

Public Safety Funding  
Sheriff Adam Christianson  
November 2008

In the wake of the State's on-going budget crisis, law enforcement is bracing for yet another round of budget cuts to local public safety initiatives funded through the State's budget. Unfortunately, during the most recent special session of the California State Legislature, neither political party was able to build a partnership or find real solutions for the State's fiscal crisis. As one of 58 elected Sheriff's in the State, we stand ready to work closely with legislators from both parties and in both houses to identify and develop budgetary solutions that address the shortfall. The proposed cuts will disproportionately affect law enforcement at a time when we are asked to do more with less. We believe there are better solutions to be found and there must be a way to establish secured sustainable funding for local public safety programs already in place. We agree that we must do our part to address the budget crisis and we have done that by accepting the Governor's originally proposed 10% cuts back on September 23rd when the State's budget was adopted.

There are no easy answers and any further budget cuts will result in a reduction of law enforcement services to the community. It is critical we maintain existing funding levels to protect our programs and staff. The Sheriff's Department continues to struggle with retention of experienced law enforcement officers because we are no longer offering a competitive salary and benefits package. Most senior deputy sheriff personnel can lateral to another department that offers a higher salary. Now this may not be the appropriate time to support law enforcement personnel when so many other people throughout the community are losing their jobs and homes, but my deputies and their families are struggling too. We spend more of your tax dollars recruiting and training qualified men and women to serve and protect us, only to have them leave for other agencies that offer higher salaries. As an example, the Sheriff's Department recently lost two experienced Homicide Detectives, one to the City of Tracy and the other to the City of Turlock.

Here in Stanislaus County, the Sheriff's Department will have to make some difficult decisions based upon limited or reduced funding. Here is how those cuts will impact you, the citizens of Stanislaus County:

Our Mentally Ill Offender Crime Reduction Grants were completely de-funded by \$916,740 which means the elimination of staffing and support for mentally ill offenders who benefit from appropriate care including proper medication and support services. Our partnership with Behavioral Health & Recovery Services is strong and we will find solutions to dealing with our mentally ill offenders. Even though the funding was eliminated, the problem itself does not go away. We will find a way to make it work and continue to meet the needs of the mentally ill.

Reductions in the Rural Crime Prevention program means the loss of a detective assigned to investigate metal theft, agricultural crimes, farm equipment theft, chemical theft and the on-going clandestine methamphetamine toxic lab dumps on prime agricultural land. Again, we will continue to do our best to meet the demands the agricultural community.

In our California Multi-Jurisdictional Methamphetamine Enforcement Team (CALMMET) we saw a 34% reduction in funding totaling \$413,575 and we now face additional cuts of \$385,504 That forces us to move 4 drug agents, 1 supervisor, 1 account clerk and 1 Investigator from the District Attorney's office out of CALMMET further reducing our Narcotics Suppression Team's ability to combat the manufacturing and distribution of methamphetamine in our communities. There is an element of methamphetamine in nearly all of the crimes we investigate. A pound of meth on the street is worth \$20,000. Now is not the time to cut our efforts in the suppression of illegal narcotics. The part about this loss to the CALMMET program that concerns me the most is our Drug Endangered Children program which will also be negatively impacted by budget cuts. Our early intervention and prevention programs are important to families and children. We cannot afford to lose ground in that battle to protect them from drugs and gangs.

This is just a short sampling of the budgetary challenges we face. In total, the Sheriff's Department will see a reduction in funding for local public safety programs totaling over \$2 million dollars.

There are deep concerns about the public safety implications of current proposed budget revisions that the Governor recently submitted to the State Legislature. While we understand the State is facing an ever expanding budget deficit, we simply cannot support another round of devastating cuts to local law enforcement. Current State funding for law enforcement programs is less than 1% of the State's total budget. How will further cuts to public safety have any positive impact on reducing the State's deficit?

Funding reductions at a local level are creating bigger challenges in meeting the public's demand for our services. After a 10% reduction in public safety funding during the State's budget negotiation process, how will additional budget cuts protect the citizens of our communities? All of these dramatic losses in front-line law enforcement services will only result in cuts to those services and the potential loss of jobs by reductions in force.

The Sheriffs of California and the California State Sheriff's Association stand ready to work together with the Governor and the State Legislature in partnership to protect the citizens of California. We need to find solutions that meet budgetary challenges without cutting the critical core services that police officers and deputy sheriffs provide. We have a duty and an obligation to work together in order to serve the community and meet the public's demand for our services.

On a positive note, our local Part 1 Crimes as reported to the United States Department of Justice (Uniform Crime Reporting) are down 26% overall from this time last year. That means our efforts in the community are working and I credit all of the police officers and deputy sheriffs in Stanislaus County who work tirelessly to protect all of us. They deserve our thanks and gratitude.

The support of the community will be critical to our success. We need the public to know that further public safety funding cuts will mean cutting our current levels of service and reducing the number of public safety personnel working in our neighborhoods.

Join me in contacting your elected representatives and our newly elected representatives in Sacramento and urge them to work together and find solutions that prevent further cuts to public safety.