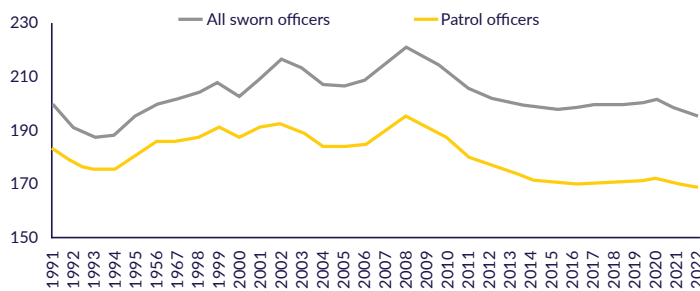


# Law Enforcement Staffing Shortages Put California at Risk

California is in the midst of a public safety crisis that is putting both residents and businesses across the state at risk. Nearly two-thirds of Californians say violence and street crime in their local community is a problem.<sup>1</sup> And while law abiding citizens worry about the safety of their families and their communities, law enforcement staffing shortages are at a critical level.

The number of patrol officers per 100,000 residents has fallen below 1991 levels<sup>3</sup>  
Officers per 100,000 residents



Police staffing is at a 30-year low, with the number of patrol officers per 100,000 residents now at its **lowest level since 1991** despite California's population having grown by nearly **10 million people** in that same timespan.<sup>2</sup>

## The Ripple Effect: Shortages Spark a Cascade of Consequences for Communities

Law enforcement staffing shortages have direct and far-reaching consequences, including longer response times and increased strain on law enforcement departments. The impacts are clear – when there aren't enough officers on our streets, more innocent people become victims. For example, in major metropolitan areas like San Diego, wait times for serious crimes increased by more than 15 minutes. For less serious crimes, the **wait time increased to nearly two hours**.<sup>4</sup>

Civilians are not the only ones bearing the brunt of these staffing shortages. Citing crime as a significant factor, retailers across the state are now being forced to shutter their businesses:



**CNN** In-N-Out has never closed a location, until now. It cites crime as the problem.

**San Francisco Chronicle** Westfield mall blamed SF Nordstrom closure on 'rampant' crime

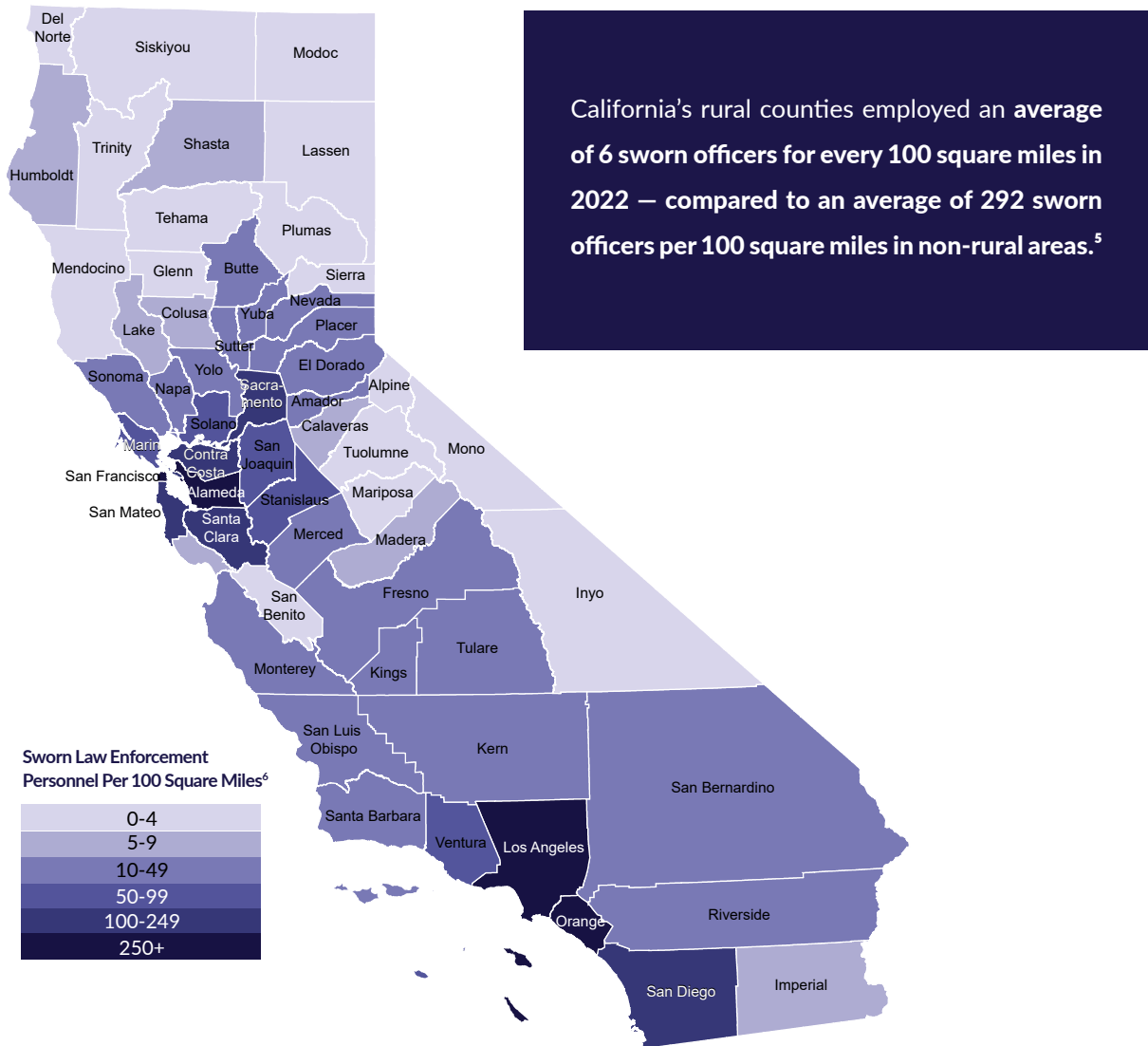
**AXIOS** Target stores closing: Nine locations to close because of theft, retail crime

**Los Angeles Times** Starbucks to close six Los Angeles-area stores it calls 'unsafe to continue to operate'

**BUSINESS INSIDER** A Taco Bell franchisee has shut the dining rooms of at least 3 restaurants in Oakland over crime fears

## Rural Communities Suffer Most

While law enforcement shortages are widespread, their impacts are magnified in rural communities.



These staffing challenges have resulted in long emergency response times and have led some local governments to make incredibly tough decisions — like Tehama County ending daytime patrols.<sup>7</sup>

*“People have expressed to me fear and concern based on the lack of the daytime sheriff’s office patrol,”* said Tehama County District Attorney Matt Rogers. *“Simply put, if they pick up the phone and dial 911, is someone going to come?”*



## The Challenge at Hand: Core Issues Behind Staffing Shortages

Shortages create a vicious cycle for departments, causing strain on the existing workforce and making it more difficult to hire new officers. A 2019 national survey found that **78% of participating agencies had difficulty in recruiting qualified candidates.**<sup>8</sup> And in California, between 2020-2022, the state lost about 3,600 sworn staff and 1,200 civilian staff, a drop of 4.5% and 3% respectively.<sup>9</sup>

But recruitment is only one step in the process. Qualified peace officers must be hired, trained, and retained for a physically and emotionally taxing job that requires many to retire or leave the profession early. This is even more acute in rural regions for departments who have smaller budgets and are unable to offer the same incentives we see being offered in major cities,<sup>10</sup> like signing bonuses and higher salaries.

**3,600**  
Sworn Staff

**1,200**  
Civilian Staff

## California faces the following roadblocks to maintaining appropriate staffing levels:

- **Negative Views of Law Enforcement:** Prevalent anti-law enforcement rhetoric has made it increasingly difficult to recruit, hire, train, and retain the right officers for the job. Applications have decreased significantly, and anti-police sentiment has placed officers at greater risk – in 2021, intentional killings of law enforcement officers reached a 20-year high.<sup>12</sup>
- **High Attrition Rates & Early Departures:** The demanding nature of being a peace officer coupled with the emotional and physical toll the job takes has led to a significant increase in early retirements and voluntary exits from the profession.
- **Lengthy Recruitment Processes:** As experienced officers retire at staggering rates, departments must find a way to replace them quickly with new recruits. This presents a challenge for the 47.5% of departments who have a hiring process that lasts between four months to year.<sup>13</sup>

*“We have no money. We have no people,”* said Modoc County Sheriff Mike Poindexter, echoing more than a dozen rural CA sheriffs. *“We don’t have nearly enough people. We just don’t.”*<sup>11</sup>

*“Ask 150 high school kids who wants to be a police officer – you won’t get one that will raise their hand.”* – Sam Blonder, CEO of Epic Recruiting<sup>14</sup>



## Where We Go from Here: The Benefits of Hiring More Officers

California faces a web of compounding obstacles as it grapples with a public safety crisis marked by increased crime and unprecedented officer staffing shortages. In an attempt to mitigate these impacts, the state has recently resorted to deploying the California Highway Patrol (CHP)<sup>15</sup> to bolster officer levels on the ground in especially hard-hit areas – even though the CHP is also understaffed.<sup>16</sup> But this shortsighted solution simply removes officers from one understaffed area to provide short-term relief to another.

This moment exemplifies the urgency for increased resources to recruit, train, and retain officers. Even small changes can make a big impact:

### Crime Reduction:

Each additional officer results in 1.3 fewer violent crimes and 4.2 fewer property crimes per year.<sup>17</sup>

### Economic Impact:

There is a significant crime-reduction benefit of hiring even one additional officer – in Los Angeles, one officer yields an expected benefit of \$480,000.<sup>18</sup>

It is abundantly clear that departments must be fully funded so they can prevent, not just respond to, crime in our communities. It's time to provide the necessary funding and resources to ensure departments can maintain adequate staffing levels to increase public safety in our neighborhoods, respond to and address the disturbing wave of rising crime, increase hours spent on training, and provide officers with the support they need. PORAC is committed to working with elected officials on both sides of the aisle to find commonsense and comprehensive solutions so that we can move towards a safer California, together.

*"We probably do need to look at subsidizing smaller police departments so they can level the playing field."* – Assemblymember Reggie Jones-Sawyer, Former Chair, Assembly Public Safety Committee<sup>19</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PPIC: <https://www.ppic.org/blog/solid-majorities-of-californians-view-crime-as-a-problem/>

<sup>2</sup>PPIC: <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/1tf-law-enforcement-staffing-in-california.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>PPIC: <https://www.ppic.org/publication/law-enforcement-staffing-in-california/>

<sup>4</sup>CBS8: <https://www.cbs8.com/article/news/local/sdpd-staffing-result-in-increased-response-times/509-30a61f94-c257-48c5-ac75-9ebda5fea905#:text=In%20fact%2C%20San%20Diego%20Police%20they%20did%20in%202018>

<sup>5</sup>California DOJ: <https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/exploration/crime-statistics/criminal-justice-personnel> & U.S. Census: <https://data.census.gov/>

<sup>6</sup>California DOJ: <https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/exploration/crime-statistics/criminal-justice-personnel> & U.S. Census: <https://data.census.gov/>

<sup>7</sup>CalMatters: <https://calmatters.org/justice/2022/12/police-officer-shortage/>

<sup>8</sup>IACP: [http://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/239416\\_IACP\\_RecruitmentBR\\_HR\\_0.pdf](http://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/239416_IACP_RecruitmentBR_HR_0.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>PPIC: <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/1tf-law-enforcement-staffing-in-california.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>CalMatters: <https://calmatters.org/justice/2023/09/california-police-bonuses-raises-contracts/>

<sup>11</sup>Sacramento Bee: <https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/article230045209.html>

<sup>12</sup>CNN: <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/13/us/police-officers-line-of-duty-deaths/index.html>

<sup>13</sup>IACP: [http://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/239416\\_IACP\\_RecruitmentBR\\_HR\\_0.pdf](http://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/239416_IACP_RecruitmentBR_HR_0.pdf)

<sup>14</sup>CalMatters: <https://calmatters.org/justice/2022/12/police-officer-shortage/#:text=%E2%80%9CAmong%20command%20staff%20there's%20this,needs%20a%20shakeup%20like%20that.%E2%80%9D>

<sup>15</sup>Office of Governor Newsom: <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2024/02/06/chp-surge-east-bay/>

<sup>16</sup>KRON: <https://www.kron4.com/news/bay-area/chp-struggling-with-statewide-staffing-shortages/>

<sup>17</sup>PPIC: <https://www.ppic.org/publication/law-enforcement-staffing-in-california/#:text=Recent%20research%20finds%20that%20increased,per%20year%2C%20primarily%20through%20deterrence>

<sup>18</sup>RAND: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP279.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP279.html)

<sup>19</sup>CalMatters: <https://calmatters.org/justice/2022/12/police-officer-shortage/>