



# Rural Pennsylvania

A Legislative Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly

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## Survey of Small-Town Police Departments

### Introduction

Among Pennsylvania's nearly 2,600 municipalities, 1,124 have police departments. Fifty-six percent of these police departments serve municipalities with less than 10,000 residents and provide services to nearly 872,000 residents.

To better understand the issues facing these "small-town" police departments, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania surveyed police chiefs in municipalities with less than 10,000 residents. Approximately 52 percent of chiefs responded to the survey.

Among the findings were that small-town police departments in rural counties differ from small-town departments in urban counties in budget, staff, and equipment. The survey also found that most rural small-town departments operate with a mix of full- and part-time officers and have had relatively little staff turnover over the last two years.

The survey also found that most small-town police chiefs only somewhat supported regionalization and that many departments have access to computer technology.

### Background

#### Role of the Police Chief

According to the Governor's Center for Local Government Services (GCLGS), the police chief in a typical municipal police department is responsible for many administrative activities, including determining the operational procedures of the department, developing and managing the department's budget, managing work schedules, and supervising personnel. In some communities, the chief also conducts regular patrols and performs other police functions.

The chief is hired by the municipality's elected officials and is accountable to them.

### Number of Police Departments

In 2003, there were 1,124 municipal police departments in Pennsylvania, according to the GCLGS. These departments provide policing services to 53 percent of the state's municipalities, or 80 percent of the state's population. Forty-seven percent of the state's municipalities, or 20 percent of the state's population, rely exclusively on the Pennsylvania State Police for law enforcement services.

According to GCLGS data, between 1998 and 2003, there was a slight decline in the number of municipal police departments; seven departments were disbanded.

According to the most current data from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2000, there were 12,666 local police departments in the U.S. Between 1996 and 2000, the number of local police departments in the U.S. increased by 2 percent.

### Types of Police Departments

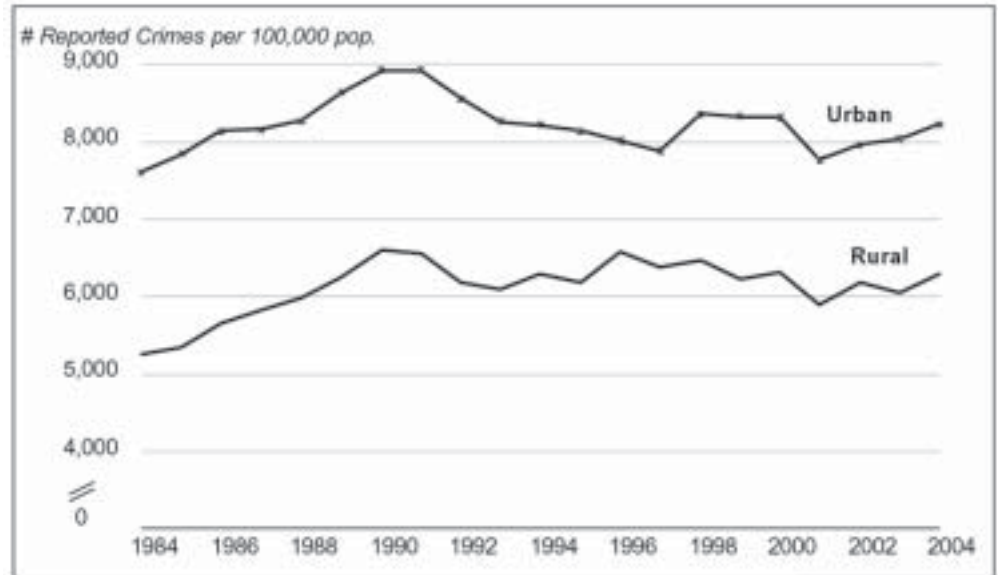
In Pennsylvania, municipal police departments typically provide services to residents in one of three ways. In the most traditional method, the municipality creates its own police department and officers in the department provide services to residents. According to the GCLGS, 87 percent of the state's 1,124 departments are traditional. The second method

Figure 1: Types of Municipal Police Departments by Rural and Urban, 2005

	Municipalities In:		Total (n=2,564)
	Rural Counties (n=1,561)	Urban Counties (n=1,003)	
Traditional Departments (Departments serves only one municipality)	29.0%	59.9%	41.1%
Contracted Departments (Services purchased from another municipality)	5.0%	8.5%	6.4%
Regional Departments (Multi-municipal departments)	3.3%	5.7%	4.2%
No Municipal Police Department (Municipality relies exclusively on State Police)	62.7%	25.9%	48.3%

is through contract agreements between two or more municipalities. In this instance, a municipality will pay another municipality's police department to patrol its streets and provide police services. Approximately 11 percent of departments provide services through contract agreements. The third method is through the establishment of a regional police department: this is where two or more municipalities come together to form a single police department that has jurisdiction over each of the municipalities. Less than 3 percent of Pennsylvania's municipal departments are regional.

**Figure 2: Total Number of Reported Crimes per 100,000 Residents, 1984 to 2004**



Data source: Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Report, Pennsylvania State Police

### Data Limitations

Although a scientific method was used to gather the data presented here, the results may have been affected by the following conditions:

**Mailing List Errors:** While the Governor's Center for Local Government Services' List of Municipal Officials is regularly updated, a lag may exist between the time municipalities notify the GCLGS of the change in police chiefs and the time when changes are made to the list. Similarly, the complexity of local policing arrangements may have resulted in some chiefs being double counted or excluded from the list.

**Police Chiefs in Municipalities Over 10,000 Population:** Twenty-eight police chiefs reported that their service area had a population of more than 10,000 residents. Twenty-one of these chiefs said they provide service to two or more municipalities. These respondents were kept in the database since the individual municipalities served had less than 10,000 residents. Only five of the 28 chiefs reported serving one municipality with a population greater than 10,000. The responses of these chiefs were also kept in the database because, in most cases, the chiefs may have over-estimated their municipality's population when compared to U.S. Census data. Two of the chief's responses were eliminated from the database because they each served municipalities with more than 10,000 residents. It was unclear why these chiefs completed the survey since no survey was mailed to them.

### Crime

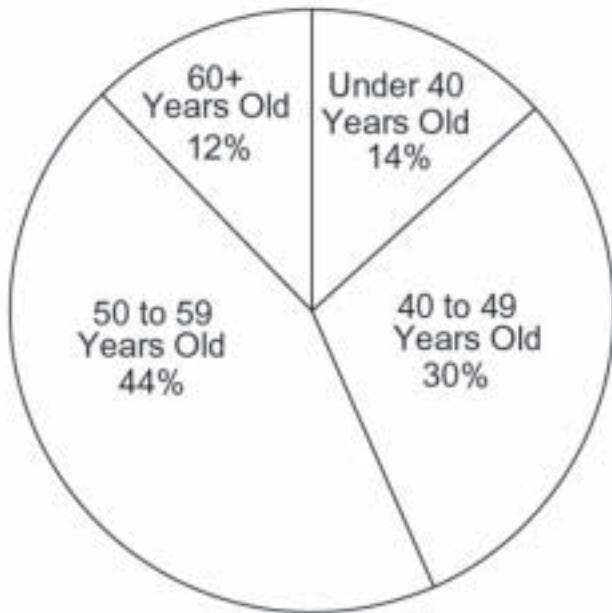
In 2004, according to the Pennsylvania State Police Uniform Crime Report, both municipal and State Police responded to nearly 952,000 reported crimes. Twenty-three percent of the crimes were in rural counties and 77 percent were in urban counties. On a per capita basis, rural counties had 6,294 reported incidents per 100,000 residents while urban counties had 8,231 per 100,000 residents. As Figure 2 shows, the number of reported crimes in rural and urban counties has declined since the early 1990s. The most significant decline has been in more serious crimes, such as rape, murder, and robbery. From the peak of 1991 to 2004, rural counties have seen a 15 percent decline and urban counties have seen a 22 percent decline in serious crimes.

### Survey Methodology

In April 2005, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania mailed a six-page survey to all 634 police chiefs in municipalities with less than 10,000 residents. By the end of June, 331 surveys were returned, for a response rate of 52 percent. The confidence interval, or margin of error, was plus or minus 3.7. This means that we are 95 percent confident the results are within 3.7 percentage points of what all Pennsylvania small-town police chiefs would have answered.

The names and addresses of the police chiefs came from the Governor's Center for Local Government Services' List of Municipal Officials. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania organized the names and addresses to include only those who serve in municipalities with less than 10,000 residents. From this list, 39 police chiefs that represented more than one municipality were identified and only one survey was sent to each of these chiefs.

**Figure 3: Age of Pennsylvania Rural and Small-Town Police Chiefs, 2005 (n=317)**



Police chiefs in municipalities with less than 10,000 residents were selected because the Center wanted to determine whether issues faced by these chiefs are different from those in larger municipalities since other statistical data show significant demographic and socio-economic differences between municipalities with less than 10,000 residents and those with more than 10,000 residents. Some of these differences include race, income, age distribution and per capita police expenditures.

The location of the police department in which the chief served was defined as either rural or urban, according to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's county definition. A department was considered rural if it was located in a county where the population density was below the statewide average of 274 persons per square mile. All other departments were classified as urban.

## Findings

### Characteristics of Police Chiefs

In 2005, the typical small-town police chief was a 50-year-old male who had been a police officer for 22 years and a chief for 10 years.

While 74 percent of chiefs were between 40 and 59 years old, 14 percent were under 40 years old and 12 percent were 60 years old and older. Statistically, there was no significant relationship between the age of the chief and the number of police officers and the number of persons in the municipality.

Less than 1 percent of Pennsylvania small-

town police chiefs are female. Nationally, a 2002 report by the *National Center for Women and Policing* found that females held 3 percent of the top command positions in small-town police agencies.

The average police chief has been chief for 10 years. Eight percent were chiefs in other departments before coming to their current department. There was no significant difference between the size of the community and the number of years of experience the chief had.

Twenty-eight percent of police chiefs had a bachelor's degree or higher. In general, the more education the chief had, the bigger the department's budget and staff.

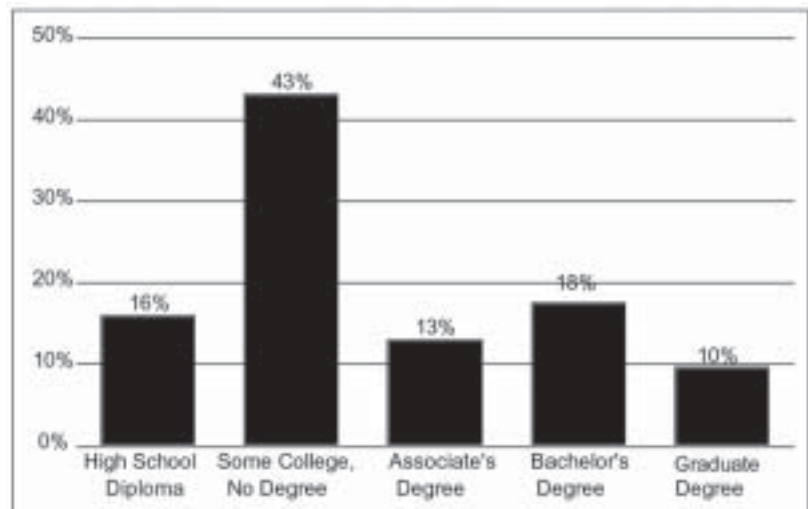
The two strongest predictors of the police chief's salary were the department's operating budget and the chief's level of educational attainment. (See Figure 5 on Page 4) Chiefs in departments with budgets over \$900,000 earned twice that of chiefs in departments with budgets under \$200,000. Similarly, chiefs with a bachelor's degree or higher had a higher salary, on average, than those with only a high school diploma.

### Characteristics of Police Departments

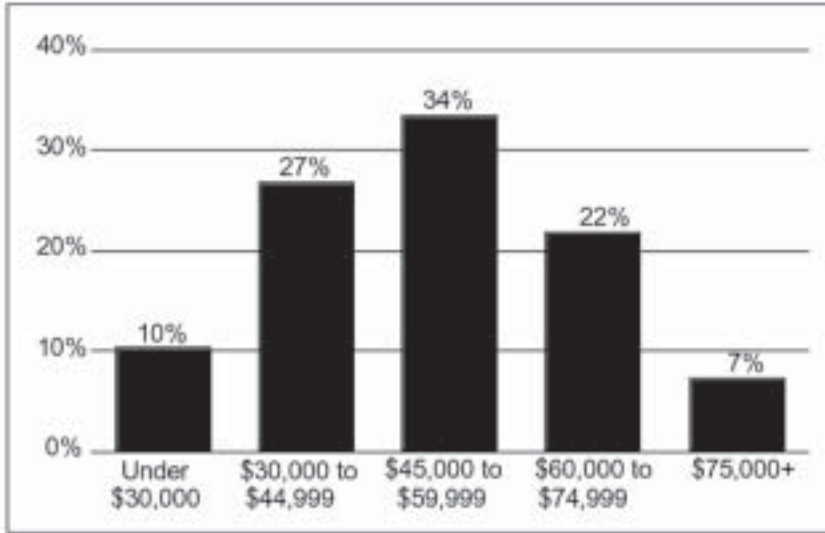
In 2004, the average police department had an operating budget of \$607,000. Not surprisingly, budgets and population were closely correlated: the larger the population, the larger the budget. Regionally, there were no significant differences in operating budgets; there was, however, a difference between departments located in rural and urban counties. Departments in rural counties had an average budget of \$364,600 or \$69 per person, while departments in urban counties had an average budget of \$751,600, or \$111 per person.

Seventy percent of the chiefs said their departments provide police services, or coverage, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The amount of coverage a department provides

**Figure 4 : Highest Level of Educational Attainment for Police Chiefs (n=328)**



**Figure 5: Police Chiefs Annual Salary (n=328)**



is correlated with its budget, number of officers, and the population of the community. Rural departments provided an average of 130 hours of coverage during a typical week or about 19 hours per day. Urban departments provided an average of 154 hours of coverage, or 22 hours per day.

**Police Department Staffing**

The average police department has seven full-time officers and five part-time officers. Hidden in these averages, however, are the departments that rely exclusively on part-time officers (5 percent) and those that have no part-time officers (24 percent). Police departments in smaller communities are more likely to depend on part-time officers, while departments in larger communities are more likely to use full-time officers.

**Figure 6: Average Number Full- and Part-Time Officers and Percent with Non-Uniformed Staff**

	Avg. # Full-Time Officers*	Avg. # Part-Time Officers*	% With Clerical & Other Staff
Rural	5.3 Officers (n=122)	4.2 Officers (n=103)	43.2% (n=57)
Urban	7.9 Officers (n=189)	5.6 Officers (n=146)	65.0% (n=128)
Total	6.9 Officers (n=311)	5.0 Officers (n=249)	56.0% (n=185)

\* Includes the police chief

**Figure 7: Starting Salary for Small-Town Police Officer**

	Average Annual Full-Time Starting Salary	Average Hourly Part-Time Starting Salary
Rural	\$30,393 (n=107)	\$10.96 (n=102)
Urban	\$39,280 (n=179)	\$12.99 (n=142)
Average	\$35,956 (n=283)	\$12.14 (n=244)

Per capita, there was a slight, but statistically significant, difference between the number of full-time officers in rural and urban small-town police departments. Rural departments had 1.0 full-time officers per 1,000 residents, while urban departments had 1.2 full-time officers per 1,000 residents. There was, however, no difference between rural and urban small-town departments in the number of part-time officers per capita; both had about 0.6 officers for every 1,000 residents.

Thirty-two percent of the departments reported having female police officers. These officers were typically found in larger departments located in urban counties. These departments had an average of one female officer.

According to the survey, 96 percent of the police departments required officers to attend 16 or more hours of training each year. Generally, the larger the department the more training required. While most of the training was done in-house (57 percent), 47 percent of the departments received training at the Pennsylvania State Police Training Academy.

Between 2003 and 2005, 59 percent of small-town police departments had no net change in full-time officers. Among departments with a net change in full-time officers, 61 percent had a net gain and 39 percent had a net loss. Those with a net gain had an average increase of two new officers. These departments were typically larger, located in urban counties, and offered an average starting salary of \$38,300, or \$2,300 more than the statewide average. The opposite was true for departments with a net loss of full-time officers. These departments were smaller, generally located in rural counties, and offered an average starting salary of \$35,100, or about \$800 below the statewide average. In these departments, the average net loss was two officers.

For full-time officers, the average starting salary, after the probationary period, was nearly \$36,000 per year. For part-time officers, the average wage was \$12.14 per hour. Starting salaries were significantly correlated with police budgets; the larger the budget, the higher the starting salary. In addition, departments with civil service commissions and collective bargaining unions or associations had higher starting salaries than those without.

Small-town departments located in rural counties had lower starting salaries than those in urban counties.

In an opinion question, the chiefs were nearly evenly divided on whether the current pay rate was high enough to attract new officers. Thirty-nine percent of the chiefs believed that their current pay rate was not high enough to attract new officers, while 35 percent thought it was. Twenty-six percent expressed a neutral opinion on the matter. Among those who believed the current pay rate was not high enough, the average starting salary was \$30,160. These departments were generally located in rural western Pennsylvania and had budgets under \$500,000. In addition, between 2003 and 2005, these departments had a net loss of full-time officers and a net gain of part-time officers. In departments where chiefs believed the current rate was high enough to attract new officers, the average starting salary was \$41,000. These departments had a net increase in both full- and part-time officers.

In another opinion question, 24 percent of police chiefs agreed that their department was adequately staffed, 44 percent disagreed, and 32 percent were neutral on the issue. Among those who agreed that their department was adequately staffed, there was an average of eight full-time officers and six part-time officers. These departments also had an average budget of \$715,000. The chiefs who did not believe that their department was adequately staffed had an average of six full-time officers, five part-time officers, and a budget of less than \$472,000. Regardless of the adequacy of staff size, more than 70 percent of the chiefs believed that morale in their department was good.

Forty-eight percent of small-town police chiefs said a civil service commission oversaw the process of hiring police officers. These respondents were typically located in urban counties and had an average of eight full-time and six part-time officers. The average operating budget among these departments was \$710,000. Departments without a civil service commission overseeing the hiring process had an average of six full-time and four part-time officers. The average operating budget for these departments was \$485,000.

Collective bargaining unions or associations represented the officers in 80 percent of the small-town departments. In general, departments without bargaining units were located in rural counties. They had smaller budgets and fewer officers than departments with bargaining units.

The number of employee benefits was largely dependent on the police department's budget: the larger the budget, the more benefits officers received.

Eighteen percent of the chiefs said that between 2003 and

**Figure 8: Percent of Small-Town Police Departments Providing Employee Benefits**

	Rural (n=126)	Urban (n=193)
Health insurance	95.2%	94.8%
Life insurance	81.7%	94.8%
Clothing allowance	86.5%	83.4%
Prescription coverage	79.4%	85.0%
Dental insurance	65.1%	84.5%
Vision insurance	63.5%	80.3%
Longevity pay	46.8%	78.2%
Long-term disability insurance	48.4%	61.7%
Killed-in-service insurance (KIS)	50.0%	50.3%
Uniform cleaning	24.6%	50.8%
Higher education incentive	11.9%	40.9%
Shift differentials	20.6%	35.2%
Fitness club membership	3.2%	5.7%
Other benefits	4.0%	4.1%

Column totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses

2005, elected officials in the municipalities they served discussed significantly increasing the number of uniformed officers. Geographically, these municipalities were located in urban counties of eastern Pennsylvania. The small-town departments in these municipalities had larger budgets (over \$725,000) and more full-time officers (eight) than the average small-town police department.

Sixteen percent of the chiefs said that between 2003 and 2005, their elected officials were discussing a significant decrease in the number of officers. There was no geographical pattern to the location of these municipalities. However, the departments in these municipalities typically had smaller budgets (under \$484,000) and more part-time than full-time officers.

### Technology and Equipment

Ninety-nine percent of small-town police department had computers. Most departments had five computers, the most current being installed after 2003. In addition, 95 percent of the departments had Internet access and most participated in some type of information network, such as the Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System (81 percent), the Pennsylvania Justice Network (JNET) (79 percent), and the Pennsylvania Police Pursuit Reporting System (64 percent).

The average police department had four police vehicles: the newest vehicle was a 2003 model. Forty-one percent had a laptop computer in at least one police vehicle.

Eighty-seven percent of the police departments provided body armor to all police officers. Among these departments, 80 percent required officers to wear the body armor while on duty.

**Figure 9: Services Provided by Rural and Urban Small-Town Police Departments**

<u>Percent of departments that provide the following services/programs</u>	<b>Rural (n=126)</b>	<b>Urban (n=192)</b>
Enforce municipal zoning ordinances	48.4%	33.3%
Enforce building or property maintenance codes	34.6%	18.8%
Provide truancy enforcement	31.5%	27.1%
Participate in anti-drug taskforce initiatives	81.0%	68.8%
Officer providing DARE instructions or similar anti-drug youth program	37.3%	52.3%

Column totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses

Thirty-four percent of the police departments had a trained bicycle patrol officer, 13 percent had a K-9 unit, and 41 percent had holding cells for prisoners. These departments were typically larger and located in urban counties.

In an opinion question, 46 percent of chiefs indicated that they did not have enough technology, 24 percent said they did, and 30 percent offered a neutral response.

### Police Services

Rural small-town police departments tend to provide more non-traditional law enforcement services, such as enforcement of zoning ordinances and property maintenance codes, than urban small-town departments. Rural small-town departments are less likely to have youth anti-drug programs, such as DARE, than urban small-town departments; however, rural departments are more likely to participate in anti-drug taskforce initiatives.

### Crime & Socio-Economic Issues

Among the top crime issues identified by all police chiefs were domestic violence, substance abuse, traffic violations and vandalism. Between rural and urban police chiefs, the top three issues varied slightly. While both rural and urban chiefs identified domestic violence and traffic violations as top concerns, they differed on the issues of substance abuse and vandalism.

Among the crime issues not identified as top concerns for police chiefs were violent crimes, noise violations, animal violations, and truancy/curfew violations. Each of these issues was identified by less than 4 percent of the chiefs as top concerns in their community.

Sixty-eight percent of chiefs said the number of criminal complaints in their community had increased between 2003 and 2005. Twenty-six percent said they were about the same and 6 percent said they declined. A higher percentage of

rural chiefs (74 percent) than urban chiefs (64 percent) said that the number of criminal complaints had increased.

The causes of crime can sometimes be traced to the socio-economic conditions within the community. The top three socio-economic issues identified by the chiefs were: lack of activities for youth (43 percent); needs of older residents (37 percent); and aging infrastructure (36 percent). There were, however, differences between chiefs in rural and urban small-town departments. Rural chiefs identified the lack of jobs and poor economic conditions as the top issues in their communities, while urban chiefs saw aging infrastructure as their top concern.

Among the socio-economic issues that were not identified as significant issues were: limited emergency services (fire/EMS, etc.), racism, and homelessness. Less than 3 percent of the chiefs identified these as significant issues in their communities.

### Regionalization

Seventy-five percent of the respondents said their department provided police services for just one municipality. Among the 25 percent that provided services to one or more municipalities, 66 percent did so through a contract-for-service agreement, 28 percent did so through a regional police force, and 6 percent did not specify.

Thirty-nine percent of chiefs said elected officials in their municipality had discussed creating a regional police force within the last two years, while 61 percent said regionalization had not been discussed. Statistically, there were no significant differences between those municipalities that had and had not discussed regionalization. (Both types of municipalities have an average of 5,600 residents, seven full-time officers, and five part-time officers. The average police budget for departments was \$570,000. In addition, there was no statistically significant regional pattern in

**Figure 10: Top Three Crime Issues Identified by Small-Town Police Chiefs**

<b>Rural (n=126)</b>		<b>Urban (n=193)</b>	
Substance abuse (dealing/use)	61.1%	Traffic violation	58.0%
Domestic violence	54.8%	Vandalism	51.8%
Traffic violation	44.4%	Domestic violence	50.8%

Column totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses

**Figure 11: Top Three Socio-Economic Issues Identified by Small-Town Police Chiefs**

Rural (n=126)		Urban (n=188)	
Lack of jobs/poor economic conditions	54.0%	Aging infrastructure	40.4%
Lack of youth activities	52.4%	Lack of youth activities	36.7%
Needs of older residents	41.3%	Needs of older residents	34.6%

Column totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses

municipalities considering regionalization, nor was there a significant difference between departments located in rural and urban counties.)

In response to an opinion question, 69 percent of the chiefs either disagreed with or were neutral to the idea that regionalization of police services was inevitable within the next 10 years. Thirty-one percent of chiefs, however, agreed that regionalization was inevitable. Statistically there was no significant difference in the characteristics of the departments among chiefs who had agreed or disagreed on the inevitability of regionalization.

**Community Policing & Relations with Other Law Enforcement Agencies**

Community policing is a collaborative effort between the police and the community that identifies problems of crime and disorder and involves all elements of the community in the search for solutions to the problems. Asked in an opinion question whether community policing is effective in their community, 63 of the chiefs agreed that it was effective, 29 percent were neutral, and 8 percent said it was

ineffective. In another opinion question, over 73 percent of the chiefs said they had a good working relationship with the Pennsylvania State Police, other police departments in their region, and their county district attorney and local magisterial district judge.

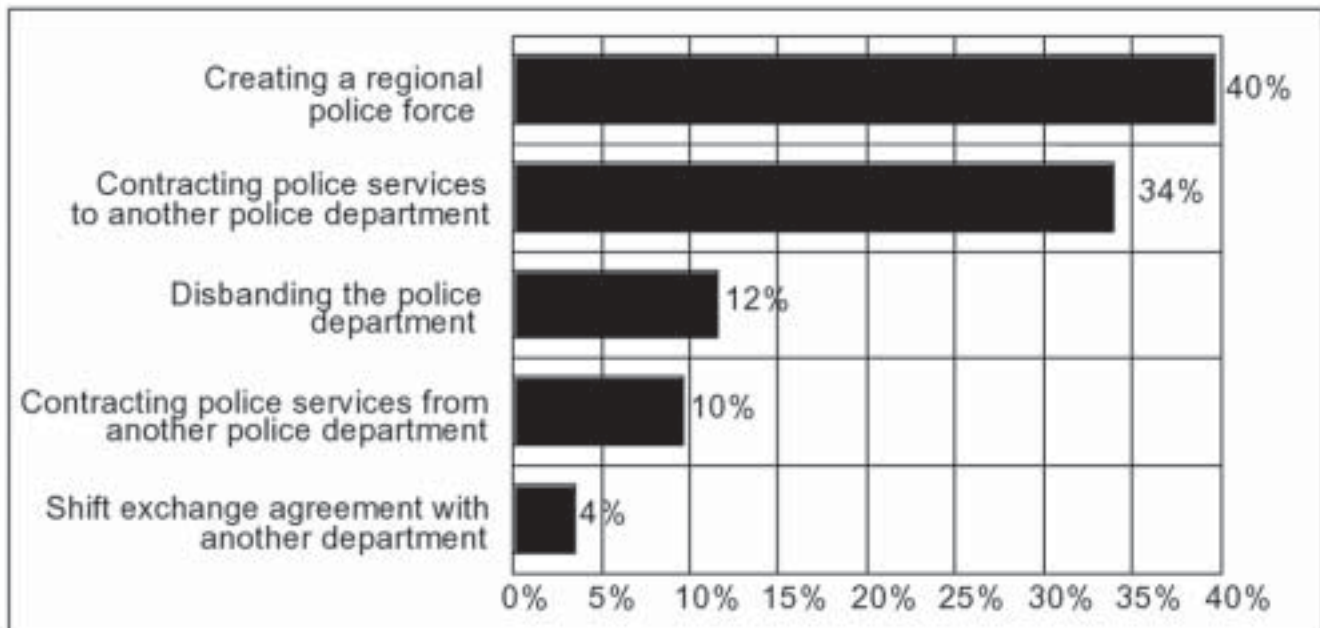
**Conclusion**

**Differences between rural and urban small-town police departments**

Compared to urban small-town police departments, rural small-town police departments had fewer officers and smaller operating budgets. In addition, rural chiefs were more likely to indicate that their department is inadequately staffed and cannot attract new officers or retain existing officers because current pay rates are too low.

U.S. Census Bureau data show that rural municipalities are less affluent than urban municipalities. As a result, the local tax base in rural areas may be insufficient to fully fund the police department. The majority of rural chiefs seem to recognize this economic reality; when asked to identify the

**Figure 12: Percent of Municipalities That Discussed Changing Their Police Department Between 2003 and 2005 (n=321)**



top socio-economic issues in their communities, 59 percent of the rural chiefs said a lack of jobs and poor economic conditions compared to 18 percent of the urban chiefs.

### **Most departments are a mix of full- and part-time officers**

Seventy-two percent of the police departments surveyed had both full- and part-time police officers. Among these departments, there was an average of six full-time officers and five part-time officers. Departments with a mix of full- and part-time officers provide, on average, more hours of police coverage than departments with only full-time officers.

### **Transition in police chiefs**

In 2005, the average police chief was 50 years old and had more than 22 years of police service. Over the next five to 10 years, it is likely that many chiefs will consider retirement. This transition may be especially troublesome for small departments that have had, on average, the same chief for the last 10 years.

### **Regionalization has lukewarm support**

According to the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, there are several advantages to regionalization of police departments. These include: uniformity and consistency of police enforcement, improved management and supervision, and reduction in cost. In 1995, there were 24 regional departments in Pennsylvania and in 2004 there were 32. While only three out of 10 chiefs agreed that regionalization was inevitable, four out of 10 municipalities had discussed regionalization within the past two years.

### **Relatively stable workforce**

Fifty-nine percent of the chiefs reported no personnel changes (hiring or terminations) among their full-time officers between 2003 and 2005, and 54 percent reported no change among their part-time officers. On the surface, this suggests that most departments have a relatively stable workforce. Among departments with staff changes, however, it does appear that some departments are replacing full-time officers with part-time officers. This is especially evident among rural departments where 11 percent had a decline in full-time officers and an increase in part-time officers.

### **Police Departments have access to technology**

Ninety-nine percent of respondents reported having a computer, and 95 percent reported having Internet access. While the survey did not measure how the departments are using technology, the results suggest that access to equipment or the Internet is not an issue for rural and urban or affluent and less affluent small-town police departments.

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The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy research within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

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