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June 11, 2021

Survey on Police Workforce Trends

Background

In recent months, the news media have reported many stories about a staffing crisis in policing. For example:

- In Seattle, a record 180 officers left the police department in 2020, and 66 more officers have left so far this year. "I have about 1,080 deployable officers. This is the lowest I've seen our department," Police Chief Adrian Diaz said recently.
- In Minneapolis, Chief Medaria Arradondo told a City Council panel that reduced staffing is making his department "one-dimensional," with officers mostly responding to 911 calls and not having time to do proactive policing.

The PERF Survey

To gauge whether the staffing crisis is a widespread phenomenon or is limited to a small number of departments, PERF fielded a survey of police agencies whose chief executives are PERF members. The survey was conducted from May 10 to May 21, 2021.

The survey started by asking the agencies about the following:

- Their current staffing levels, and
- Their numbers of authorized sworn positions (as opposed to how many of those positions are actually filled).

Next, the survey asked for detailed numbers about the numbers of officers

- who were hired,
- who resigned, or
- who retired during the 12-month period of April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021.

Announcements

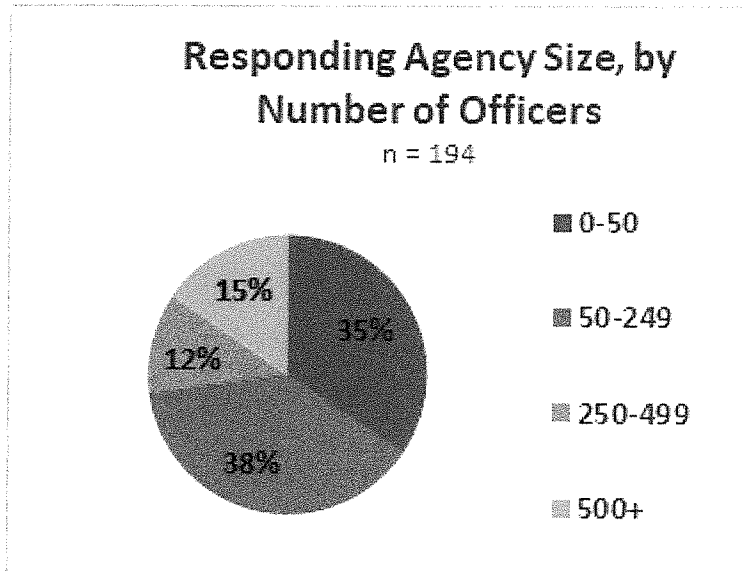
[Click here](#) to view PERF's September 2021 survey about violent crime

[Click here](#) to view PERF's June 2021 survey about police workforce trends

[Click here](#) to read past editions of "Trending," PERF's weekly email update to its members, including the most recent: "[We had a lot of straight talk at our Town Hall Meeting](#)"

And to learn whether those numbers represented any change from the previous year, we asked for the same numbers for the period April 1, 2019 -- March 31, 2020.

PERF received 194 responses to the survey. While not a representative sample of police agencies nationwide, the responses reflected a mix of departments of all sizes, as detailed below.



Key Findings:

- On average, agencies are currently filling only 93% of the authorized number of positions available.
- Among the responding agencies as a whole, fewer new officers were hired, and resignations and retirements increased in the 2020-2021 period, compared to the previous year.
- **HIRING:** The reduction in hiring was relatively modest, with a 5% overall decrease in the hiring rate among responding departments. Smaller agencies actually saw an increase in hiring, while larger departments experienced dramatic reductions.
- **RESIGNATIONS:** Increases in resignations were more significant. Agencies reported an overall 18% increase in the resignation rate in 2020-21, compared to 2019-20.
- **RETIREMENTS:** Increases in retirements were even larger. Among all responding police departments, there was a 45% increase in the retirement rate. (In small departments, a small number of retirements may result in a high percentage increase in the retirement *rate*. But even in the largest agencies, with 500 or more officers, the retirement rate increased by 27%.)

Current Staffing Levels

PERF asked for the number of authorized sworn positions in each agency and the actual number of sworn positions filled. On average, agencies filled 93% of their authorized positions as of April 1, 2021.

The percent of authorized positions filled was quite consistent across agency size, with agencies of fewer than 50 sworn personnel reporting the lowest percentage of filled sworn positions.

Agency Size

Percent of Authorized

	Force Filled
0-49	91.5%
50-249	93.4%
250-499	92.6%
500+	93.1%
Overall	93%

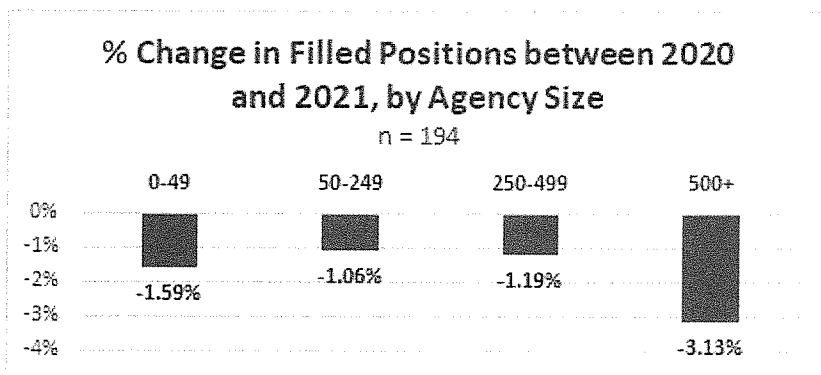
Changes in Staffing Levels

Agencies reported the number of filled positions in their agencies on April 1, 2021 and April 1, 2020.

On average, the number of sworn, full-time positions filled decreased by 1.56% across all agencies that responded to the survey.

Among agencies with 500+ sworn officers, the decrease was most severe, with a 3.13% overall reduction.

By contrast, agencies with 50 to 249 officers only saw a 1.06% reduction in their ranks.



Changes in Hiring, Resignation, and Retirement Rates

As depicted in the chart below:

Hiring

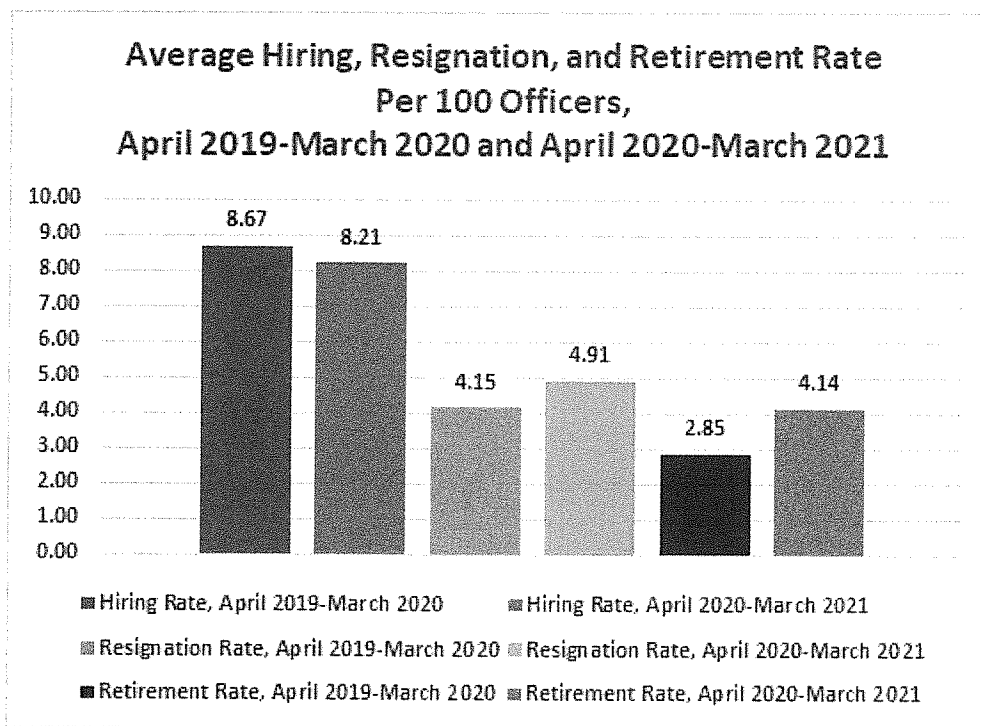
- For the April 2019-March 2020 period, responding agencies on average hired 8.67 officers per 100 current officers.
- During the same period a year later, agencies hired only 8.21 new officers per 100 current officers.
- That is a 5% decrease in the hiring rate.

Resignations

- For the 2019-20 period, responding agencies reported 4.15 resignations per 100 officers.
- During the same period a year later, 4.91 officers resigned per 100 officers.
- That is an 18% increase in the resignation rate.

Retirements

- For the 2019-20 period, agencies reported 2.85 retirements per 100 officers.
- During the same period a year later, 4.14 officers retired per 100 officers.
- That is a 45% increase in the retirement rate.



Changes in Hiring, Resignation, and Retirement Rates, by Size of Department

PERF looked at changes in hiring, resignations, and retirements by the size of the responding agencies.

Hiring: Agencies with 250 or more sworn personnel saw the biggest decreases in the rate of officers hired between the two time periods.

- There was a 29% reduction in the hiring rate for agencies with 250-499 officers.
- There was a 36% reduction in the hiring rate for agencies with 500 or more officers.
- Agencies with fewer than 250 officers actually experienced an increase in the hiring rate over the previous year

Resignations: The smallest increase in resignation rates was found in small agencies with fewer than 50 officers. However, those agencies seem to generally experience higher resignation rates than larger agencies in normal times, with 5.15 resignations per 100 officers in 2019-20. While the resignation rates in larger agencies tend to be lower, the increases in the resignation rate over the past year were highest in medium-sized and large agencies.

Retirements: Agencies with fewer than 250 sworn personnel saw the biggest increases in officer retirement rates:

- A 49% increase in the retirement rate for agencies with fewer than 50 officers, and

- A 59% increase in the retirement rate among agencies with 50-249 officers.

However, larger agencies also saw significant increases in retirements. Among the largest agencies, with 500+ officers, 4.35 officers out of every 100 officers retired in 2020-21.

Percent Change Between Time Periods by Agency Size			
Agency Size	Hiring Rate Change	Resignation Rate Change	Retirement Rate Change
0-49	3% (10.09 to 10.42)	11% (5.15 to 5.70)	49% (2.48 to 3.69)
50-249	8% (7.51 to 8.08)	28% (3.69 to 4.73)	59% (2.87 to 4.55)
250-499	-29% (8.10 to 5.77)	22% (2.81 to 3.42)	19% (3.23 to 3.85)
500+	-36% (8.65 to 5.52)	21% (3.93 to 4.76)	27% (3.43 to 4.35)

Comments by Survey Respondents

Many respondents provided brief remarks characterizing their situations regarding hiring, resignations and retirements, morale within their departments, and related issues. Following is a sampling of these comments. (Quotations are not attributed because PERF promised anonymity to survey respondents.)

Recruiting and Hiring

"My department is getting younger as my experienced personnel retire/resign and are replaced with new officers. We are struggling to keep up with salaries for neighboring larger departments who are recruiting my experienced officers."

"We have seen an approximate 40% reduction in applicant packets this last fiscal year. In addition, we are seeing fewer 'above average' candidates. The current rhetoric and negativity surrounding law enforcement is having a negative impact on the number and quality of applicants we recruit."

"Social media is a complex issue that we must all address and look into when hiring our applicants. It has created another layer of investigative background work for my detectives. Social media checks have excluded many candidates from our process, because their thoughts and ideals do not align with the guiding principles of our department."

"We have seen an increase in applicants who have changed careers to *enter into* law enforcement."

"Applications have decreased dramatically, making hiring extremely difficult. And our officers have fatigue from working long shifts and covering backfill slots to supplement staffing."

"We've had a more than 50% reduction in the number of applicants for the recruit academy, from an average of 450 per year, to only 205 in 2020. And we've seen a 100% reduction in qualified lateral recruits, with zero hired in 2020, compared to an average of 3 to 4 annually since 2008."

"We have found that traditional incentives do not resonate with the applicants applying to be an officer."

"I've been attracting retired officers who want to stay in law enforcement, but don't want to work in a city any more, due to politics. As much as I appreciate their service, these applicants don't really add value to my organization. I need people who want to make this agency their career and stay for the long haul, not a person who only wants to work a year or two, on day shift with weekends off."

"Hiring has been a challenge. Many who applied could not meet minimum eligibility requirements, failing either the background investigation or polygraph. Minority hiring, a significant goal, has been considerably more difficult. Police accountability has been a source of conversation and concern among those who are hired, and those who left."

"We are seeing a significant downturn in 'new to policing' recruits, and increasing interest from laterals. An increased number of applicants remove themselves midway through the hiring process."

Resignations and Retirements

"The number of resignations is higher than years ago. People are retiring as soon as they have the minimum required time, either by age or years of service."

"Senior officers who are able to retire are retiring. They enjoy the work and the people, but are not willing to go through another change in law enforcement with little structural input from all parties. And there's a belief that violent crime will continue to rise."

"We have more officers on medical injury leave than ever, and all are trying to medically retire."

"We have seen the most dramatic increase in retirements / resignations in my six years as chief. Officers who became eligible to retire have done it at the first opportunity. We had a lieutenant resign with 16 years who was not eligible for retirement."

"In 2020 and 2021, most of our officers who left did not leave for another department. They left the profession."

"It has been difficult to hire back to our full complement for the past five years. With over 25% of our department retiring since 2016, the candidate pool has gotten smaller and smaller. With another large wave of retirements due in the next three years, it could be an insurmountable task for an agency our size."

"Our resignations have been at the very 'new' level of officers, with under 7 years of service."

"Officers are no longer waiting to be 'maxed out' at their pension to leave. They are leaving years early, collecting a considerably lower pension."

"I expected more of an exit of personnel due to the national climate, but that did not really materialize."

"Both sworn and professional staff are frequently retiring as soon as eligible, with fewer personnel staying on to optimize retirement or simply continue to serve the community. Fewer employees are willing to take promotional exams and advance to leadership positions, requiring us to hire 'from the outside' for lieutenants and above."

"Sworn officers are seeking jobs outside of urban policing. Officers have made it clear that they do not want to work the streets as a patrol officer or in the schools."

"We have seen an increase in separations in all categories. A variety of different issues are presented during exit interviews, but consistently stated is the national climate on policing."

Officer Morale

"Officers are depressed over the negative national narrative about the police. They also have pandemic fatigue."

"My son just finished his time in the Marines and is now working for a police department. I still feel strongly enough about what we do every day to encourage my youngest son to do the same. I am impressed about how seriously the officers now take the job."

"There is considerable concern by my officers over the future of policing. Their significant others are pressuring them to leave the profession. All of my resignations were leaving the profession completely, [not transferring to another department]. Also, there is not a hiring pool to replace these officers. The candidates are non-existent or very sub-par."

"COVID and the summer protests had an effect on each of us. Lately, though, I'm seeing a return to a pre-COVID / pre-protest atmosphere around the building. More laughing, more community engagement, more proactive police work. Our community gives us a 97% approval rating. The officers recognize this."

"We have a positive and energetic work force, very strong morale, with lots of worry about their future, but their proactive police work has helped drop our violent crime rate by 26% last year. They have appreciated the command staff support as we have managed through [controversial incidents]."

"Our community has continued to support us, and we have benefited by hiring laterals who were in jeopardy of being laid off from their agency, which did not have the same amount of community support."

"We are fortunate to work in a community that still supports its police department. However, the negative climate surrounding law enforcement has definitely affected morale. Officers are researching other careers in preparation to retire once they complete their 20 years of service and are eligible for retirement. This is different from a few years ago, when officers were planning to stay 30 to 40 years with the department."


"There has been massive attrition, so nearly every person in the department has had to change the way they conduct police work. The greatest casualty of this has been proactive work on the patrol level. On the bright side, crime analysis to best deploy limited resources has gone from a frill to a necessity."


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