

CHALLENGES IN GOVERNANCE



Police Report

Presented by Police Chief Art Walgren



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To whom it may concern,

Thank you for this opportunity.

The Watford City Police Department continues to face many obstacles. This is a result of the growth and overall impact of the boom. Law Enforcement faces an ever increasing call load which rivals big cities where officers go from call to call and do not have time for proactive patrol. We often have calls holding because we do not have enough people on the street to handle things as it comes in. We have seen a dramatic increase in the complexity of the cases we investigate. Things such as suspects and victims to work here, but live in another state making it hard to contact people in person. Many crimes cross county and state lines making it difficult to follow up and interview people. Then there is the international spotlight which has drawn attention from the drug cartels and lately groups involved in things like credit card fraud.

Specific problems related to our law enforcement duties include a high suicide rate and lack of mental health resources, counseling and related services for these people. There is also a lack of specially trained medical staff such as SANE nurses and limited access to adequate facilities for them. We also lack in the area of detox and substance abuse centers and so on. We continue to face issues with recruiting. We also face a lack of affordable housing available for purchase by all first responders, which effects longevity. We struggle with training needs. The rapid growth of our departments in this part of the state has meant Watford City has quadrupled in size in 5 years from 5 sworn to 20 sworn. As a result of that growth, more than half of my department has less than 2 years of experience. That can be at least partially mitigated by additional training, but that becomes very expensive, especially when we talk about the numbers of officers we need to train. Bringing training to this part of the state is best for the number of officers we need to train, but again the cost is great with an average cost of about \$10,000 for a week long course. We also struggle with the complexity of the call load and the number of man hours needed to properly investigate cases we face resulting in massive overtime. The last thing I can think of would be equipment. The demands of needing to keep pace with technology are expensive. From dispatch upgrades, records management, radios, investigative equipment, commercial vehicle enforcement, drug enforcement and so on, the need for some type of new and upgraded equipment is with us every year.

As a result of the lack of facilities and resources, many people that we deal with do not get adequate care and this makes the recidivism rate very high. We many times turn people who are in need of mental health intervention back out onto the street because they cannot find anywhere that can help them. Here is a specific case.

Just a couple of days ago my officers dealt with a male who was making repeated 911 calls and talking about people trying to kill him, breaking into places, etc... He was taken to our hospital and evaluated for a mental health hold. The doctors here then called Jamestown, Bismarck, Minot and ultimately could not find room for him anywhere, so he was just released back out on the street. I bring this case up only to emphasize the difficulties faced, especially in the area of mental health.

In closing, I would like to say that I don't want to come off in a negative light, because I feel it truly amazing how the North Dakota spirit has lead us to do many great things in a short amount of time. I am grateful to have a city and state with dedicated leaders who have lead us to where we never could have imagined we would be 5 years ago. Finally, I would also like to thank the legislature for everything you give to us. It is greatly needed and greatly appreciated.

Thank you!

Arthur D. Walgren
Chief of Police

