

DATE: December 4, 2023

TO: Anne McEnery-Ogle, Mayor
City Council

FROM: Eric J. Holmes, City Manager
Jeff Mori, Chief of Police

RE: **Vancouver Police Department Update**

Executive Summary

In recent years, Vancouver has accelerated its ongoing transition from a suburban to urban community. Coincident with this growth, trends that emerged early in the COVID-19 pandemic have complicated many aspects of policing. Consequently, community safety and police services have emerged among the highest priorities for residents and businesses in Vancouver, at a time when our capacity for police to respond is spread thin. The key factors contributing to this are:

- **Call volume and complexity** have increased by 29% since 2018, and calls are more complex requiring longer, more staff and resource intensive response.
- **Staffing levels** for both commissioned officers and non-commissioned professional staff are below what is needed to provide a level of service that assures consistent, reliable, proactive community-based policing.
- **Geography and regional resources:** Vancouver's size and presence as the largest police agency in southwest Washington, the second largest city in the greater metro area and our adjacency to Portland, there is a greater strain on Vancouver's resources in the context of the regions collective ability to meet policing needs.
- **Legislation:** while the City supports the legislative reforms that emerged in 2021 and 2022 – and proactively implemented many elements prior to new laws going into effect – aspects of reform legislation translated to increased demand for staff time in the form of supervision, de-escalation and training, which reduces availability of officers to deploy.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics is that the Vancouver Police Department is unable to sustain effective responses to calls for service and to maintain consistent and adequate coverage of the city as a whole in any given 24-hour period and to engage in proactive community-oriented policing. This memorandum provides key data points, discussion and analysis that illustrate these issues.

Depending on the community's desired levels of service and outcomes, initial analysis suggests that meeting today's demands for police services translates into the need for up to a one-third increase in commissioned officers as well as 50% increase in related professional staff. This equates to an approximately \$25 million annual increase in expenses (2024 dollars) which would need additional new revenues to support. Additional investment in new capital facilities commensurate with staffing would also be needed. Phasing of an investment would make initial costs more manageable and support successful implementation. Maintaining levels of services in the subsequent years would require both continuous pursuit of efficiencies as well as additional investments proportionate to growth.

Based on this, it is appropriate now to consider the next stage of investment in VPD.

Background

Vancouver is accelerating its ongoing transition from a suburban to urban community. The changes have created more urban city dynamics such as higher population densities, increased traffic, and more demands on the public safety ecosystem. The waterfront redevelopment is the first of a series of projects that are expected to fuel continued development for years to come and will contribute significantly to the urbanization of Vancouver; the development permitting pipeline today includes enough development to add nearly 25,000 new residents to Vancouver's in the next several years without annexation. Such projects include the Vancouver innovation center, continued build-out of Columbia Tech Center, The Heights, Columbia Palisades/HQ, Section 30 and the Fourth Plain Corridor. Further, increased densification throughout the city will occur in coming years to both meet GMA mandates and address the ongoing housing crisis. Finally, pursuit of a future annexation strategy would increase both the population and geography served by VPD.

These changes are reflective of national shifts in development patterns and pressures toward first tier suburbs like Vancouver. Overall, growth in Vancouver's population and density have translated into new and different demands for police services. Further, the current comprehensive planning effort is anticipated to result in land use patterns that focus higher densities in areas throughout the City.

The balance of this memorandum will use a of terms of art, with the following meanings:

- “authorized position” means a full-time position included in the biennial budget; an authorized position may not be filled.
- “sworn staff” means police officers commissioned by the State of Washington to perform police work.
- “professional staff” means staff within the police department that perform essential functions, such as admin support, records management, data analytics, business management, procurement, etc., some with specials security clearances, that do not have a law enforcement commission from the State of Washington.
- “Calls for service” means calls for police service by community members received and dispatched by 911 for police response.
- ” reported crime” means crimes reported from all sources (in person, on-line, result of 911 dispatch).
- “officers per 1000” is a raw measure of law enforcement capacity commonly used for comparative purposes across similarly sized agencies. While common, as a metric it has some limitations in that it does it does not account for community expectations or outcomes.
- “patrol” refers to the primary function of the police department and the first resources that respond to reports of crime. This excludes detectives, administrative and command staff. A significant majority of all sworn personnel in VPD are patrol officers.
- “police resources” means a patrol unit (1 officer, 1 car); a multiple resource call means multiple on-duty officers and cars are responding or engaged.

In this context, the Police Department's operational priority is to respond to emergency calls from our community as well as investigate major crime and enforce traffic laws to improve roadway safety for vehicles and pedestrians. The Departments' ability to meet the demand for services has been strained in recent years due to a range of factors:

Reported incidence of crime. Since 2018, the reported incidence of crime has increased by over 100%. Of particular concern is crime against persons has increased over 80% since 2018. Most recently, this has levelled off; it is unclear whether this is an actual reduction in crime, or a reduction in reported

crime driven by a sense of futility by crime victims that reporting will have any impact due to the departments limited ability to respond or investigate lower-level crimes. Over time, unaddressed crime – even low-level crimes - can have a significant negative impact on the sense of safety in a community as well as confidence in the community’s reputation.

Call volume and complexity. Since 2018, there has been a 29% increase in total 911 dispatched call volume to a total of 86,875 calls in 2022 (~238 calls per day). At the end of the 3rd quarter in 2023, there were already 66,266 calls for service and the year-end projection is expected to be slightly higher than last year.

Today, there are almost no “easy” police calls for service, with nearly all calls having layers of complexity. It is also relatively common for calls to require multiple police resources either to contain, de-escalate or defuse a situation, and these types of calls are not typically resolved quickly. In Vancouver the daily number of incidents that require six or more patrol officers to respond to a single call has more than doubled since 2017, to more than nine incidents per day. During these calls, more than half of all available patrol resources from a specific precinct are required at a single call for service. The frequency of these incidents results in large portions of the city with significantly diminished police coverage for significant parts of the day, translating into delayed response to calls for service and increased risk.

Staffing. The Department is experiencing staffing limitations in sworn and non-sworn staff.

Between 2016 and 2021, the City made a significant investment in additional police staffing, adding 44 commissioned officers over six years. This investment was funded by combination of increases in business taxes, revenues from the Van Mall North annexation, marijuana taxes and utility taxes revenues. During the pandemic – during which there was also a social justice movement and major police reforms - the City limited staffing additions in police. In 2022 and 2023, a total of 8 additional officers were authorized, funded largely by the City’s share of the public safety sales tax revenues passed Clark County voters in 2022. Since 2018, the authorized sworn staffing has increased by 16%.

Since the late 2000’s, it had been challenging for the City to fill all authorized police officer positions. However, over the last year this has changed and as of fall 2023 all authorized patrol officer positions are filled. While this is a positive step, anticipated retirements in coming years will continue to put pressure on recruitment. The arrival of the Southwest Washington Regional Criminal Justice Training Academy, authorized by the legislature in 2023, anticipated to open Q1 2024, will enhance the City’s ability to recruit and train locally as well as decrease the wait time to get a new student officer enrolled into a basic police academy.

Despite this progress since 2016, the number of authorized commissioned officers in VPD is among the lowest in the state of Washington as well as nationally. Further, VPD operates in the context of all Clark County law enforcement agencies which, collectively, have the lowest total staffing levels compared to similarly sized counties in the state.

County	Total Pop	Total LE in County	Officer/1000
Clark	520,825	447	.86
Pierce	928,937	967	1.04
Spokane	550,700	651	1.18

Based on the WASPC Crime in WA 2022 Report

Vancouver's adjacency to Portland, a major urban influence within our metro area, is a dynamic our peer organizations such as Tacoma and Spokane, do not have. The compound impact of these variables is quickly straining capacity within our public safety system.

Finally, the capacity of the authorized commissioned force is constrained by the patrol shift schedule, and to a lesser degree by other elements of labor agreements. Long a part of collective bargaining agreements, the City's patrol shift schedule restricts the flexibility in how officers are deployed throughout a 24-hour period, resulting in a mismatch between patrol schedules and periods of high demand.

Investigations. Vancouver Police Detectives currently investigate an average of 1,700 new cases every year. Each detective carries an average caseload of over 60 investigations, and they are at capacity. Based on current volumes referred for investigation from patrol operations, supervisors must triage each case based on public safety risk, statutory requirements (such as domestic violence investigations which may have mandatory arrest requirements) and the viability of identifying/locating the suspect(s). However, each year, there are nearly 3,100 incidents which go uninvestigated that may have some type of investigative lead.

Training. Training is a valuable and critical aspect of an effective police department. All Washington Police Officers are required to have a minimum of 24 hours of in-service training. Additionally, several groups of our police officers have already completed their mandatory 40 hours of Law Enforcement Training and Community Safety Act (LETCSA). This is specifically related to the passage of I-940 which must be repeated by every officer every 3 years. In addition, each City of Vancouver employee must complete several hours of city required training every year. The Vancouver Police Training team is approaching capacity and unable to take on additional tasks without additional staff and resources.

The combined effect of these constraints also drives the reliance on overtime, which is costly and can contribute to officer fatigue. Historically, the global overtime has been increasing at approximately 6% per year. This year, we are projected to increase overtime hours by 24%.¹

Opportunities

There are opportunities to enhance the effectiveness and level of service of VPD to better meet the needs of a growing, urbanizing Vancouver.

Community engagement and accountability. Increased capacity among sworn officers would allow more proactive engagement with the community we serve. Proactive engagement from police is generally correlated with a reduction in overall crime and a resulting increase in perceptions of community safety and stronger relationships between the department and the community it serves.

Technology: VPD currently uses a relatively standard array of technology to support law enforcement efforts, which has enhanced the implementation of the police camera program over the last year. Further systemic investments in technology holds the promise to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of community safety and law enforcement efforts.

Facilities: The city's current police facilities, built in the mid 2000's, are at capacity and do not include room for growth. Further, there have been evolutions in both the type of work VPD does and the manner in which the Department's work is done since these facilities were built.

¹ FY 2020 YTD (Nov. 30) OT hours – 31, 327, FY 2021 YTD OT – 33, 372, FY 2022 YTD OT – 35,588, FY 2023 YTD OT – 47,130

Public Safety Ecosystem and Other Considerations

Additional law enforcement capacity drives the need for capacity in other elements of the overall safety and wellbeing ecosystem. For example, jail, courts (including specialty courts), community court, prosecution, defense, and co-responder resources for mental health and substance use crisis.

Jail. The City of Vancouver does not own, operate, manage, or govern the jail. Rather, we contract with Clark County for jail services. However, the Clark County Jail is an important partner in our SW Washington Criminal Justice ecosystem. The Jail is working through a new management model and diligently trying to improve staffing. As Jail staffing improves and more housing areas become available, the City will be able to continue to lodge dangerous offenders and those required by statute to be arrested, but also chronic offenders as well as those who have active arrest warrants.

Courts. As with the Jail, the City does not oversee or manage the court system; we contract with Clark County for court services. The capacity of the court system is currently strained, and an increase in policing capacity would add to the demand for court services.

Prosecution & defense. An investment in additional police capacity would be expected to result in additional apprehensions of suspects that translate into increased prosecutions and the need for indigent defense. Investments in these areas of the ecosystem need to be made proportionate direct police services.

Co-response. VPD currently relies on a modified co-response model, giving officers and field supervisors an on-call resource to bring specialists in mental health crisis on scene when needed. Expansion and enhancement of co-responder resources available to patrol operations for real-time response as well as proactive team independent of the patrol function would enhance community safety outcomes.

Dispatch. The City currently is a member of the regional consortium of CRESA that provides 911 dispatch services to VPD. These services need to evolve to meet the needs of a growing, urbanizing community.

Enterprise and support services. An investment in VPD staffing and resources would also increase the need for HR, IT, General Services, Finance, Legal, Risk Management, Equity & Inclusion and other enterprise services. Building this capacity within the City organization would be essential to success in delivering better outcomes to the community.

Timing. The trends and dynamics described here are being experienced by the community, department and larger ecosystem today. Bringing additional resources online to address the apparent gaps in level of service from VPD would take time. The reality of hiring, training, housing and deploying additional police suggests that a multi-year approach to resourcing the department would be necessary. This also means that there would be a 2–6 year ramp up in improvements to levels of service in VPD once a new investment is approved.

Next Steps

There is shared expectation and desire in our community to foster both a real and perceived sense of safety, evidenced from survey responses and the anecdote of multiple requests from business owners, neighborhood associations, school districts and other government partners for additional police service which nearly all must be completed on overtime. On the horizon, new technology and programs are

available which will enhance public safety services; however, additional staff is required to manage and operate such programs.

Building on the model and foundation of the community task force on policing that advised on implementing changes in the use of force policies and practices and a camera program for VPD, the City Manager's Office will be convening a community-based committee to review and advise on current levels of service, gaps, desired (and measurable) outcomes, and potential investments in VPD and related ecosystem. The intent of this work is to formulate a recommendation to the City Manager by mid-2024 for the City Council to consider. Once a recommendation is made, the committee would be asked to continue on in support of transparency and accountability in implementation of the initiative and department outcomes.

Given the magnitude of known gaps and the limited range of revenue tools available to the City, it is anticipated the next investment in the system of community safety and wellbeing would necessitate a voted property tax levy. As noted earlier in this memorandum, there may be a need for as much as a \$25 million increase in current expenditures, plus commensurate capital facilities investments, to meet community expectations.

Given the timing of bringing new resources online and the growing demand for services, there is a sense of urgency around moving a potential investment forward. Given the potential magnitude of an investment, a phased approach to revenue, staffing and capital investments will need to be explored.

If City Council ultimately agrees an investment is needed, a mid 2024 recommendation will allow Council a choice of placing a levy on the general election in 2024 (or later if Council deems appropriate).

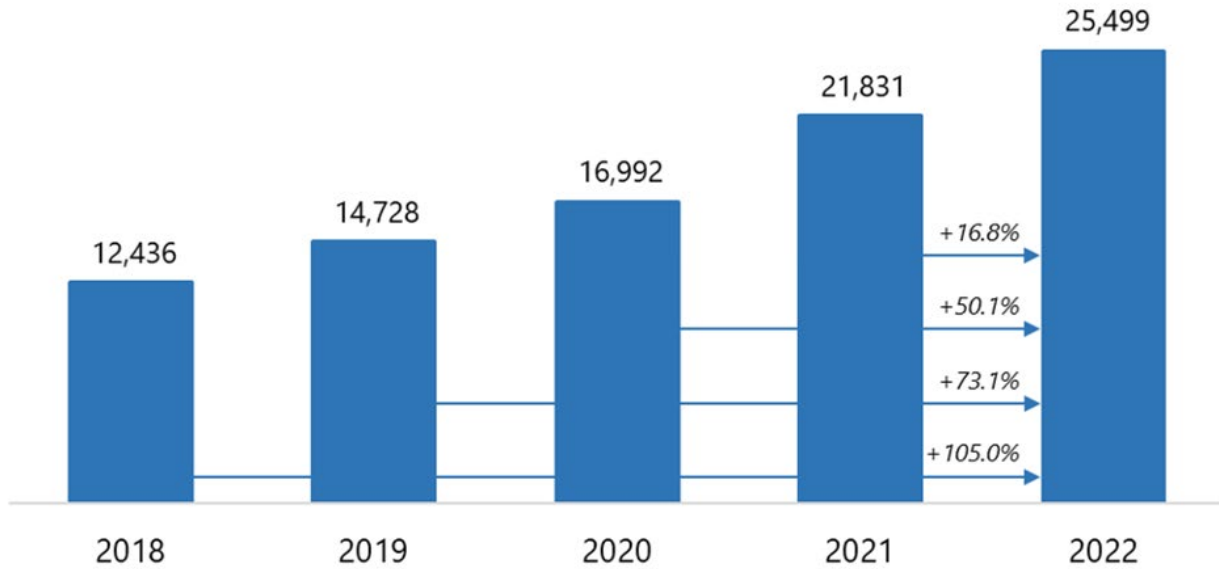
We look forward to a discussion with Council on December 18.

Attachments:

- Select departmental data
- Association of Washington Cities report: Evolving public safety & criminal justice services (2023)

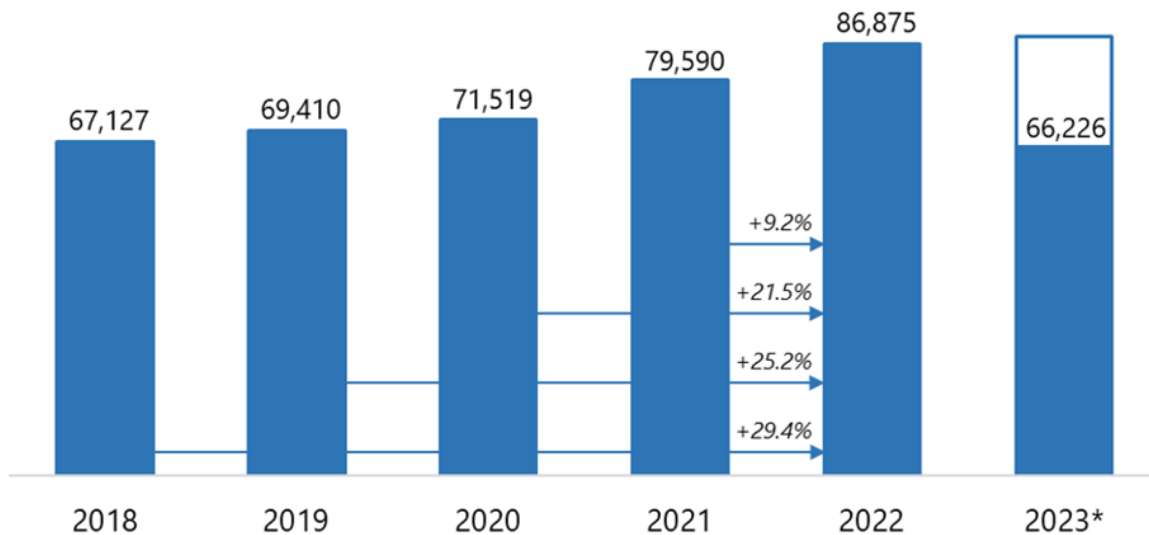
REPORTED CRIME IN VANCOUVER

NIBRS Group A (Person, Property, Society) Crimes as Reported on WASPC (2018 -2022)



CALL VOLUME GROWTH IN VANCOUVER

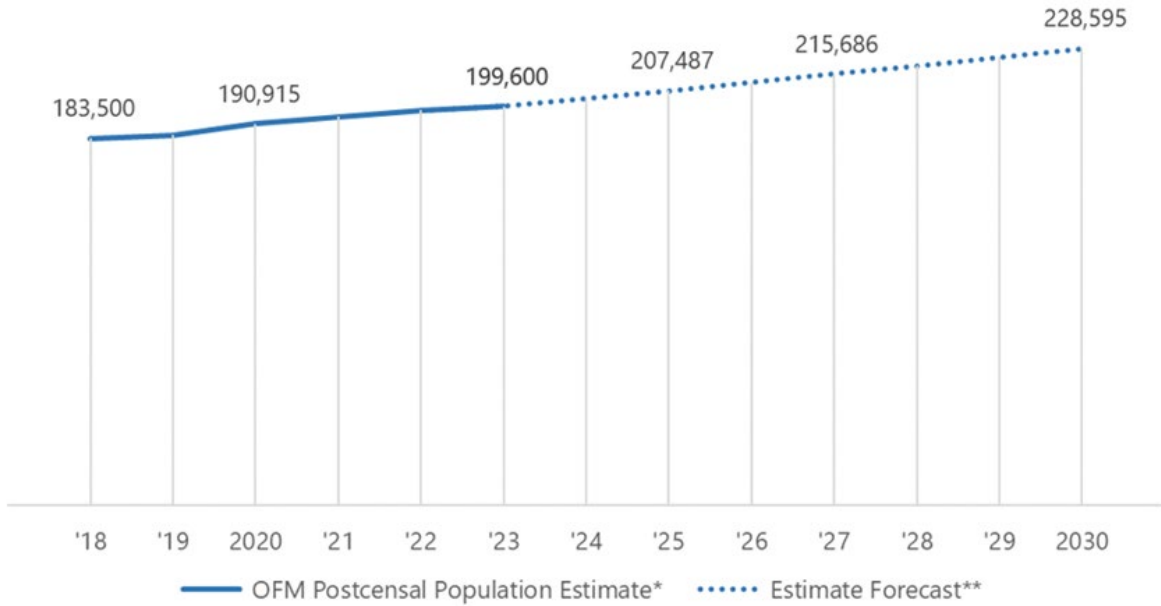
Calls for Service (January 2018 - September 2023)



**2023 is through the 3rd quarter*

POPULATION GROWTH IN VANCOUVER

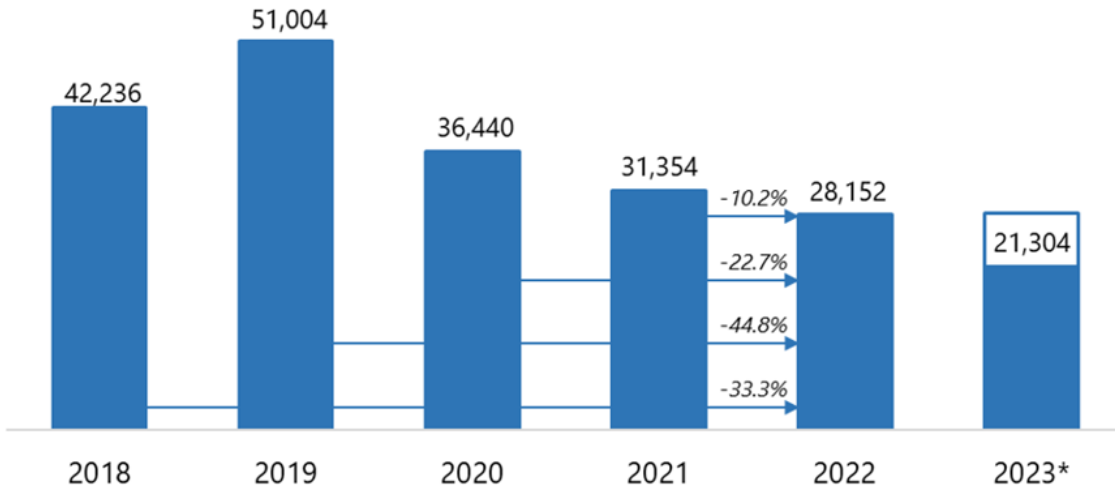
City of Vancouver OFM Postcensal Population Estimates (2018 - 2023)



*Decennial years are presented as actual Census counts; other years are postcensal estimates
 **Based on a 10-year average annual growth rate of 2.0%

PROACTIVE VPD OFFICER TIME DECREASE

Proactive Officer Initiated Events (January 2018 - September 2023)



*2023 is through the 3rd quarter

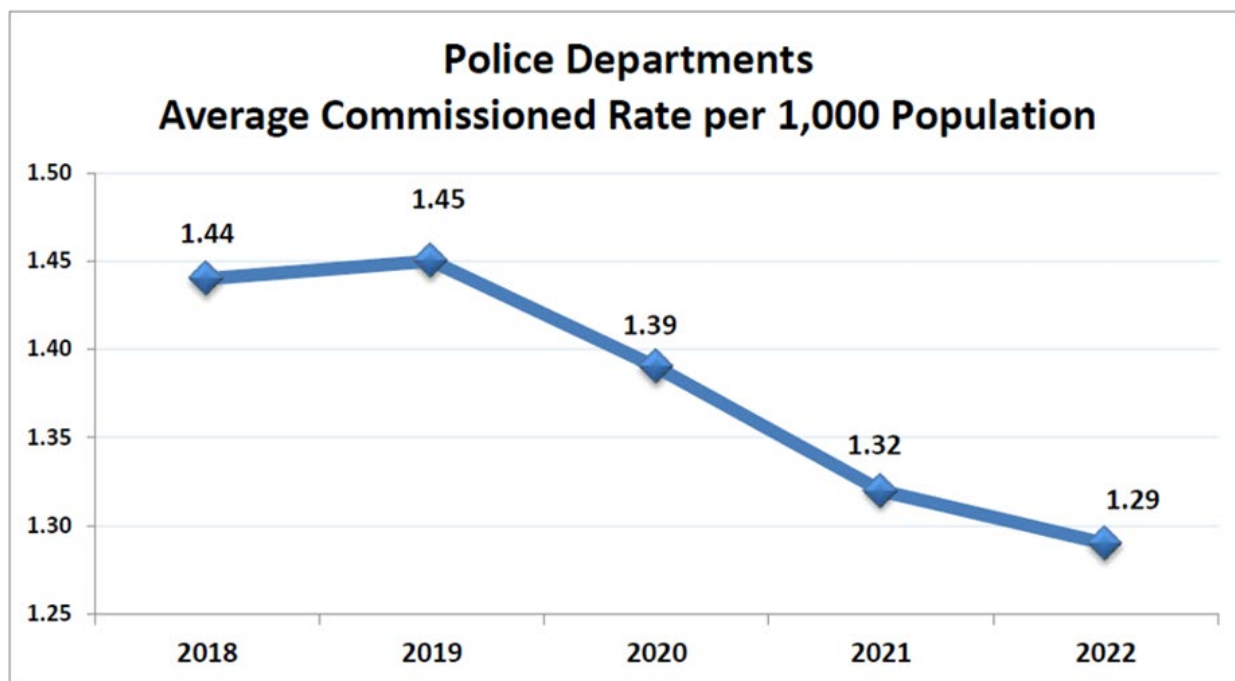
AUTHORIZED OFFICERS TO COMPARABLE WASHINGTON CITIES

City	Total Pop	Total LE	Officer/1000
Vancouver	197,600 *	212*	1.076
Tacoma	220,800	324	1.47
Spokane	230,900	341	1.48

Based on the WASPC Crime in WA 2022 Report

*If adjusted to current a current population (200,000) and VPD authorized (244), equals 1.22/1000

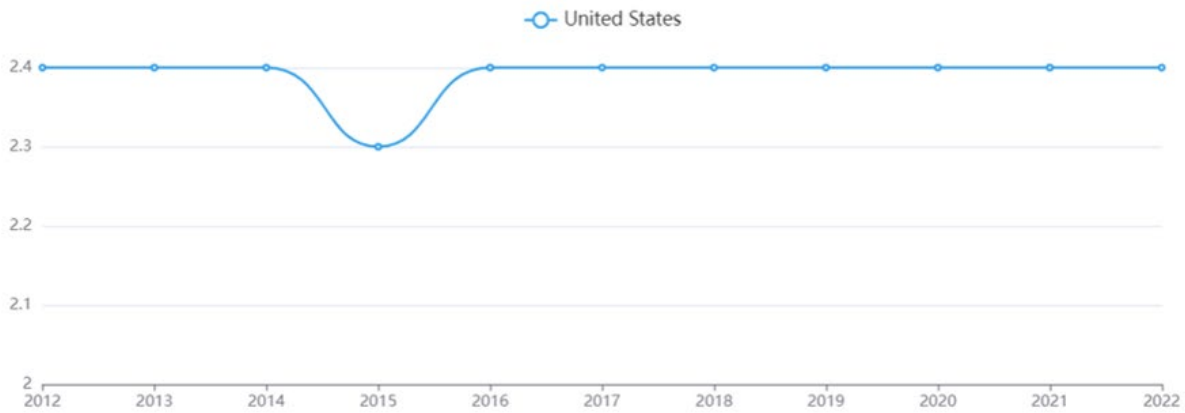
WASHINGTON STATE AVERAGE FOR OFFICERS PER 1000



Based on the WASPC Crime in WA 2022 Report

NATIONAL AVERAGE FOR OFFICERS PER 1000

Ratio of Police Officers to Population



Based on the Federal Bureau of Investigation Crime Data Explorer
<https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/le/pe>

VPD OVERTIME INCREASE IN TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS

