayers via a bond election. One of which was shut down due to lack of adequate manpower. We are currently 403 away from that number however, that number increases constantly due to monthly retirements.

One of the net effects of not hiring is that the patrol force has been slowly whittled away and is severely understaffed. Without being able to hire, PD management was left to come up with alternative solutions such as supplemental overtime shifts to plug holes and the detective back to patrol program. Let me address these separately.

Overtime is viewed as a short-term solution for many reasons, chief among them is that there is not an infinite supply of money. Second, employees will become saturated after a period and begin to experience burnout. In addition, the current precinct staffing model used to determine if extra officers are needed to cover a shift is a flawed design that doesn't allow supervisors to determine if extra manpower is needed until after a shift has started on a given day. We are presently five months into the fiscal year and the PD has spent \$10M out of its allotted annual overtime budget of \$11M.

The detectives back to patrol program is another short-term band-aid solution and PD management knows it is. Taking over-burdened case carrying detectives and making them do a day or week out of every month back in patrol takes them away from managing their caseloads. This program has been largely ineffective.

The patrol division, the front-line troops, are and have been operating in crisis mode for some time now. This creates massive officer safety issues coupled with being in some of the most dangerous times we have ever seen in law enforcement history. These factors have given Chief Williams no choice but to engage in what could be best described as a form of organizational triage. It has been decided by police management that patrol needs to have a minimum staffing level of 1,096 bodies. To reach this number, a very aggressive timeline has been set for a city-wide patrol rebid. This is going to entail moving 169 detectives and officers currently assigned to detective details and patrol specialty squads throughout the department along with 24 Sergeants back to the streets to bolster the front-line patrol force. Also, included in the mix are 97 OIT's currently on the street. The 1,096 number has been referred to by PD

management as “crisis staffing level”. This is being looked at as a hard-line number that we cannot go below. This work around to beef up the patrol force is a rob Peter to pay Paul scheme that only shifts the existing burden from front line patrol officers to investigative and specialty patrol details. While this may diminish payout of overtime in patrol we will now have to start paying detectives overtime to keep up with an increasing caseload.

It is important to note that between 2008-2016 the population in the city of Phoenix increased while during the same time-period PD manpower declined 20%. Our current ratio of police officers to citizens is approximately 1.74:1000. This calculation is based on a population of 1,563,025 (source US census Bureau). The national average for staffing is 2.5:1000 (Source IACP) Our city covers 530 square miles stretching from Anthem to Ahwatukee and from Tolleson to Scottsdale. The business website growthnation.com has forecasted Phoenix will be the 4th largest city in the nation by 2020 – just three years away.

The City Manager, Mayor and Council have been very clear in letting the police force and the citizens know where they stand on public safety. We can’t hire cops however, between 2013-2015 \$137M dollars was spent on or earmarked for dog parks, artwork, swimming pools and city park renovations. We understand quality of life issues are important to the citizens. Many of our officers are residents of Phoenix and use these services and facilities. We just believe the city needs properly prioritize expenditures and public safety should be the priority.

A food tax was implemented in 2010 with a five-year sunset provision that levied a 2% sales tax on every dollar spent on food. This was bringing in much needed financial relief, a portion of which was earmarked for public safety, but was reduced early due to internal pressure on the council which resulted in a loss of \$33.4M in revenue. Once again, the Mayor and Council showed the citizens and the police department where they stood on public safety.

Citizen & Community Impact

The President’s Task force on 21st century policing recommendations were published in May of 2015 and The Community Police and Trust Initiative recommendations in the City of Phoenix came out in March of 2016. Both emphasize the need for strong police community relations. The Phoenix PD has typically excelled in this area. The police department and Chief Williams have pledged to continue to make community based policing a priority. The problem is that community based policing tends to take a back seat when there aren’t enough officers to get calls answered. It takes manpower to make all these programs happen. When officers run call to call non-stop there is no time to engage in community outreach. Citizens have also been feeling the impact with longer and longer response times to calls. (comparisons on manpower / staffing handout).

Unintended Consequences

Make no mistake, the predicament we find ourselves in is not the fault of rank and file officers or the fault of police managers. Chief Williams, through no fault of her own, has inherited a severely understaffed police department due to a City Manager, Mayor and Council who have failed to get their priorities straight. Police management has even begun to informally discuss what types of calls the PD might not respond to.

There are currently 774 sworn personnel that are eligible to retire right now. Within a year, we can add another 142 to that number. Officers get tired of having their lives upended and getting yanked around like a dog on the end of a choke chain with an endless cycle of department re-bids. They have lives and families, some are single parent households and others are trying to get their college educations while working full time. When senior experienced people get continually jerked around due to the city's lack of foresight, retirement begins to look like a very attractive option. People can leave with the stroke of a pen but it takes about a year to get a candidate through the pipeline to solo capable status.

Solutions

First and foremost, we are not trying to say that the re-bid should be put on hold. That ship has sailed and the patrol force is in desperate need of manpower.

There is only one solution to the crisis we find ourselves in and that is to hire at a rate that will allow us to outpace current rates of attrition however, this is a long-term solution since it takes up to a year to produce a solo capable officer.

The city is going to have to find a way to generate the funds necessary to continue giving the PD additional money for overtime until hiring can catch up.

The City Council has the ability to rapidly come up with solutions to fix this problem but they won't do it unless enough pressure is brought to bear.

Conclusion

We have asked a lot of citizens to join us here today and there is a reason for that. It's the same thing I tell new officers fresh out of the academy when I teach their career survival class in this very room. Citizens are the real boss. Sure, we all work for Sgt's, Lt's, and so on but all these citizens standing up here are the real boss. I'll let you in on a little secret, all those folks over at city hall, the Mayor, the City Manager and the Council; they have bosses too. It's called the citizens. You the citizens are their boss.

Let me digress for just a minute. There are some common radio codes in police work. One familiar to any cop is the radio code 907. 907 is a radio code that tells anyone listening that the officer needs a backup. Anyone in police work for any length of time has responded to and requested a 907. There is another radio code called a 906. This means the requesting officer needs urgent assistance usually because they are in a serious fight. When a cop hears a 906 come out you drop everything and get there fast to render assistance.

Our officers and detectives are servant leaders who willingly step into the gap daily to serve the community despite the odds that are stacked against them. As the President of the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association, I am telling you the citizens that my officers, the rank and file cops and detectives that are out there on the front lines daily, now need a 906 from you.

I am asking that the citizens of Phoenix step to the plate for us and demand that your employees; the City Manager, Mayor, and Council get their house in order and their priorities straight. Please, demand that they find or generate the funds necessary to end this crisis. The rank and file cops have always been and will continue to be there for you. Please, be there for us.