

Washington County Sheriff's Deputies
FOP Maine Lodge #006
Machias, ME



President: Christopher Simpson
Secretary: Ryan Allen

PRESS RELEASE

On November 12, 2024, the Washington County budget committee met regarding the 2025 county budget proposal. Due to concerning statements made in this meeting, Lodge #006 (Maine FOP), representing full-time patrol deputies for the Washington County Sheriff's Office, is releasing the following statement regarding the FY 2025 budget process.

During the 11/12/24 meeting, several committee members stated that the county's overall budget increase in the coming year should be reduced through cuts to public safety. This approach is shortsighted and dangerous and ignores the realities of modern public safety needs in Washington County. It puts Washington County residents at increased risk— a risk acknowledged and inexplicably ignored by certain committee members.

These committee members are targeting two patrol deputy positions, currently unfilled due to recent personnel changes. Random cuts based on happenstance is a deeply irresponsible approach to budget management. The random fact that these positions are open at budget committee time does not mean they are expendable—it just makes easy targets. The Sheriff's Office anticipates filling these openings within 2-3 months with multiple current candidates.

These open positions have stretched our patrol deputies thin as we provide 24/7 patrol coverage to the entire county. Cutting them permanently increases this strain with no hope of relief. With our current, budgeted positions filled, we will have three shifts of five deputies working. If these positions are removed, we are left with four deputy shifts and one extra deputy who will be rotated to cover extended absences such as the law enforcement academy and military deployments.

Four deputy patrols are an inadequate long-term solution to the patrol needs of Washington County. On any given shift, our patrol deputies and supervisors are responsible for covering all incoming law enforcement complaints in a 3,258

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square-mile area that stretches over 100 miles and two hours of travel north to south from Danforth to Steuben and 50 miles and 1 hour east to west from Lubec to Wesley. A loop of this patrol area via Route 1 and Route 9 from Danforth to Steuben and back maps at 5 hrs 42 minutes and 282 miles.

Many complaints, by policy and common sense, require a two-officer response. When two or more of these calls occur at once (not an unusual occurrence), additional complaints are left waiting. When a supervisor, who is required to cover a patrol slot with only four deputies working a shift, is needed to respond to a scene like a death investigation or serious crash, their patrol area is left uncovered. When deputies are pulled to the far ends of their patrol zones, large geographical areas are left virtually uncovered with response times easily exceeding one hour.

Frequently, our coverage areas include the cities of Calais and Eastport and the towns of Baileyville and Machias, which cannot staff their municipal police departments to provide full local coverage. Washington County deputies provide primary and backup coverage to these municipalities at the expense of other towns that do not budget for their own police, a problem that will be exponentially exacerbated if our positions are cut.

The Sheriff's Office has not staffed five-deputy shifts as a luxury. They are essential to providing adequate, safe law enforcement services to Washington County and its residents. Washington County is NOT a four-deputy patrol area.

The current proposed increase to the County budget results from several factors. Primarily, this is the first year in some time where the County will not draw on reserve or unallocated funds to cushion the effect of increasing costs. This means that the County budget now reflects the true, undisguised costs of running the county government.

The County increase this year will result in an average per-household cost increase of around \$4-\$6 per month. The patrol division's barebones proposed increases for our 2025 budget account for \$0.50-\$0.75 of that monthly cost increase. Those increases are NOT new positions. They simply reflect the increased costs of running a law enforcement agency such as fuel, vehicles, equipment, and labor; the same costs that drive governments and businesses everywhere.

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The budget committee has suggested (*egregiously in our opinion*) that Washington County residents need to “suffer” through public safety cuts so they will be driven to complain to the state about law enforcement coverage. *We disagree.* Augusta will not solve our local patrol needs and Washington County residents should not suffer to make a political point.

Finally, the hyperbole from committee members that Washington County residents will be driven out of their homes by county tax increases is inflammatory and misleading. While none of us want to pay more taxes, the county’s increase to reflect the true cost of doing business is not nearly this drastic. The increased cost of the patrol division is a small portion of this measure. Cutting two patrol positions to save perhaps \$1 a month on the average tax bill is short-sighted and reactive.

As taxpayers and residents, our lodge supports the current proposed budget and strongly opposes cuts to public safety, especially the Sheriff’s Office patrol division. We encourage the citizens of Washington County to voice your opinion to your budget committee representatives, town select board members, and city council members as soon as possible. (Contact info here: <https://washingtoncountymaine.com/bac-contacts/>)

The next budget committee meeting is November 21, 2024, at 9:00 AM in Washington County Courtroom #3 in Machias. We encourage public safety supporters to attend and show the committee your support for maintaining a fully staffed patrol division at the Sheriff’s Office.

We look forward to continuing our work as members of the foremost and finest law enforcement agency in Washington County.

(This release represents the sole opinion of the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #006 and does not represent the official opinions or positions of the Washington County Sheriff’s Office.)