

# ACCG RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE C.O.P.S TASK FORCE

ACCG appreciates the opportunity to work with the Task Force to develop innovative strategies that will increase the availability of qualified professional local law enforcement personnel across all agencies within the state of Georgia by addressing issues of: adequate and competitive levels of compensation, reduce wage related turnover, and increase the pool of career driven applicants.

## IDENTIFIED ISSUES:

- Local law enforcement wages in Georgia lag both in the southeast region and nationally.
- Metropolitan (MSA) area wages exceed wages in rural areas of Georgia, and rural areas lose officers to the larger areas at alarming rates.
- Georgia's per capita spending on law enforcement ranks high when compared nationally.
- Number of law enforcement officers per capita ranks high when compared regionally and nationally indicating a potential need to "right size" local law enforcement agencies.
- Only about a third of the 159 counties have conducted an independent wage and salary survey.
- County Sheriffs lack the authority to generate revenue and rely on County BOC for funding essential public safety and constitutional operations.
- Lack of convenient low costs training for officers.
- Lack of adequate safety equipment for local law enforcement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Increase the existing premium tax by 1% on auto insurance policies and have .5% go into a fund dedicated to an incentive program for law enforcement jurisdictions that demonstrate managerial and operational excellence.

The remaining .05% should be dedicated to the Police Officer's Annuity and Benefit Fund (POAB) to ensure that this benefit remains available to all P.O.S.T. certified law enforcement within our state. This will also ensure ongoing funding for this important law enforcement benefit in lieu of fine add-ons that have and will continue to decrease as a result of criminal justice reform.

The details of incentive programs should have criteria specific to the various jurisdictions and their operations, i.e. municipal police departments, sheriff's offices with patrol functions, and county police departments.

An example of a similar program is the "Waterfirst Community" program. For discussion purposes call it the "ELLE" Excellence in Local Law Enforcement Program. Possible financial incentives for Law Enforcement jurisdictions that demonstrate managerial operational excellence in several key areas:

- Receive priority status on all grant applications and grant funding issued thru the Governors Office of Highway Safety.
- Receive tuition reimbursement for all P.O.S.T approved training completed.
- Receive reimbursement for the purchase of tactical and bullet proof vests for all officers in the department.
- Receive a state base supplement of \$5,000 per year per sworn officer within the department.

Examples of potential criteria that jurisdictions must meet and maintain the following program requirements for the ELLE designation:

- Local law enforcement agencies shall have a published classification wage & salary schedule which has been updated by an independent HR firm within the past 60 months to assure wages are competitive within the region when compared to other law enforcement agencies and wages paid by private sector employers within the region.
  - Demonstrate that the agencies are “right-sized” for the types of duties and services provided.
  - Command staff complete managerial training.
  - Have P.O.S.T. develop training specifically designed to de-escalate situations, crisis intervention, and liability reduction.
  - Have clear policies regarding overtime and outside employment.
2. Currently offenders on probation/parole with the Department of Community Supervision (DCS) who violate the conditions of probation/parole are revoked and ordered to a state probation detention center. There is currently a wait list for available beds, therefore those inmates are held in the county jail until a bed becomes available. Currently the counties are not reimbursed for housing these state inmates. The state should pay the per diem for housing these inmates, just as they pay for those inmates sentenced to state prisons.

Once a bed becomes available, under current law, the Department of Corrections (DOC) is supposed to pick up the inmates to transport to the state facility, however that is not the current practice. The Sheriff’s office is providing those transports. Having DOC/DCS provide that transportation would free up resources within the Sheriff’s current budgets for increased compensation for deputies.

3. Prior to the move to community based mental health services the state paid for all psychotropic medications for mental health patients. Due to the lack of community based mental health services, many of these mental health patients are in local county jails and the counties are responsible for not only the psychotropic medications but all other health related costs as well as the housing costs. The State should pay for the

mental health services and medications required in local jails or at the very least set up some sort of cost-sharing program.

4. Reimburse Sheriff's Offices at a per mile rate for transport of all 1013's to mental health facilities. This would offset the costs of the officer's time and transportation to the current budgets, again freeing up resources for redirection.
5. Under current law (O.C.G.A. 42-4-15) medical providers are not permitted to charge a county more than the Medicaid rate for any emergency room visit for an inmate and any resulting hospital stay. ACCG urges expansion of that statute to include all medical services, which would cap those expenses at the current Medicaid rate thereby freeing up existing resources within the current budgets for redirection to officer pay.
6. Have the Public Safety Training Center and P.O.S.T. partner with the Local Government Risk Management Services (LGRMS) to develop and implement a train the trainer program that will enable local jurisdictions to send one person to be certified as a trainer that can take back and provide relative, meaningful and effective training for law enforcement officers without the costs of travel meals and housing.