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PROPOSITION 130: FUNDING FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Paul M. Pazen is the former Chief of Police in Denver, Colorado where he rose through the ranks of the department up to his appointment in 2018 as the Chief. Chief Pazen is excited to join the Common Sense Institute as a Fellow, Paul believes in utilizing research, innovation, data, and evidence-based methods to improve the quality of life, vibrancy and public safety for the people of Colorado.



Steven L. Byers, Ph.D. – Chief Economist

Steven Byers's is Common Sense Institute's Chief Economist and has been with CSI since 2022. Steven is responsible for conducting research on issues important to the Colorado economy.



DJ Summers – Director of Policy and Research

DJ Summers is Common Sense Institute's Director of Policy and Research. He oversees the stages of CSI's fellows and research staff, coordinates with partners, iterates and analyzes projects, and breaks down findings for the public, legislators, and commercial leaders.

ABOUT COMMON SENSE INSTITUTE

Common Sense Institute is a non-partisan research organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of Colorado's economy. CSI is at the forefront of important discussions concerning the future of free enterprise and aims to have an impact on the issues that matter most to Coloradans. CSI's mission is to examine the fiscal impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so that Coloradans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI employs rigorous research techniques and dynamic modeling to evaluate the potential impact of these measures on the economy and individual opportunity.

TEAMS & FELLOWS STATEMENT

CSI is committed to independent, in-depth research that examines the impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so that Coloradans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI's commitment to institutional independence is rooted in the individual independence of our researchers, economists, and fellows. At the core of CSI's mission is a belief in the power of the free enterprise system. Our work explores ideas that protect and promote jobs and the economy, and the CSI team and fellows take part in this pursuit with academic freedom. Our team's work is informed by data-driven research and evidence. The views and opinions of fellows do not reflect the institutional views of CSI. CSI operates independently of any political party and does not take positions.

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INTRODUCTION

Proposition 130 attempts to respond to Colorado's crime by sweetening police recruitment incentives.

This measure involves a one-time \$350,000,000 appropriation from the state general fund to pay for a newly created "Peace Officer Training and Support Fund" within the Department of Public Safety for the purposes of recruiting, training and supporting peace officers and their families.

The money may only be used for bona fide peace officer functions and not programs for other human services functions. The money must supplement and not supplant other state or local appropriations to agencies and shall only be available to increase other total funding.

The measure also creates an obligation for the state through the "Peace Officer Training and Support Fund" to pay the surviving spouse, children or estate of any peace officer killed in the line of duty \$1,000,000. This payment is in addition to any other payments including workers compensation, survivor benefits in a pension system, or other benefits provided by law. This is an ongoing obligation regardless of the balance available from the initial \$350,000,000 obligation.

KEY FINDINGS

- Proposition 130 would devote \$350 million from the state general fund to police recruitment, training, and support.
- From 2011 to 2023, Colorado's crime rate rose 26%, including crimes against persons (2%), crimes against society (16%), and motor vehicle thefts (225%).
- Colorado's number of police officers per 1,000 people has consistently lagged behind the national average. Nationally, there were 2.4 police officers per 1,000 people in the U.S. in 2023. In Colorado, there were 2.2 police officers per 1,000 people.
- The share of Colorado law enforcement employees who are police officers shrank from 69% in 2013 to 65% in 2023.
- From 2011 to 2024, the number of police officers with the power to arrest increased 7.9%, just half the rate by which the population rose.
- From 2010 to 2022, the crime rate in Denver rose 32%. At the same time, the number of uniformed police officers fielded by the Denver Police Department declined 15.1%.
- In Colorado Springs, the crime rate decreased by 15.9% from 2010 to 2022 while the number of police officers fielded by the Colorado Springs Police Department rose by 5.7%.

CRIME IN COLORADO

The state's reputation as safe has been seriously compromised in the last decade. Particularly in the early 2020s, as several public safety indicators fell, causing Colorado to fall below the national average in the Common Sense Institute's Public Safety Competitiveness Index.

From 2011 to 2023, Colorado's relative ranking decreased seven spots from 24th to 31st among states and Washington, D.C.

The state's crime rate has skyrocketed 25.8% from 2011 to 2023. The rate of crimes against persons is up 2% from 2012 to 2023 and crimes against society is up 15.8% over the same period. Though motor vehicle thefts have dropped 8.2% in the last two years, these thefts are still up 225.3% since 2011.

At the same time, state policy and funding has focused more on regulating policing strategies and prioritizing civilian roles within police departments, resulting in a declining share of law enforcement comprised of police officers with the power to make arrests. Colorado has

consistently held a lower ratio of police officers to population than the nation at large. The measure would devote state funding to hiring programs and pay raises for Colorado peace officers at a time during which the number of uniformed officers per capita has been declining. From 2011 to 2024, the number of police officers with the power to arrest increased 7.9%, just half the rate by which the population rose. This means the number of police officers per capita has decreased in Colorado even as its police spending has risen. Crime in Colorado worsened as the rate of police per capita fell. The number of incidents increased 37% from 2011 to 2024 while the number of cleared cases (cases which result in a prosecution) increased only 2.2%.

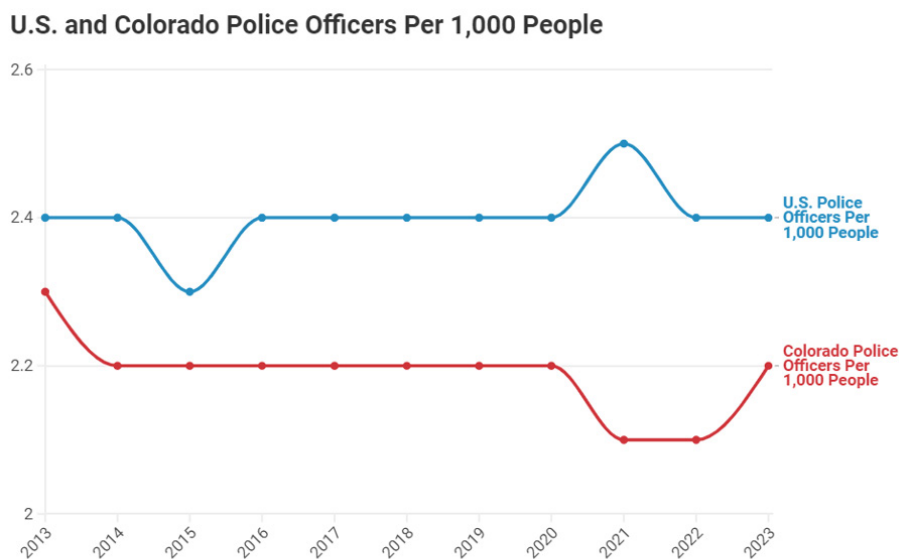
SHIFTS IN THE NUMBER AND RATE OF POLICE OFFICERS IN COLORADO

The disparity between public safety spending and crime rate coincides with a decreased emphasis on uniformed officers.

Public spending on policing has risen and is among the higher rates among U.S. states and the District of Columbia. However, Colorado’s number of police officers per 1,000 people has consistently lagged behind the national average. Nationally, there were 2.4 police officers per 1,000 people in the U.S. in 2023. In Colorado, there were 2.2 police officers per 1,000 people. Between 2013 and 2023, Colorado has had between 0.4 and 0.1 fewer officers than the national rate.

This trend deepened in 2022. This followed the passage of SB20-217, which among other actions limited qualified immunity for police officers. In response, police departments experienced waves of retirements and quits and had difficulty attracting new recruits. Another series of bills lessened consequences for offenders on parole and probation among other changes, increasing workload on a shrinking police force.

FIGURE 1 - U.S. AND COLORADO POLICE OFFICERS PER 1,000 PEOPLE



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting



Colorado's number of police officers cratered in 2022. There were 11,463 police officers in Colorado in 2022, the lowest of any year between 2013 and 2023. It was also the year of the lowest rate of police per capita, with 1.96 officers per 1,000 people.

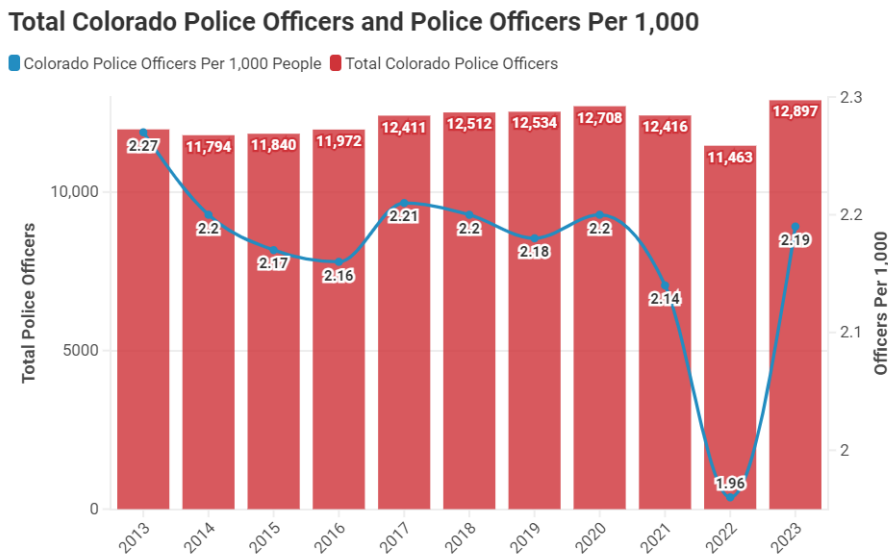
This rebounded in 2023 to 12,897 police officers as crime rates began cooling. This was the highest number of officers in Colorado between 2013 and 2023 but not, however, the highest rate of uniformed officers, as population continued climbing. There were 2.19 officers per 1,000 in 2023.

Spending on public safety appears to have the greatest impact when it is dedicated to uniformed officers. In Colorado, however, the share of law enforcement employees who are officers has been declining in favor of civilians. The state's grant process for police department funding has increasingly prioritized nonprofits and community organizations who explore alternative policing measures rather than going directly to the hiring and retention of uniformed officers.

In 2013, Colorado's law enforcement employees were 69% comprised of police officers. That share has shrunk consistently leading into 2023. In 2023, the share of Colorado law enforcement comprised of officers had shrunk to 65%.

In the same time period, the share of law enforcement that are civilians has risen from 31% to 35%.

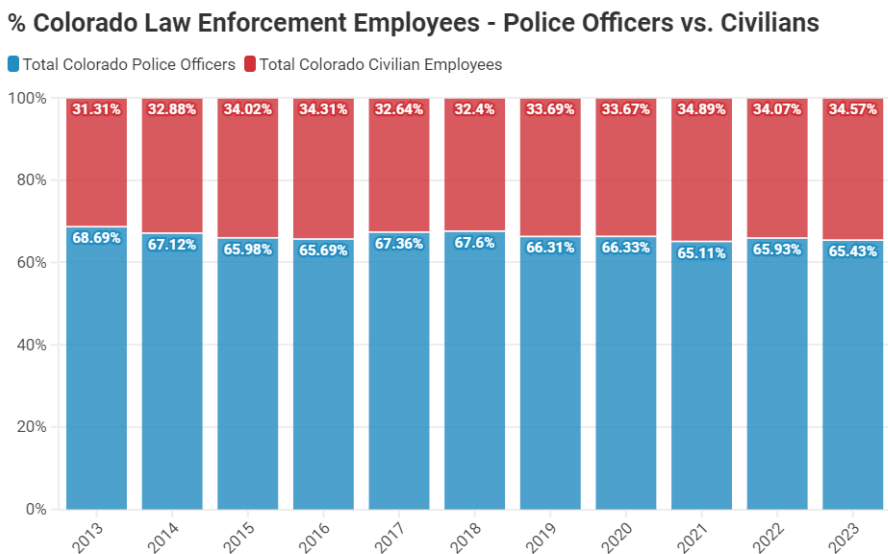
FIGURE 2 - TOTAL COLORADO POLICE OFFICERS AND POLICE OFFICERS PER 1,000



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting



FIGURE 3 - % COLORADO LAW ENFORCEMENT EMPLOYEES - POLICE OFFICERS VS. CIVILIANS



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting



STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT SPENDING ON POLICE PROTECTION

The measure would substantially increase the level of police funding, particularly that of uniformed officers. This has been falling in the last decade as Colorado’s crime has worsened.

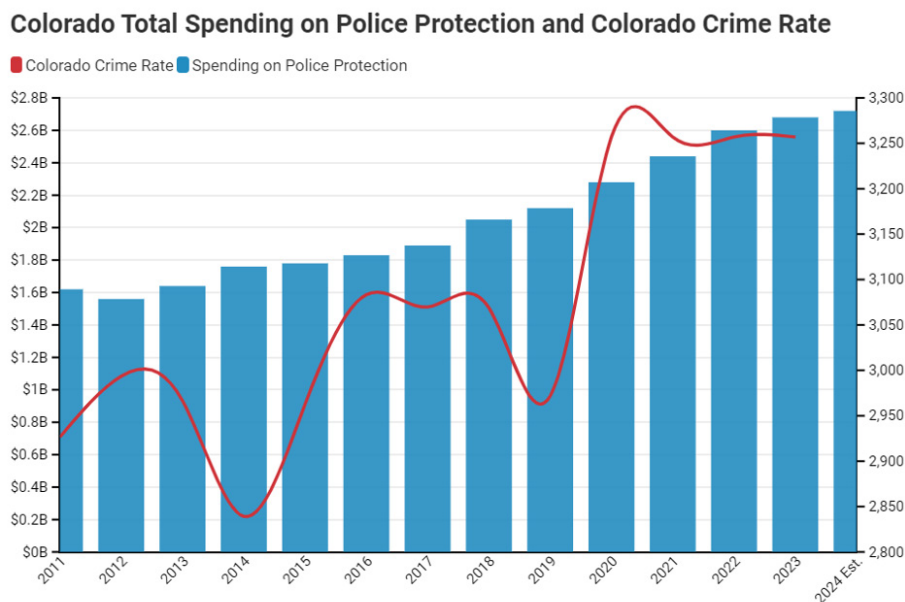
Using the latest release of data from the U.S. Census Bureau - State and Local Government Finances by Level of Government and State, spending on police protection across Colorado in 2021 totaled \$2,438,962,000. Inflating this to 2024, spending is estimated to total \$2,718,991,678 in 2024. An additional \$350,000,000 of spending amounts to a 13% increase.

From 2011 to 2024, spending on police protection increased 68% while population increased 14.1%. In 2011 spending per capita was \$316 and in 2024 it is estimated to be \$466. Should this measure pass, spending per capita in 2025 is estimated to be \$525.

However, from 2011 to 2024, the number of police officers with the power to arrest increased 7.9%, just half the rate by which the population rose. This means the number of police officers per capita has decreased in Colorado even as its police spending has risen. Should this measure pass, this would place Colorado’s police protection spending per capita as the nation’s fifth highest, in between Maryland (\$510) and New York (\$539). Currently, the state ranks 14th for spending per capita on police.

While spending has increased, however, so has crime. As spending on police protection increased from \$1.56 billion to \$2.68 billion from 2012 to 2023, Colorado’s crime rate rose from 2994 to 3257.

FIGURE 4 - TOTAL COLORADO SPENDING ON POLICE PROTECTION



U.S. Census and CSI Calculations

CONNECTION BETWEEN UNIFORMED OFFICERS AND CRIME RATES

CSI found in an analysis of localized crime data that crime rates and rates of uniformed police officers corresponded in Denver and Colorado Springs.

In recent years, to manage costs, the Denver Police Department has switched from sworn personnel to civilians for many positions that do not require a uniformed officer. After increasing from 2010 to 2012 the ratio has declined by 34.6% in 2022.

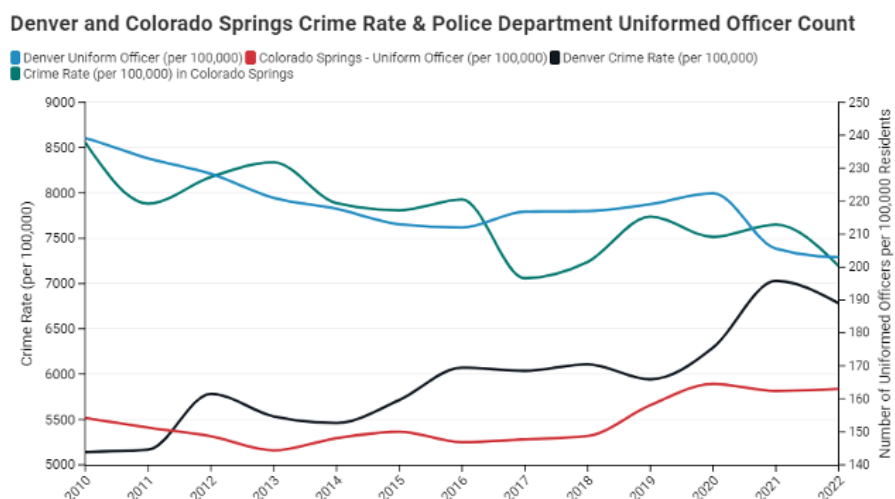
From 2010 to 2022, the crime rate in Denver rose 32%. At the same time, the number of uniformed police officers fielded by the Denver Police Department declined 15.1%. This happened as officer roles began declining from a mixture of early retirements, quits, and recruitment troubles, resulting in shortfalls in authorized police strength.

The inverse is true in other Colorado cities that prioritized uniformed officers. In Colorado Springs, the crime rate decreased by 15.9% from 2010 to 2022 while the number of police officers fielded by the Colorado Springs Police Department rose by 5.7%.

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FIGURE 5 - DENVER AND COLORADO SPRINGS CRIME RATE & POLICE DEPARTMENT UNIFORMED OFFICER COUNT



Source: City of Colorado Springs, City and County of Denver, and Colorado Crime Stats

DISTRIBUTION OF THE MONEY

The money is to be distributed by the Department of Public Safety through a grant program, whereby law enforcement agencies in municipalities and counties can receive funds to:

- Increase annual pay of police, sheriff and other law enforcement officials
- Provide one time hiring, retention or merit bonuses to attract, maintain, or reward exceptional law enforcement officials.
- Hire additional police or law enforcement officials to address specific geographic areas or specific types of criminal activity, including gang activity, drug cartels, human trafficking, stolen vehicle hunts, and drug interdiction at the state’s borders and along the state’s interstate highways.
- Initial and continuing education for law enforcement including the use of force training, restraint and non-lethal force training, physical fitness training or enhancement, post-secondary education advancement in criminal justice or other related areas of study, and other programs and disciplines that contribute to a comprehensive training and retraining of law enforcement officials in the State of Colorado
- Money as needed from the general fund as may be needed to pay the surviving spouse or children or estate of police, fire or other first responders killed in the line of duty.

As is typical with many new programs, the administrative agency or agencies involved create and write the rules necessary to implement the new law. The measure does not specify the criteria for how police agencies will compete for the new fund’s grants. Criteria such as department size, authorized force, crime levels or changes in crime levels, current spending per capita, or police clearance rates, would likely need to be considered.

The funding does not clarify what constitutes a peace officer, and whether that is limited to uniformed police with arresting powers or includes civilians as well. The measure does not specify who will oversee the fund’s administration in the Colorado Department of Public Safety.

Lastly, the program’s funding is not ongoing. The measure does not relay how the funding changes sparked by the \$350 million will be sustained over time, however the legislature could decide to authorize the program to make it permanent or exist over a longer period of time.

BOTTOM LINE

Colorado's crime has risen steadily even as the funding dedicated to public safety has risen. A combination of legislative action and public attention chipped away at Colorado's share of uniformed police officers. The dedication of funding toward hiring and retaining more officers was deprioritized in favor of alternative policing methods, and though the Colorado police force regained some of the losses it incurred in 2021 and 2022, its uniformed officer force has not kept pace with either crime rates or population growth. There is some evidence that dedicated funding towards attracting and retaining uniformed police officers corresponds to a downward turn in crime rates, as seen in Colorado Springs. Additional funding may press crime downward, though the ballot measure is unclear as to how its impacts will be tracked and overseen.