

**POSITION PAPER ON:
MINIMUM VIABLE POLICE DEPARTMENT SIZE
BY
THE LOCAL UNIT ALIGNMENT, REORGANIZATION
AND CONSOLIDATION COMMISSION**

This is one of a series of position papers developed by the Local Unit Alignment, Reorganization and Consolidation Commission (LUARCC) in furtherance of its mission to improve the operations of local governments in New Jersey.

In its examination of shared police services, LUARCC has received input from many individuals and organizations. Two issues related to the size of police departments have been raised by various sources: 1) the calculation of the appropriate size of a police force given the circumstances of individual jurisdictions; and 2) the minimum size of a police force. This paper addresses the second of these two issues. The Commission will address the issue of “right sizing” in a future piece.

The Minimum Size of a basic Police Force: Based on testimony and the experience of Commission members the Local Unit Alignment, Reorganization and Consolidation Commission finds that, to adequately provide police services regardless of population size or crime statistics, a minimum two full time sworn officers should be available on duty at all times. For the safety of the officer, it is necessary that there be a guaranteed “backup” provided for all calls that may present a threat to the responding officer. Consequently, even though the municipality sets a policy of only one officer on duty during certain hours, this safety requirement results in the need for either a second officer being on duty or some mechanism in place that assures that a second officer will in fact be available and will respond automatically on certain types of incidents.

There are several ways to provide for this minimum requirement of two officers available at all times:

- 1) the direct employment of sufficient officers to insure that two officers are on duty at all times;
- 2) the use of special officers to supplement normal full time officers; or
- 3) the use of a definitive shared service agreement with a nearby department that assures that an officer responds as needed.

This paper will look briefly at each of these alternates.

A Self Sufficient Force - On Duty Officers

A self-sufficient force, for purposes of this paper, is one that does not rely on assistance from resources external to the municipality, maintains 24/7 coverage with two full time sworn officers, available for response and backup.

Based on a schedule of five shifts a week of eight hours a shift and accounting for three weeks vacation, training time, sick leave, administrative leave and 13 holidays, the Commission finds that a self-sustaining force requires a minimum of 11 full time sworn officers.

The Table below shows these calculations

Calculation of Minimal Number of Sworn Officers	
	Hours
Number of hours of scheduled work (8 hours 5 days a week)	2080
Minus:	
Vacation Time	120
Average sick leave	40
Holidays	104
Administrative Leave	36
Training	80
Total Availability	1,700
Annual number of hours for coverage (365 days * 24 hours * 2 officers)	17,520
Divide by availability	1,700
Total number of officers needed for 24/7 coverage	10.30588
Minimum size of force	11

The ratio for police coverage cited by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is 2.7 sworn officers per 1,000 population in the northeast. This ratio is an observed average and not meant as a measure of appropriate force level. It is used in the paper for illustrative purposes. Applying the population average of 2.7 officers per 1,000 residents, a town with a population lower than 3,700 may need to justify the maintenance of a full time self-sufficient police force. Obviously, in instances where local conditions are unusual, a smaller community might be able to make a case for such a force. However, municipalities, with a population under 3,700

currently maintaining a full time police force, should examine this issue and consider the possibility of entering into arrangements with other communities to provide adequate public safety at an appropriate cost. Currently there are over 60 municipalities (see next section) in New Jersey who employ at least 1 but fewer than 11 full-time sworn officers.

In future papers the Commission will look at this group of 66 as well as some of the smaller forces with 11 or more officers but with smaller populations to identify possible efficiency savings.

A Self Sufficient Force - On Duty Officers Including “Class II Special Officers”

One technique often used by smaller municipalities and those with seasonal peak populations is to supplement the full time on duty officers with special officers. The state statute regulating the use of special officers is N.J.S.A. 40a:14-146 et seq. This statute states that special officers may be employed only to assist local full time officers, not to supplant them. There is a limit to the number of special officers that can be employed: special officers can constitute only 25% of the local force (e.g. if there are eight full time officers, you can also have two full time or full time equivalent special officers). In essence under this statute, for a shift where there is only one full time regular officer working, this officer can be supported by the use of a special officer as an assistant and/or back up, provided that this special officer meets all other requirements as outlined in the statute.

Back up through a shared service agreement

This alternate is to have a written formal shared service agreement with a neighboring municipality wherein an officer from that municipality automatically provides for back up for the local on duty officer when that officer is undertaking any activity that would be deemed hazardous (e.g. a domestic violence call). This shared service agreement is in addition to any standard “mutual aid agreement” that may exist since the mutual aid agreements normally only result in assistance when requested by a municipality or officer in distress. Rather than waiting for the officer to be in this difficult situation, the shared service agreement would insure that the necessary back up is in place before the incident has escalated to the point that a mutual aid call was necessary. This shared service agreement also clarifies exactly what is expected of each jurisdiction and should also address the key issue of the monitoring of radio communications to insure the officer safety.

The size of current forces in New Jersey. Based on information published by the New Jersey State Police in the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) for 2008, 92 New Jersey municipalities with a total population over 286,000 employ no full-time sworn officers. The majority of these communities are involved in either a formal shared service agreement or receive police coverage from the State Police. This number is also changing as more municipalities have entered shared service arrangements. Below is a break down of the number of municipalities by the number of full-time sworn officers.

Sworn Officers by Municipality	
Number of Sworn Officers	Number of Municipalities
0	92
1 – 10	66
11	6
12 - 20	122
21 – 30	88
31 – 40	13
41 – 50	87
51 – 60	19
61 – 70	14
71 – 80	10
81 – 90	10
91 – 100	9
101 – 150	24
150 – 200	9
201 – 300	3
301 – 400	4
400's	1
800's	1
1300's	1