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## **Public Statement on Police Wages and Staffing**

Lately, the City has received several questions regarding police wages and staffing. While the questions are varied, most of them boil down to one primary question: *Why doesn't Syracuse City make taking care of police officers a priority?*

Before addressing this question, we remind citizens that elected officials, management staff of the city and the police department care deeply about our people. It should also be stated that the City provides myriad services that touch every citizen's life, ranging from law enforcement, to fire and medical, to critical infrastructure like water and sewer, to park and recreation programs, and many other services. Balancing the demands of citizens with the budgetary resources available can be challenging, and not everyone will agree with final decisions.

The staffing and wage issues facing the City's law enforcement officers are real. Prior to receiving the barrage of questions on this issue, the City Council had already scheduled to discuss these pressing issues during the Council meeting in November. The issues are complex and are ill-fitted to be debated in abbreviated forums, such as social media platforms.

There seems to be multiple parts to the primary question stated above, including officer compensation, officer safety, and budgetary priority. We will address them individually.

### **Officer Compensation**

Police officer compensation has been rising since 2011 when the state legislature reduced retirement benefits for new state and local government employees hired from that time forward. In the last year or two, officer compensation throughout the Wasatch Front has escalated sharply, particularly in the last 6-8 months. Following the negative public perceptions of law enforcement and related destructive events happening nationally, we have seen both an exodus of seasoned professionals from the profession and a lack of young people entering it. This is occurring nationally and along the Wasatch Front. This shortage of quality candidates has created a pitched increase in compensation packages throughout the State as agencies compete for the remaining quality candidates. This comes at a time when rising home prices and general labor shortages are happening simultaneously, creating even more upward pressure on wages.

Below is an outline of the pay increases Syracuse City has approved for our police officers since 2015. Prior to that, there were few pay increases since 2009/2010 due to the Great Recession of 2008.

- 2015: 2.98% - Average merit-based increase
- 2016: Special PD wage increase average dollar amount was \$1.58
- 2016: 2.68% - Average merit-based increase
- 2017: 3.33% - Average merit-based increase
- 2018: 3.43% - Average merit-based increase
- 2018: Market Adjustment depended on position was up to \$1.42
- 2019: 4.02% - Average merit-based increase
- 2020: 4.07% - Average merit-based increase
- 2020: Market Adjustment 1.75%
- 2021: 4.20% - Average merit-based increase
- 2021: Market adjustment 3.78%
- In 2020-2021 the City authorized 3 rounds of hazard pay due to COVID-19 that included \$2 per hour increases. On average each officer received a total of \$3,330.

In total, the police department wages in Syracuse City have increased over 30% in these last 6 years. This information is not meant to argue that the City has done enough, it is only meant to state what has, in fact, occurred over this timeframe. The City recognizes that this might not be enough to remain competitive in today's wage market. For example, the starting wage for a new police officer in the City has not kept up with inflation over the last 9 years.

In addition to wages, Syracuse City also offers the following benefits:

- Medical Insurance.
- City Contribution to Health Savings Account
- Dental Insurance
- Life Insurance
- Long Term Disability
- Paid Vacation & Sick Leave
- 12 paid holidays
- Employee Assistance Program
- Paid time off for wellness activities
- Full retirement benefits after 20 or 25 years depending on hire date, which includes:
  - Annual payments for life of at least 50% of the average of highest 3 or 5 years' salary; or
  - Full access to the employee's 401(k) account, of which the City has contributed to annually, currently at 11.83% of the employee's annual salary.

In order to stay competitive and to ensure the best possible service is provided to the citizens, the City adopted a Recruitment and Retention Policy with the intent to pay competitive wages while creating a constructive and productive work environment. Among other things, this policy aims to pay city employees at the 60th percentile of comparison cities, meaning out of every 10 cities compared, Syracuse will be among the top 4. Wage studies were conducted every 4 years with wages being adjusted to the 60th percentile at this time. Additionally, every year officers are eligible for merit-based pay increases depending on performance, meaning higher performers can earn more money each year and throughout their career as compared to lower performers.

This year, the police department's wages are due for the 4-year wage study. This discussion is scheduled to begin this month with an understanding that Syracuse police wages have fallen below the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile over the last four years.

Due to the rapidly changing environment over the last 6-8 months, the Council will likely revisit the City's Recruitment and Retention Policy to reflect the new labor environment in Utah.

### **Officer Safety**

The City maintains that officer safety is a critical priority. Officers are required to have a minimum of 40 hours of training per year. In Syracuse City, officers average around 90 hours per year. Training is designed to enhance skills and increase safety. The City equips officers with tools, protective equipment, and vehicles with quality safety and performance specifications. In addition, a \$1,000 uniform allowance is provided to officers to use at the officer's discretion.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, the City authorized a work schedule that allowed officers, on a rotational basis, to stay out of harm's way by working part of their schedule from an on-call basis, being dispatched from their home only if needed. Adequate coverage in the city was provided as directed by police administration.

In addition, to prevent spread amongst officers within the department, they were required to take a rapid Covid test at the beginning of each shift. Last year Covid-19 was the #1 cause of line-of-duty deaths among police officers nationwide. The City feels that these proactive measures protected the officers and their loved ones at home.

Concerns have been expressed about inadequate staffing during certain hours. In 2017 the City added additional officers to improve this situation. This significantly decreased the amount of time that officers have light backup. Scheduling options were given to the officers at the time, and the officers preferred a schedule that was lighter on coverage during certain hours. Since 2015, the City has added five police officers. The City recognizes, however that additional officers are needed as the City grows. The City's 5-year staffing plan shows that it will need at least between 2 and 7 additional officers by 2025, depending on the growth of the City and the addition of a dedicated traffic safety unit when needed.

Recently, the ability to have full redundancy on certain shifts has been affected in part due to a few injuries that have placed some officers on light duty, and therefore not out on patrol. The City's police administration recognizes this and continues to monitor the situation, with the expectation that additional positions will be discussed in an upcoming Council meeting.

### **Budgetary Priority**

On an annual operational basis, Syracuse City spends more on its police department than any other department. This does not include public works infrastructure projects, which are funded through dedicated monthly utility fees and state gas tax, not the city's general fund.

In addition, public safety personnel are given higher annual wage increases than non-public safety employees of the City. The police department has also received more pay increases than other City departments.

While it is clear that the City strives to stay competitive in taking care of its law enforcement employees, lack of priority is not one the reasons it would fall behind. The City recognizes that under the current situation, additional work is needed and remains committed to addressing the compensation issues that exist.