

Elimination of the D.A.R.E. Program

I have received many emails and letters concerning the elimination of the DARE program. I must first begin with saying this was far from an easy decision. Our budget cuts over the last several years have not been easy and all are having a serious impact on our ability to serve our citizens. Some members of our community have asserted that the elimination of DARE will result in dramatic increases in drug and alcohol abuse among children; I believe that to be an untrue statement. Several of the major counties up and down the front range, including the Colorado Springs Police Department have already eliminated the DARE program as they faced budgetary constraints and they have not witnessed an increase in drug and alcohol abuse. Let's not forget that parents play a role and have a responsibility to be mentors, role models and educate their own children concerning the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse.

The duties and responsibilities of the Office of Sheriff are clearly defined by the Colorado Law. The primary responsibilities are operation of the jail, Fire Warden, transportation of prisoners, civil process, law enforcement/the investigation of crimes, search and rescue and issuance of Concealed carry permits. The responsibilities have to be funded by the Board of County Commissioners and fulfilled before other activities are funded and carried out.

DARE is not listed in the state mandates of my Office and is in competition with the items that are state mandated. I am a strong advocate and supporter of the DARE program, but when the decision is between the statutory and non-statutory responsibilities, it is my obligation to perform the statutory duties. We have many areas in the Sheriff's Office that are severely understaffed which leaves my deputies open to significant danger and liabilities. We have seen our budget cut four times since 2006. We struggle to provide the statutory requirements with safety and efficiency, let alone the non-statutory activities.

Not only am I statutorily mandated to perform the above-mentioned responsibilities, but in many cases I have no authority to control the demand growth, especially within the jail and inmate transportation. They are heavily driven by citizens/victim expectations, the District Attorney and the Courts. Federal law, state law and legal court decisions dictate the performance levels with the operation of the jail and inmate transport requirements. Patrol calls for service have continued to grow much faster than the revenue stream provided to increase staffing. In addition, our response times continue to grow at unacceptable rates. Our patrol staffing is the same as it was in 1989. Yet, the population has grown more than 50% during the same time. The patrol deputies are often going to high risk calls without back-up and sometimes are traveling 25 - 45 minutes for these calls.

As we continue to move through the budget process, with more cuts on the way, we are forced to become reactive rather than proactive. The statutory responsibilities have continued to increase with no additional funding to meet these responsibilities forcing many positions within the Sheriff's Office to be cut. Those cuts include; the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Task Force (ATF) position, The FBI Organized Crime/Gang task force position, The FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force position, five School Resource Officers, six jail deputies and six patrol deputies.

Statutory responsibilities like the jail and patrol have to be fulfilled before optional activities like DARE can be funded.

The education of students concerning drugs, gangs and violence is not a statutory requirement of the Sheriff or the Board of County Commissioners. It is my hope that parents, as well as, the school systems will step up, fill the void, and educate their children on the dangers associated with substance abuse. The voters had an opportunity to fund these positions that we are now forced to cut. They spoke loudly and clearly, by a margin of 6-4 that these services were not necessary, nor important. I believe we in public safety miss so many opportunities to be proactive especially with our youth when it comes to crime prevention and substance abuse. The funding to incorporate these programs and ideas just does not exist.

I can not speak for the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) but they are mandated under state law to balance the County's Budget. I know the County Commissioners have discretion over a very limited amount of the County's \$220 million dollar budget. I also know they are funding, at reduced amounts, other non-mandated programs such as the CSU 4-H program, but that is something you would have to take up with them. Please understand, our Patrol division is 60% understaffed and our Detention division is 10% understaffed and both of these are very high liability areas. Employees have not seen an increase in their salaries in four years and have fallen 30% behind their counterparts in other jurisdictions. Our operating costs for fuel, tires, vehicle maintenance and training as an example have risen sharply over the past couple years, and those costs increases have not been covered by the BOCC. We are expected to fall short in meeting the budgetary needs in those cost centers and others next year. Excluding the mandated food and medical contracts for the jail, 91% of my budget goes to salaries, so there is nowhere else to cut other than positions. Again, I will state these cuts move us in a more reactive direction than proactive and it certainly is not what I believe to be in the best interest of neither the community nor our future.

It is my sincerest hope the community will recognize the importance of public safety at all levels. Both of my children have benefited from the DARE program and still make comments referring back to what they were taught by a DARE officer. They are now 22 and 17 and I acknowledge that DARE did not necessarily stop my children from engaging in substance abuse. I feel my wife and I played a significant role in educating our children about the dangers and risk associated with drugs and alcohol. This is a program I would love to see be saved, but with more budget cuts on the way, not only is it not likely, it most likely will not happen. However, if another funding source could be found, I would love to keep the program in place.

Sincerely,

Terry Maketa

Sheriff