

Officer Staffing in Local Law Enforcement Agencies

Officer and Population Trends in North Carolina

Percent Change 2010-18



The combined rate of increase from 2010-18 of officers in North Carolina's local law enforcement agencies was outpaced by population growth, but changes were not consistent across all agency or county types. During this time, the state's total population increased by 8.5% (815,000 residents).¹ Sheriff's offices and police departments combined saw an increase of 6.5% (1,375 officers).² County sheriff's offices saw the highest amount of growth with 8,107 officers in 2010 and 8,990 officers in 2018 (+10.9%). Police departments grew from 12,879 officers to 13,371 (+3.8%). The percent growth for all law enforcement agencies combined was similar by county type, with an overall 6.7% increase in urban counties and 6.1% in rural counties.³

Changes in the rate of law enforcement officers per 1,000 jurisdictional population varied by agency and county type. Jurisdictional population differs from a city or county's total population and refers to the number of officers in an agency's geographic response area. Sheriff's offices in rural counties saw a rate increase from 1.69 to 1.81 officers per 1,000 jurisdictional population from 2010-18. Police departments in urban counties saw a rate decrease from 2.40 to 2.26. The rate for sheriff's offices in urban counties remained steady from 2010-18 (1.85 to 1.84, respectively), as did the rate for police departments in rural counties (3.88 to 3.87, respectively).

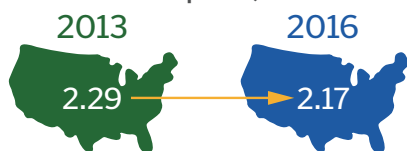
¹N.C. population data retrieved on 12/16/19 from <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/demog>

²Police Employee Data 2010-18, State Bureau of Investigation

³Urban and rural counties defined according to U.S. Census Bureau's Core Based Statistical Areas (Sept. 2018)

The National Perspective

Rate of Officers per 1,000 Residents



U.S. rate includes local and state police



N.C. rate includes police departments, sheriff's offices, and State Highway Patrol

While there is no national standard for how many officers a jurisdiction should have per capita, the most recent data available from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics survey, conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, reported a decrease in the rate of officers per 1,000 U.S. residents from 2.29 in 2013 to 2.17 in 2016.⁴ The comparable rate calculated for North Carolina shows a smaller rate decrease from 2.35 to 2.32 between 2013 and 2016. North Carolina's rate of officers per 1,000 residents remains higher than the national rate.⁵

⁴Bureau of Justice Statistics *Full-Time Employees in Law Enforcement Agencies, 1997-2016* (Aug. 2018)

⁵N.C. population data retrieved on 12/16/19 from <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/demog>

Recent Recruitment Insights

QUICK FACT

In 2019, 95%
(1,591 of 1,684)



of those who took
the State Basic
Law Enforcement
Exam for N.C.
passed.

North Carolina Department of Justice,
Criminal Justice Standards Division

A 2019 nationwide survey of over 400 police agencies conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum, reported that 63% of police agency executives advised that the number of police applicants decreased over the previous five years. In light of the study's findings, PERF identified several recruitment strategies that may assist agencies to increase applicant pools:

- Adjust agency-specific employment restrictions related to previous drug use, credit history, tattoos, and facial hair
- If possible, align benefits with the needs of those entering the workforce (flexible scheduling, childcare assistance, student loan forgiveness)
- Implement “grow your own cops” strategies by partnering with local schools to develop police cadet programs and student internship opportunities
- Host recruitment events designed specifically for non-traditional applicants (i.e., Women in Law Enforcement events)
- Emphasize the day-to-day service aspects of law enforcement over excitement

In 2018, a survey of college students was conducted to gauge the level of interest in becoming a police officer and to gain insights into the expectations and knowledge of potential police applicants toward the recruitment process. This study, which was overseen jointly with a police department, included over 750 students enrolled in criminal justice classes in five U.S. universities. Among the findings were that:

- 39% of the students surveyed indicated interest in a police patrol career
- 39% indicated interest in a specialized or supervisory police role, such as a narcotics officer, detective, or sergeant
- 55% agreed that patrol is an acceptable entry-level position if a future promotional opportunity follows
- 67% indicated that they did not understand the promotional process within police agencies

The majority of the students surveyed also indicated that neither the time commitment or physical fitness training required for the police academy were barriers but 63% indicated that they had little knowledge of what a police academy would entail. Over 70% of the students agreed that having a mentor would make a difference in choosing a career in policing.

⁶ Police Executive Research Forum *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It* (Sept. 2019)

⁷ Scheer, C., Rossler, M., Papania, L. (2018). Interest in Police Patrol Careers: An Assessment of Potential Candidates' Impressions of the Police Recruitment, Selection, and Training Processes. https://aquila.usm.edu/fac_pubs/15651