



# 2020 Colorado Law Enforcement: Challenges and Opportunities

**AS AGENCIES IMPLEMENT SENATE BILL 20-217,  
THEY SEEK CLARITY, SOLUTIONS**

**PublicSafetyColorado.com | [info@publicsafetycolorado.com](mailto:info@publicsafetycolorado.com)**



Colorado Association of  
Chiefs of Police



COUNTY SHERIFFS  
OF COLORADO

## Introduction and Methodology

Last year was an unprecedented year for Coloradans, including law enforcement.

When COVID-19 hit Colorado, law enforcement agencies statewide took extra precautions when interacting with the public and taking care of inmates in their charge. Some of these policy and operational changes are still in place and being refined as the pandemic continues.

In June, following the death of George Floyd, Colorado law enforcement called on the state Legislature to strengthen state law to make it a crime when officers fail to intervene in cases of unreasonable force. Our organizations also strengthened our commitment and participation in conversations with our communities and responded by implementing important improvements in public safety and policing.

Colorado law enforcement organizations remain committed to accountability, transparency and strengthening community trust. In response to requests from state lawmakers to gather information about recruitment and retention following the passage of Senate Bill 20-217, the County Sheriffs of Colorado (CSOC) and the Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) surveyed their members on the issues outlined below.

An invitation to participate in the survey was distributed via email to CACP and CSOC members. It was administered from December 28 to January 11.

Individual comments included in this report have been edited for grammar.

## Key Findings

### Agency Staffing

Even before the summer of 2020 and the passage of Senate Bill 20-217, applications for law enforcement positions were at an all-time low. Qualified applicants are looking for jobs in other career paths, and great officers are leaving the profession for other careers. This is a troubling trend because a diverse workforce that represents the best and brightest in our communities is an important part of meaningful change.

### Law enforcement agencies are experiencing a shortage of full-time sworn personnel.

**73%**

said there is currently a shortage of full-time sworn personnel at their agencies.

**51%**

of agencies experiencing a shortage said the shortage is greater than the same period a year earlier.

## Comments



We are currently down two patrol officers. Our department is allotted eight total patrol officers. Not being able to fill two vacant positions creates many issues.

**- Basalt Chief of Police Greg Knott**

We experienced normal attrition but found it difficult to replace positions during the pandemic and resulting economic uncertainty. As we exited this turbulent time, we hired approximately 22 people since July. We find there are many new individuals willing to enter law enforcement, but they need academy sponsorship. Our lateral pool is extremely small, so the academy sponsorship is a necessary albeit expensive alternative.

**- Broomfield Police Chief Gary Creager**

Our attrition rate has nearly doubled since mid 2020. There are varying reasons, but numerous exit interviews suggest that public perception and risks of civil litigation are among the top concerns. In addition, recruiting numbers are the lowest in well over a decade. We anticipate full-time sworn shortages will continue through 2021.

**- El Paso County Sheriff Bill Elder**



# 69%

said the number of applicants are down from a year ago.

**Law enforcement agencies are seeing a decrease in applicants.**



**Did you know?**

**Colorado is studying how to better train new police officers**

The Colorado Health Foundation awarded a \$1 million grant to the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) to reshape law enforcement training and better prepare future officers to serve and protect all members of Colorado's diverse communities.

The grant will allow CCC's Law Enforcement Academy Curriculum and Training project team to review current course objectives, program requirements, and instructor techniques to identify opportunities to embed a focus on social justice.

Partners in this important work to review programs statewide include the Colorado Attorney General's Office, the POST Board, community organizations such as Urban League of Metropolitan Denver and Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police, and prominent leaders in the community. Higher education partners include Colorado Mountain College, Aims Community College, and Western Colorado Community College.

## Comments



The number of applicants has decreased. When contacting potential applicants from previous years, multiple persons say they are no longer interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement.

**- De Beque Chief Marshal Bob Dalley**

There is a very noticeable decrease in applicants and even more noticeable decrease in qualified applicants. There is a very real concern on being able to fill open positions in a reasonable time, especially as it relates to smaller departments with limited resources to attract qualified applicants.

**- Hayden Police Chief Greg Tuliszewski**

In the past nine months, we have not had a single applicant who was qualified to be a patrol deputy. We have also lost several deputies with significant experience, which has left our agency young and less experienced.

**- Custer County Sheriff Shannon Byerly**

My agency is not seeing the same turnout of tenured officers applying for jobs in law enforcement, and the applicants have mostly turned to those with no experience or are just out of a POST academy.

**- Weld County Sheriff Steve Reams**



## Agency Retention

Policing has entered a new era in Colorado. Law enforcement officers face new challenges as they are increasingly tasked with responding to a wide array of social issues as well as violent crimes, and seek to understand the changes related to the implementation of Senate Bill 20-217.

The survey showed recent policy changes, growing anti-police sentiment and unclear expectations of law enforcement have contributed to officers' concerns about remaining in the profession.

# 82%

of agencies said they have seen an increase in the number of personnel expressing intent to leave their position or expressing concerns about remaining in their position.

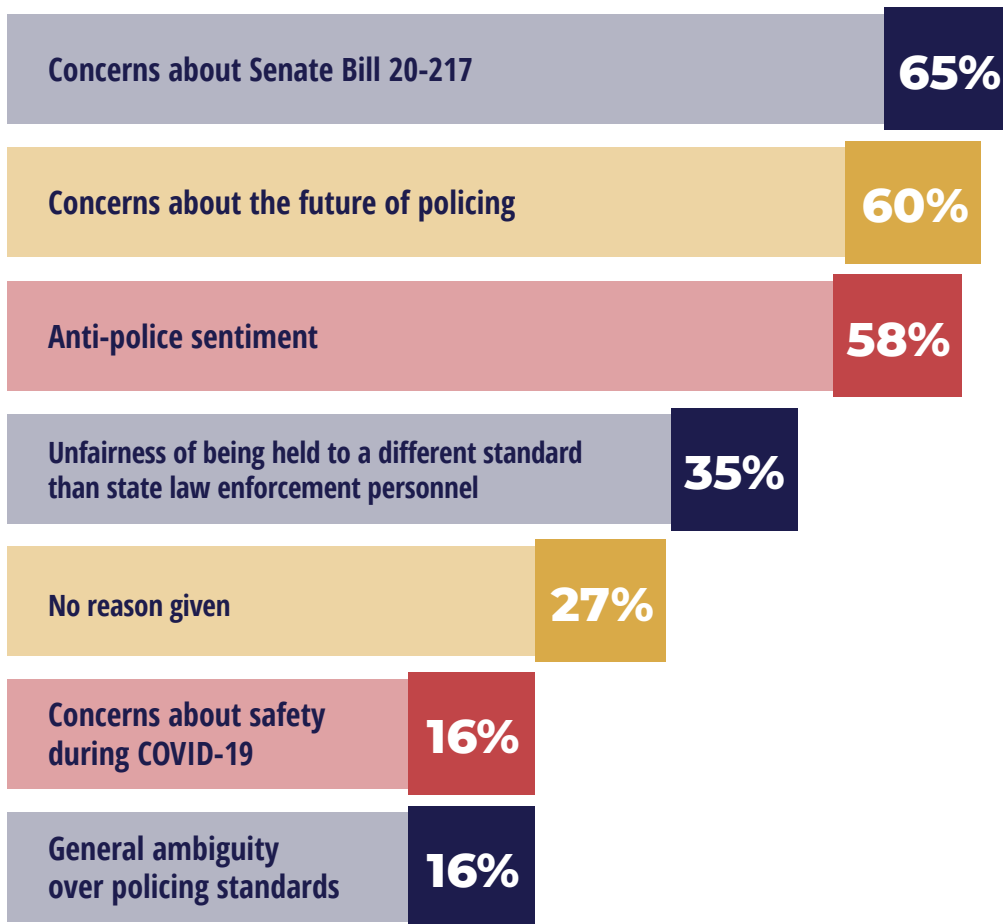
Of agencies that have lost officers in the last six months,

# 54%

said the number is up compared to a year ago.

## Reasons for officer departures

What were reasons given for officer departures? Check all that apply.



## Comments



The elimination of qualified immunity and concerns over decertification for minor policy violations were key contributors.

**- Littleton Police Chief Doug Stephens**

I did lose several tenured deputies with the passage of Senate Bill 217; others did stay but are looking at other options. In talking with them, they believe there is a lack of understanding of the work they do and the dangers they face and that policy changes should reflect the needs of local communities.

**- Fremont County Sheriff Allen Cooper**

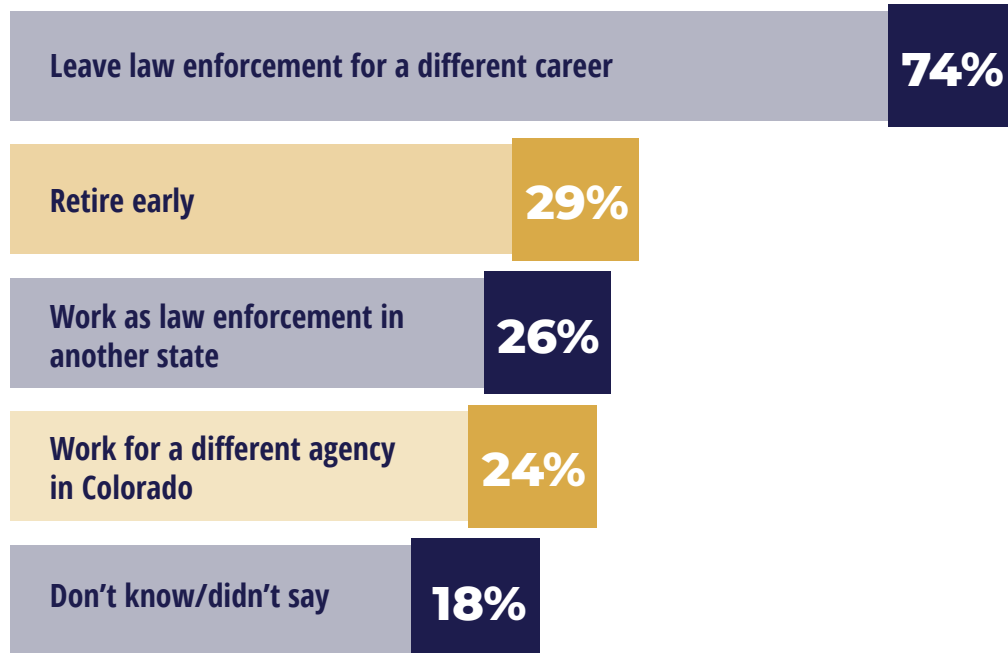
The concerns voiced over SB217 mostly stem from the elimination of qualified immunity. There is also significant concern over the ambiguity of civil lawsuits being filed in state courts that are not familiar with these cases and lack any history of case law or decisions to draw from.

**- Mead Police Chief Brent Newbanks**



## Most officers who have left agencies are leaving law enforcement altogether.

Of the officers who have left, what are their future plans? Check all that apply:



## Diversity

Law enforcement agencies are committed to mirroring the diverse makeup of their communities. Ensuring diversity in law enforcement requires a wide range of strategies, and as applications are down, this continues to be a challenge in some communities, especially in rural areas.

# 68%

of respondents said in the last six months, they have proactively taken steps to increase diversity

## Comments



We have a diversity, equity and inclusion committee looking at our agency and our role. We are currently receiving public input, and the committee will complete a report with recommendations. Also, our entire department is currently reading "White Fragility" as a part of anti-bias training.

**- Fort Lewis College Police Chief Brett Deming**

I created a separate bureau within the agency (Bureau of Professional Responsibility) whose task is to create community conversations (as well as internal conversations) around race and other specified topics, identify areas where we can improve, develop policies and implement them.

**- El Paso County Sheriff Bill Elder**





## Did you know?

### Research shows de-escalation training improves policing

Law enforcement training on how to de-escalate challenging situations is an important tool used throughout the country that improves everyone's safety. A recent study of the Police Executive Research Forum's Integrated Communications and Tactics (ICAT) program found:

- ICAT training was associated with a statistically significant 28% reduction in use of force
- ICAT also was associated with a 26% decline in citizen injuries.
- And ICAT was associated with a 36% reduction in officer injuries.

[READ MORE](#)

## Body Worn Cameras

Law enforcement supports the use of body-worn cameras. However, a clear path to funding this requirement is necessary, as not all agencies can afford them. In addition to the cost of purchasing body cameras, funding is needed for storage and staff support to review and redact footage of minors, victims, nudity, etc. Complying with the new requirements will cost some local communities millions of dollars.

# 56%

of respondents said they do not have sufficient funding to comply with Senate Bill 20-217's body-worn camera requirements.

## Looking Forward

Colorado law enforcement organizations remain committed to accountability, transparency and building community trust. We still face challenges in our communities, including addressing public health issues, rising crime rates and continuing to respond to the needs of our residents. Most agencies expect to continue to face recruitment and retention challenges as fewer people apply for open positions, and the applicant pool becomes younger and less experienced.

We will continue to work with the state Legislature on several public safety priorities, including:

- Clarifying portions of Senate Bill 20-217 so it can be implemented uniformly statewide, and officers can be confident in their efforts to fulfill the Legislature's intent.
- Securing funding for body-worn camera programs.
- Ensuring officers have and understand due process prior to revocation of their POST certification.

As we move forward, it is crucial that law enforcement is part of these solutions so they can work effectively to keep our communities safe.

The Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police is a professional organization committed to serving the law enforcement community and the citizens of Colorado.

The County Sheriffs of Colorado is an association that provides education and professional assistance and promotes unity to enable sheriffs to best serve and protect the people of Colorado.