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Contact:

Jordan Burns

Jburns@fionahuttonassoc.com

713-303-3623

New Research Shows Police Staffing Shortages Lead to Longer Emergency Response Times, Forcing Californians in Crisis to Wait for Help

California only has 2 officers for every 1,000 residents, nearly half the nationwide average, undermining departments' ability to respond to critical emergency calls in a timely manner

Sacramento, CA – Today, the [Peace Officers Research Association of California](#) (PORAC) released [new research](#) showing the detrimental impact that ongoing law enforcement staffing shortages are having on response times to emergency calls across California. This research, using the most recent [law enforcement employment data](#) from the California Department of Justice, demonstrates that on average, California counties have less than two officers for every 1,000 residents, nearly half the nationwide average of 3.5 officers. Additional research shows that staffing levels are “the strongest predictor of response times,” meaning that Californians in areas with fewer officers can expect to wait longer for help when they call 911 during an emergency.

These staffing shortages are pervasive across the state – **only 2 of California's 58 counties exceed the national average of 3.5 officers per 1,000 residents**. The research zooms in on the impact of the shortages in a series of case studies from California counties, including:

- **Sacramento**, where the number of active Sacramento Police Department officers is expected to drop to less than half of what is needed to serve the population.
- **Santa Clara**, where the San Jose Police Department has not been able to meet their goal response times for emergency calls due to ongoing staffing declines.
- **Los Angeles**, where the Long Beach Police Department is taking more than 20 minutes longer to respond to the highest priority calls than they did in 2021, as they struggle to fill vacancies.
- **San Diego**, where the San Diego Police Department is struggling to respond to serious crimes – the average response time exceeds 36 minutes, which is more than twice their 14-minute target.

“The hardworking men and women in law enforcement are doing their best to keep our communities safe despite these rampant staffing shortages, working overtime and missing out on time with their families to fill these significant gaps in capacity,” said **Brian R. Marvel, President of the Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC)**. “There simply aren’t enough officers to respond to all emergency calls, leaving Californians with less urgent but still devastating crimes to wait sometimes hours for a response. This is unacceptable – all Californians should be able to rest easy knowing that if they call for help in an emergency that a peace officer will be there in a reasonable amount of time. As we head into this next legislative session, PORAC is eager to continue working closely with our elected leaders to remedy the core issues behind the staffing shortages that are plaguing California’s police departments.”

This [new research](#) supplements PORAC's prior [first-of-its-kind research](#) released last year which demonstrated the challenges that rural police departments were having recruiting and retaining officers. The updated 2025 brief shows the pervasive nature of these staffing trends across both rural and urban departments and highlights the direct link to increased response times. This brief also explores the reasons behind staffing shortages, including negative views of law enforcement, high attrition rates and early departures, and lengthy recruitment processes.

"This research confirms what we all know to be true: that it has become increasingly difficult to hire and retain peace officers in California, leaving departments with positions that remain unfilled for months or even years and therefore unable to respond effectively to the needs of our communities," said **Sacramento County Sheriff Jim Cooper**. "A big part of this problem is public perception of the law enforcement profession – folks don't want to become cops when the narrative is that peace officers are part of the problem and not the solution. We need our state and local elected leaders to work with us to turn this narrative around – officers are a major part of keeping our communities safe, and a career in law enforcement should continue to be promoted as secure, middle-class opportunity with strong benefits."

[PORAC's research](#) underscores the urgent need for both additional resources for law enforcement and collaboration to improve public perception so that we can recruit and retain the right officers for the job. PORAC is committed to working with elected officials on both sides of the aisle to find practical, comprehensive solutions to the overwhelming law enforcement staffing challenges plaguing departments across the state and the nation – all with the goal of creating safer communities for all Americans.

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About the Peace Officers Research Association of California:

The Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC) was incorporated in 1953 as a professional federation of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. PORAC represents over 80,000 public safety members and over 955 associations, making it the largest law enforcement organization in California and the largest statewide association in the nation.