



## Half of Michigan local law enforcement agencies say they are underfunded, while most local governments are satisfied with their appropriations

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This report presents the views of Michigan's local government leaders, local chiefs of police, county sheriffs, and county prosecutors regarding funding for law enforcement agencies, including assessments of whether sheriff's offices and police departments receive the appropriate levels of funding, whether local officials would support pursuing new local millages or special assessments to fund law enforcement, and what each group's top priorities for potential new spending would be. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government and law enforcement leaders in the spring 2024 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), with some comparison to data collected on the fall 2015 MPPS wave.

The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is an ongoing census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted since 2009 by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP). Respondents for the Spring 2024 wave of the MPPS include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,307 local jurisdictions across the state, as well as responses from 54 county sheriffs, 234 chiefs of police or directors of public safety, and 55 county prosecutors.



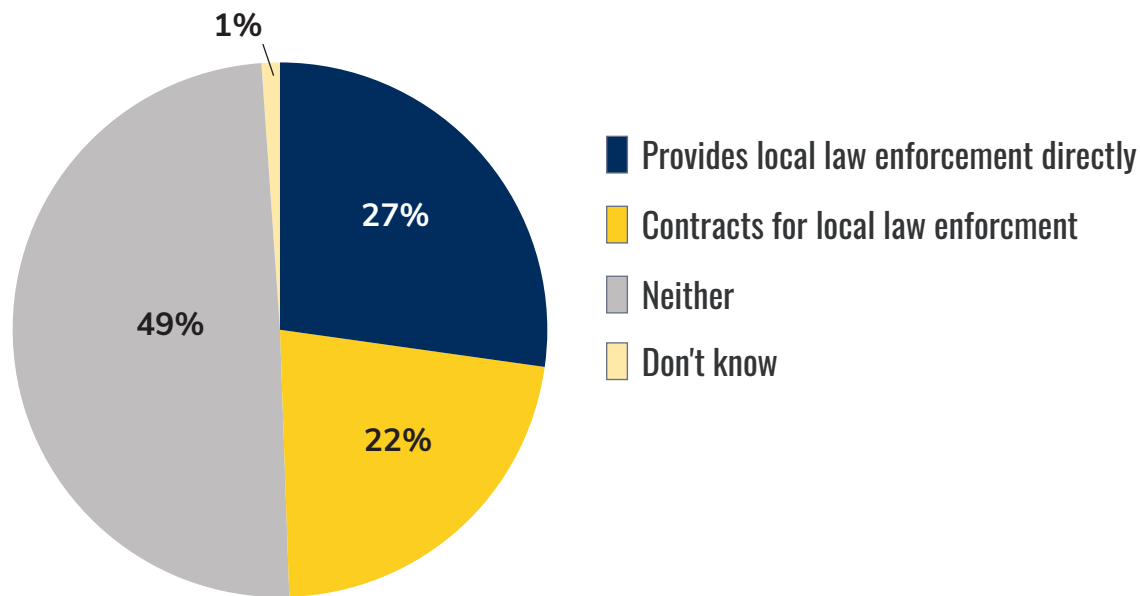
## Key Findings

- Statewide, 59% of county sheriffs and 45% of local chiefs of police say that the local governments they serve (counties, townships, cities, and villages) do not appropriate sufficient funding for their agencies.
  - » Law enforcement leaders in smaller agencies, agencies in the Upper Peninsula, and higher crime communities are most likely to say they are underfunded.
- By contrast, just 19% of local government officials whose governments fund police departments or sheriffs' offices believe they appropriate too little (including 21% of governments that directly fund law enforcement and 16% that have an indirect role, i.e., contracting for law enforcement services to be provided by a special authority/district, by another municipality, or through a contract with their county sheriff). Meanwhile, a large majority (66%) of local officials say they spend about the right amount, and 11% say they currently appropriate too much for law enforcement.
- Statewide, 44% of local officials would support pursuing new local funding for law enforcement through either a new millage or special assessment, while 27% would oppose pursuing new local funding.
- When it comes to top priorities for allocating potential new spending on law enforcement, sheriffs, chiefs, and local government leaders all rank recruitment and retention efforts as among their highest priorities. However, sheriffs (71%) and police chiefs (68%) are significantly more likely to say increasing pay or benefits for current officers would be a "very high" priority, compared with 36% of local officials.

## Approximately half of Michigan local governments directly or indirectly fund sheriff's offices and police departments

Local law enforcement services in Michigan are generally provided through a combination of state police, county sheriffs, and local police departments. All 83 Michigan county governments fund their own sheriff's office. Meanwhile, just over one quarter (27%) of all cities, townships, and villages report that they are directly involved in providing law enforcement services. This includes running their own police departments and/or participating in a joint police department with another jurisdiction (see *Figure 1*). Another 22% of local governments say they have an indirect role, contracting for law enforcement services to be provided by a special authority or district, by another municipality, or through a contract with their county sheriff. Finally, just under half of Michigan local governments (49%) report they have no real role in law enforcement, and they simply rely on the county sheriff or state police to respond when there is a public safety issue. These percentages are essentially unchanged from those reported on the Fall 2015 wave of the MPPS.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1**  
Percentage of cities, villages, and townships reporting how local law enforcement services are provided

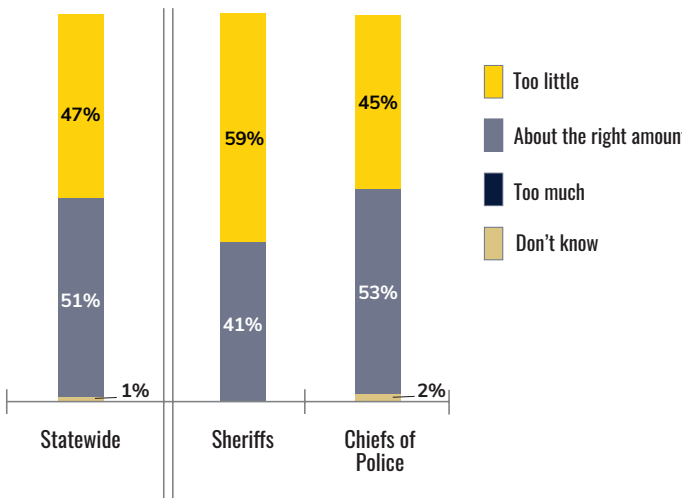


# County sheriffs and smaller law enforcement agencies more likely to express funding concerns

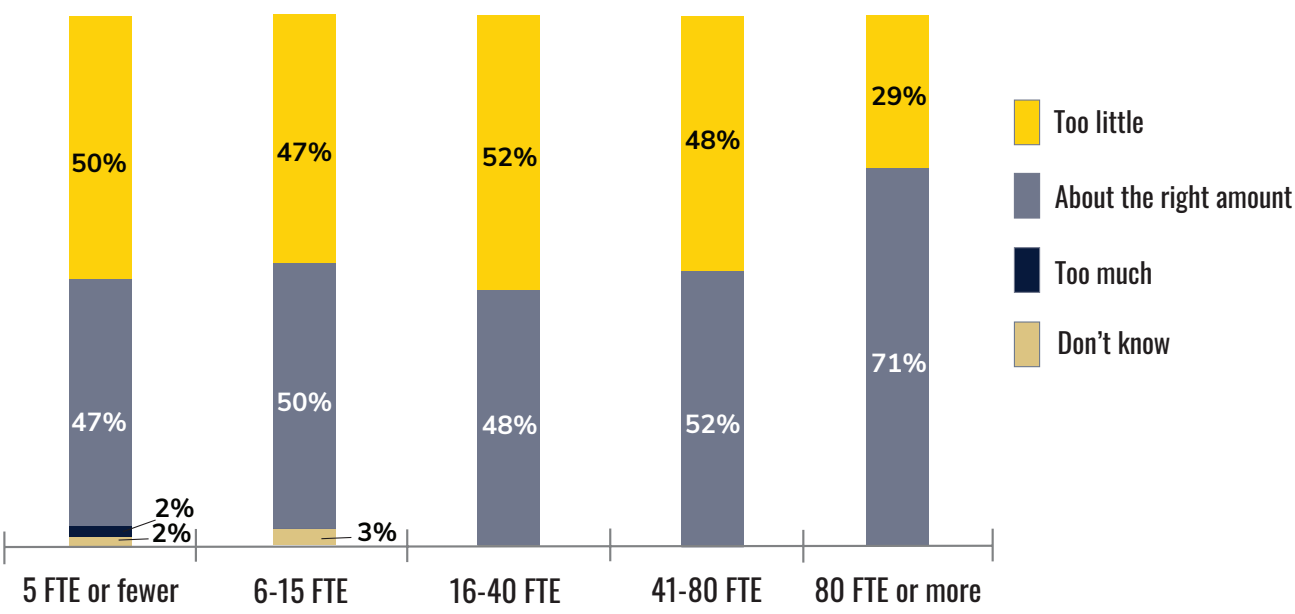
Statewide, almost half (47%) of Michigan chiefs of police and county sheriffs say the local governments (counties, townships, cities, and villages) they serve do not appropriate sufficient funding for their agencies. As shown in *Figure 2a*, 59% of county sheriffs say the county government appropriates too little to meet their office’s needs, while 41% say it appropriates about the right amount. Among local chiefs of police, 45% say the local governments they serve do not appropriate enough money, while 53% say they appropriate about the right amount. Unsurprisingly, almost no local law enforcement agencies say they are provided with too much money.

Concerns over law enforcement funding appear to be less of an issue among the largest agencies. As shown in *Figure 2b*, 29% of chiefs and sheriffs leading agencies with more than 80 full-time employees (FTE)—representing approximately 51 agencies statewide—say that the county and local governments they serve appropriate too little, compared to 47%-52% among smaller agencies.

**Figure 2a**  
Law enforcement agency leaders' assessments of appropriations for their department or office, by public office

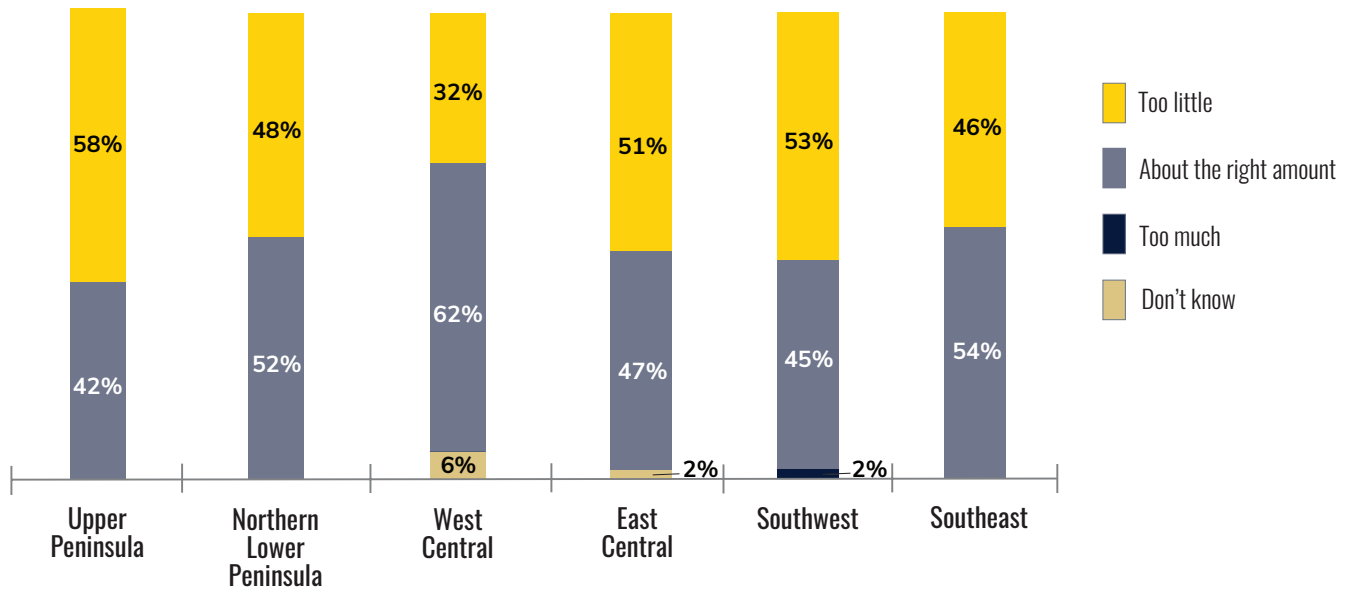


**Figure 2b**  
Law enforcement agency leaders' assessments of appropriations for their department or office, by agency size



As shown in *Figure 2c*, there is significant regional variation in law enforcement leaders' assessments of appropriations to their agency. Police departments and sheriff's offices in the Upper Peninsula are the most likely to say that county and local governments do not appropriate enough for their agency (58%), while those in the West Central Lower Peninsula are the most likely to say that appropriations are about the right amount (62%).

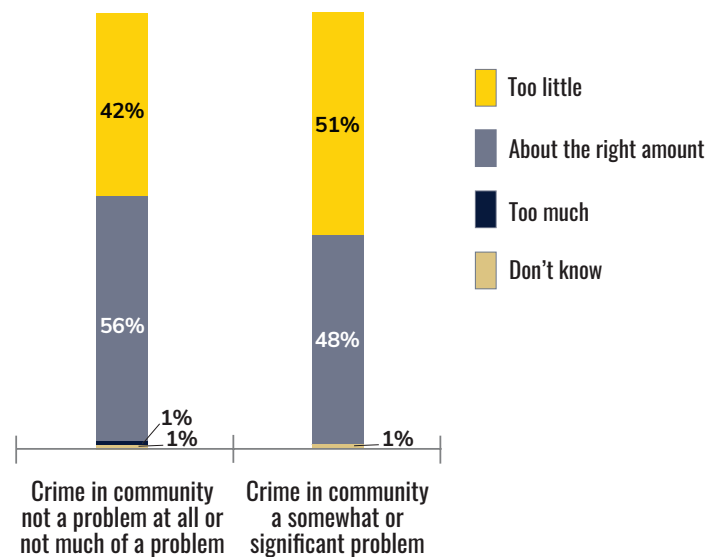
**Figure 2c**  
Law enforcement agency leaders' assessments of appropriations for their department or office, by region of the state



The MPPS also asks respondents whether they consider their jurisdictions to be rural, mostly rural, mostly urban, or urban. More than half of sheriffs and police in communities described as urban (53%) or most rural (53%) say they receive too little funding. Meanwhile, those sheriffs and chiefs who describe their community as mostly urban are significantly more likely to say they are funded the right amount (69%).

When asked to assess local levels of crime, statewide, 62% of law enforcement leaders report that overall crime in the jurisdictions they serve is either “somewhat of a problem” (63% of county sheriffs and 49% of police chiefs) or “a significant problem” (23% of county sheriffs and 9% of police chiefs). However, assessments of funding are only loosely tied to these perceived levels of crime. Among leaders who are concerned about crime levels, 51% believe their agency receives too little funding, compared with 42% of leaders from communities where they say crime is “not much of a problem” or “not a problem at all” (see *Figure 2d*).

**Figure 2d**  
Law enforcement agency leaders' assessments of appropriations for their department or office, by assessments of overall local levels of crime

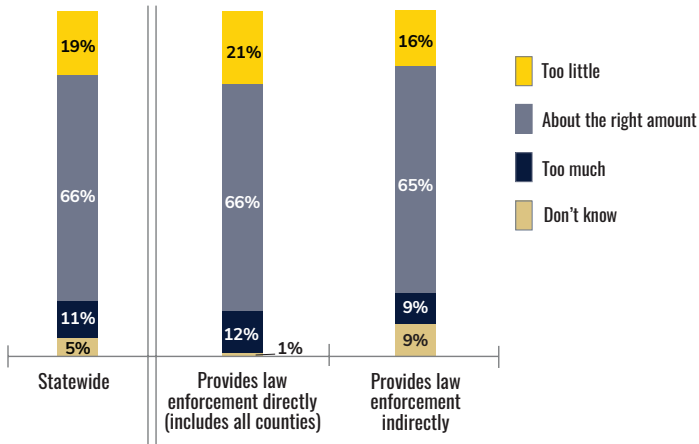


# Most local governments believe they appropriate the right amount for law enforcement

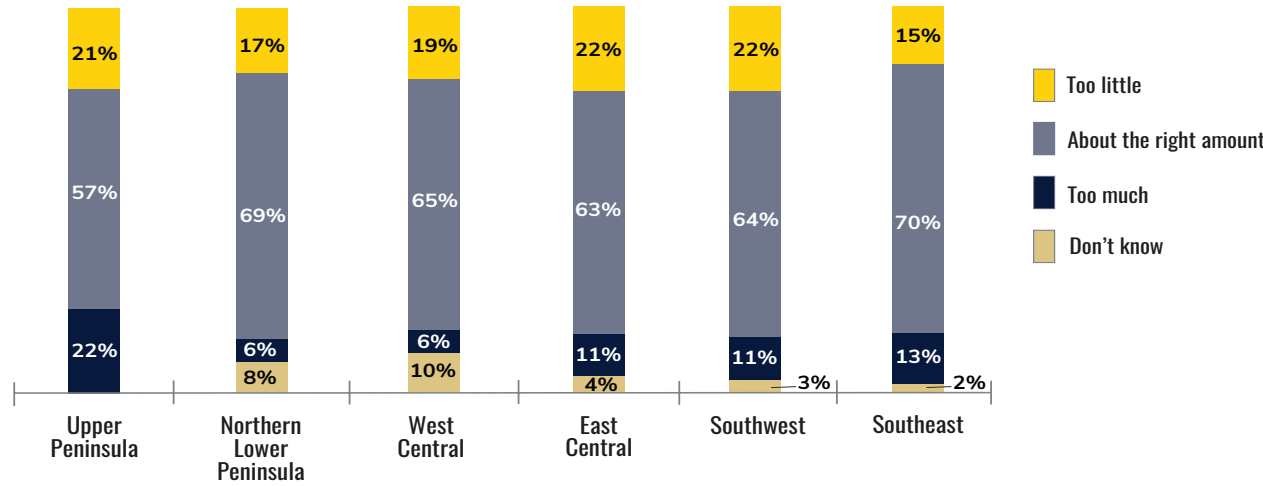
Among the half of Michigan local governments that are either directly or indirectly involved with the provision of law enforcement services in their jurisdiction (i.e., those that appropriate funding), two-thirds (66%) say they appropriate about the right amount for law enforcement, while 19% say they appropriate too little, and 11% say they appropriate too much (see *Figure 3a*). Notably, among jurisdictions that currently are not spending money on law enforcement services (not shown), 18% think their jurisdiction should start spending money (i.e., they currently appropriate “too little” funding).

When looking by region, local officials from the Upper Peninsula (57%) are least likely to say their jurisdiction is appropriating the right amount for the law enforcement services they fund (see *Figure 3b*). Around one in five (21%) of U.P. leaders believe they are spending too little, but 22% say they are spending *too much*, significantly higher than officials from any other region. Local officials from the Northern Lower Peninsula (69%) and Southeast Michigan (70%) are the most likely to believe they are funding law enforcement at the correct level.

**Figure 3a**  
Local officials' assessments of whether their jurisdiction appropriates sufficient funding to meet current law enforcement needs (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly) by service provision method



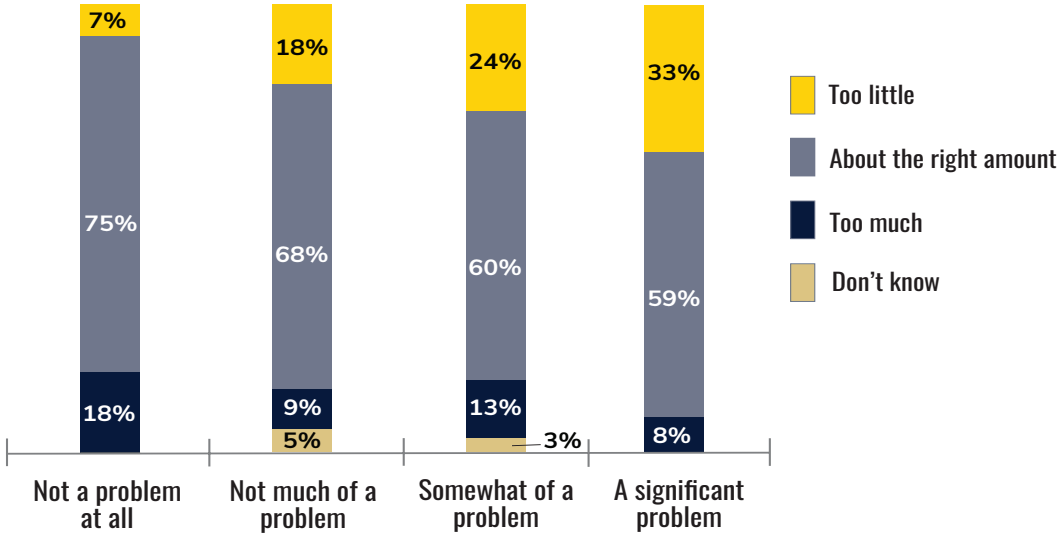
**Figure 3b**  
Local officials' assessments of whether their jurisdiction appropriates sufficient funding to meet current law enforcement needs (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), by region



Local leaders are less likely than law enforcement to see crime in their jurisdiction as a problem. For example, while 58% of police chiefs statewide say crime is either somewhat or a significant problem in their jurisdiction, only around 30% of city, village, or township officials statewide say the same. County assessments are slightly closer, with 86% of sheriffs saying crime is a somewhat or a significant problem in their county and 70% of county officials agree.

Nevertheless, local officials are generally sensitive to the need for more law enforcement funding as perceptions of crime rise. Among officials who say crime is not a local problem at all, 7% say they appropriate too little, compared to 18% in jurisdictions that say it is not much of a problem, 24% in jurisdictions that say it is somewhat of a problem, and 33% in jurisdictions that say crime is a significant problem (see *Figure 3c*). That said, across all levels of perceived crime, over a majority of local officials believe they spend “about the right amount.” Even in places where the local leader believes crime is “a significant problem,” more than half (59%) say their government appropriates about the right amount for policing, and 8% think they’re paying too much.

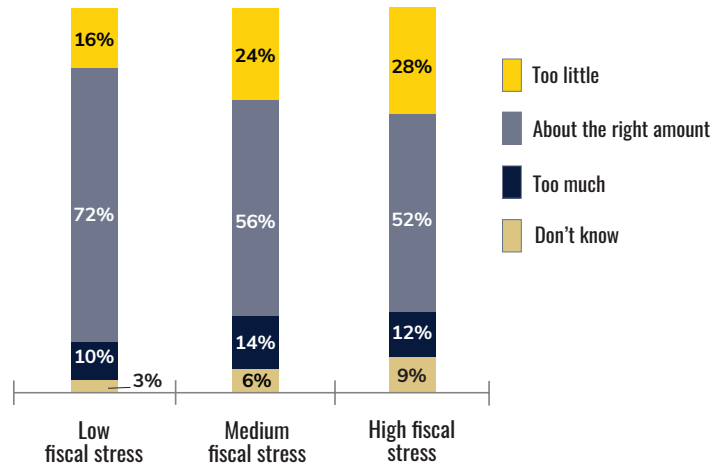
**Figure 3c**  
Local officials’ assessments of whether their jurisdiction appropriates sufficient funding to meet current law enforcement needs (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), by assessments of overall local levels of crime



A government’s lack of financial resources does not necessarily explain their reluctance to spend more on law enforcement. Indeed, jurisdictions experiencing medium or high levels of fiscal stress are more likely to say they appropriate too little funding for their primary law enforcement agency. As shown in *Figure 3d*, among jurisdictions reporting low fiscal stress, 72% say they appropriate the right amount, while 10% say they appropriate too much, and 16% say they appropriate too little. However, among jurisdictions experiencing medium levels of fiscal stress, 14% say they appropriate too much, and 24% say they appropriate too little. In jurisdictions experiencing high levels of fiscal stress, 12% say they appropriate too much, while 28% say they appropriate too little.

Prior MPPS surveys have consistently shown increasing public safety needs for jurisdictions across the state, but local officials have also reported that local government spending often fails to keep up with those growing needs.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 3d**  
Local officials’ assessments of whether their jurisdiction appropriates sufficient funding to meet current law enforcement needs (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), by self-reported fiscal stress



## Gap in perceptions on funding also exists between county prosecutors and county government leaders

The 2024 MPPS also asked the state’s 83 county prosecutors about funding for their office. Among prosecutors, 88% say too little funding is appropriated to their office and 12% say about the right amount.

Sheriffs and police chiefs generally agree, with 40% of sheriffs and 49% of police chiefs saying their county’s prosecutor’s office receives too little funding (however, note that nearly a quarter of both groups indicate they don’t know if their prosecutor’s office is underfunded or not).

In contrast to these assessments, just 22% of county leaders (board chairs and administrators) believe their county currently appropriates too little funding for their prosecutor’s office, 63% say they allocate about the right amount, and 15% of counties believe they appropriate too much for their prosecutor’s office.

# Most local governments leaders support pursuing new local funding for law enforcement

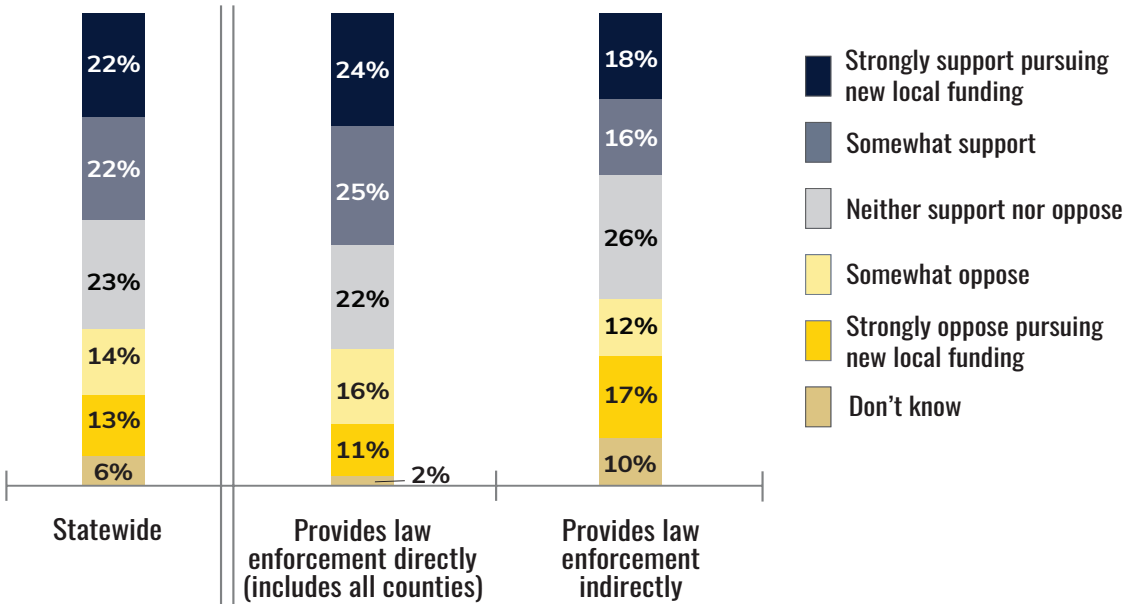
Even though most local leaders say they’re currently funding their law enforcement agencies at appropriate levels, they also tend to be open to seeking new local funding. In 2024, among jurisdictions involved in providing local law enforcement services, 44% of officials would either somewhat (22%) or strongly (22%) support pursuing new local funding for law enforcement through either a new millage or special assessment, while 27% would oppose pursuing new local funding (see *Figure 4*).

Nearly half (49%) of local officials in jurisdictions that provide law enforcement services directly would support a new local millage or special assessment for law enforcement (49%). Opinions among jurisdictions that simply contract for law enforcement services are more mixed, with 34% supporting pursuit of new local funding for law enforcement, but 29% saying they would oppose it.

Currently, support for pursuing new local millages or special assessments is highest in jurisdictions where leaders say they appropriate too little funding to law enforcement (68%), where local leaders report higher levels of problems due to crime (52%), and in communities experiencing medium (52%) or high (54%) levels of fiscal stress.

Compared with a similar MPPS survey question asked in 2015 where 32% reported that they “neither support nor oppose” pursuing new funding,<sup>3</sup> statewide, local officials have moved away from neutral opinions, with some increase in opposition to pursuing new local funds, but also a slight increase in support in 2024.

**Figure 4**  
Local officials’ support for or opposition to pursuing additional local funding for law enforcement services (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly) by service provision method

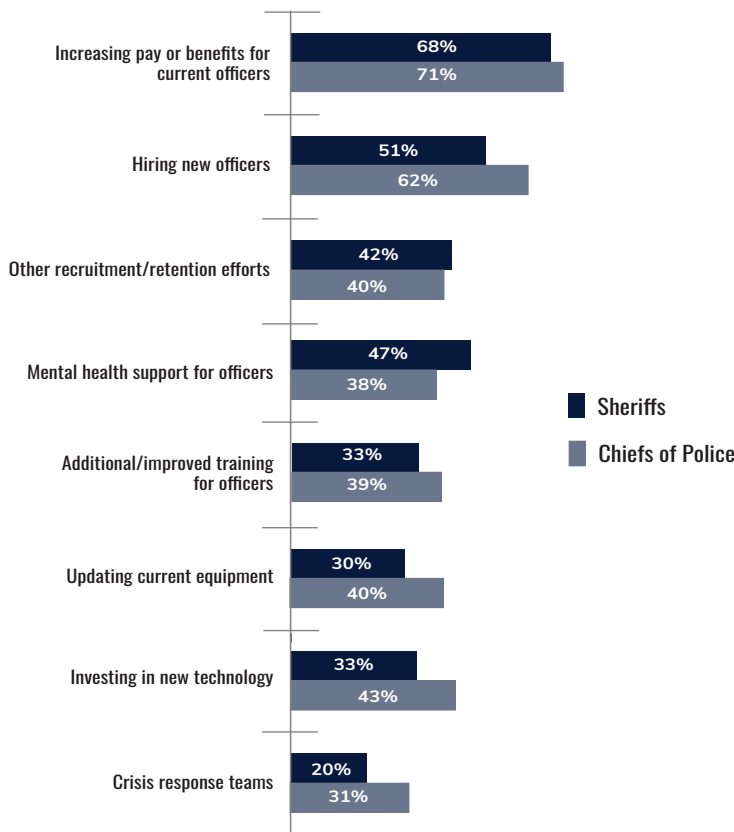




# Sheriffs and police chiefs much more likely than local officials to say increasing pay and benefits for current officers is a top priority for new funding

Beyond appropriations from local governments or new local millages, another potential source of revenue for law enforcement agencies could be through state or federal funding opportunities. For example, in 2023, 27% of local governments said they planned to spend money from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) on public safety.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 5a**  
Percentage of law enforcement agency leaders who say issues are a “very high” priority for new spending, by public office



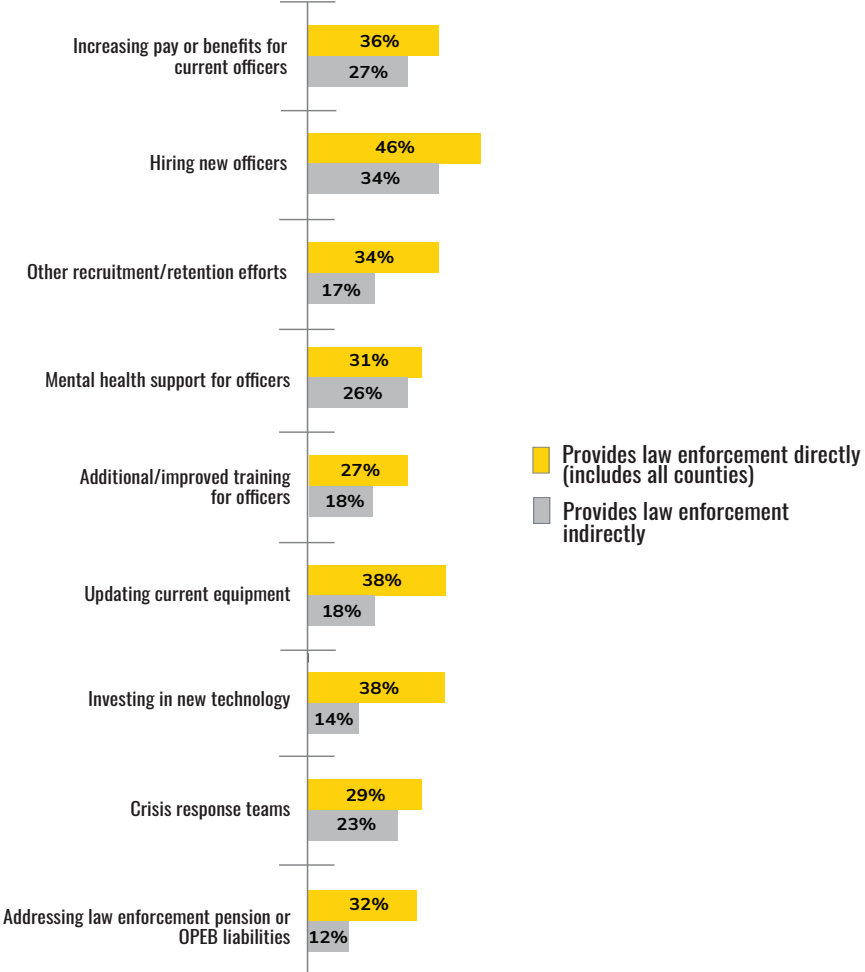
The Spring 2024 MPPS asked sheriffs, police chiefs, and local officials from governments that have a role in funding local law enforcement (directly or indirectly) what their priorities for allocating funds would be if new state or federal money became available to their jurisdiction.

If new funding became available, law enforcement leaders’ most common top priorities focus on recruitment and retention efforts, unsurprising given the widespread personnel challenges facing local law enforcement agencies.<sup>5</sup>

Statewide, approximately 70% of sheriffs and chiefs of police say increasing pay or benefits for current officers would be a “very high” priority if additional funding was available (see *Figure 5a*). Furthermore, 62% of police chiefs and 51% of sheriffs say hiring new officers would be a very high priority. Beyond recruitment and retention, sheriffs most often cited mental health support for officers as a very high priority (47%), while police chiefs were more likely to say that investing in new technology (43%) and updating current equipment (40%) was a very high priority.

Among local government officials, although the order of their priorities is similar, they are less likely to say various items are a very high priority. For example, while 68-71% of law enforcement officials consider increasing pay or benefits for current officers a top priority, only 36% of local government officials funding services directly and 27% of local officials funding services indirectly say it is a top priority (see *Figure 5b*). It's important to note that a high percentage of local government officials indicate uncertainty about these priorities, though, particularly among local governments that provide services indirectly. In places that contract for law enforcement, 20-30% of local officials choose “don't know” for each priority on the survey (not shown).

**Figure 5b**  
 Percentage of local officials who say issue is a “very high” priority for new spending (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly) by service provision method



## Conclusion

Among Michigan law enforcement agency leaders, concerns about funding levels are widespread. Almost half (47%) of Michigan chiefs of police and county sheriffs say the local governments (counties, townships, cities, and villages) they serve do not appropriate sufficient funding for their agencies. However, these concerns are not always shared by local leaders from the general-purpose local governments contributing funding, where only one in five (19%) say they appropriate too little and a majority (66%) say they appropriate about the right amount. Nevertheless, local leaders tend to be open to seeking new community funding through a new millage or special assessment.

When asked about prioritizing spending for potential funding increases from federal or state grants, law enforcement leaders have many priorities, but spending related to employee recruitment and retention are widely considered a top priority. Local officials generally share these priorities, but some are also more uncertain about the urgency of needs identified by law enforcement leaders.

## Notes

1. Horner, D. and Ivacko, T. (2016, April). *Most local officials are satisfied with law enforcement services, but almost half from largest jurisdictions say their funding is insufficient*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/52/most-local-officials-are-satisfied-with-law-enforcement-services-but-almost-half-from-largest-jurisdictions-say-their-funding-is-insufficient>
2. Horner, D. and Ivacko, T. (2021, December). *Michigan local government officials report improved fiscal health after a year of COVID-19, but not yet back to pre-pandemic levels*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/96/michigan-local-government-officials-report-improved-fiscal-health-after-year-covid-19>
3. Horner, D. and Ivacko, T. (2016, April).
4. Horner, D., Fitzpatrick, N. and Ivacko, T. (2023, June). *Challenges for Michigan local governments with ARPA spending continue, particularly in project costs and procurement*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/114/mpps-policy-brief-challenges-michigan-local-governments-arpa-spending-continue-particularly-in-project-costs-and-procurement>
5. Fitzpatrick, N. and Horner, D. (2024, September). *Michigan local governments report increased challenges with law enforcement recruitment and retention*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/126/michigan-local-governments-report-increased-challenges-law-enforcement-recruitment-retention>

## Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS is an ongoing survey program, interviewing the leaders of Michigan’s 1,856 units of general-purpose local government, conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan in partnership with the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties. Surveys are conducted each spring (and prior to 2018, were also conducted each fall). The program has covered a wide range of policy topics and includes longitudinal tracking data on “core” fiscal, budgetary and operational policy questions and is designed to build up a multi-year time series.

In the Spring 2024 iteration, surveys were sent by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) via email and hardcopy to top elected and appointed officials (including county administrators and board chairs; city mayors and managers; village presidents, clerks, and managers; and township supervisors, clerks, and managers) from all 83 counties, 280 cities, 253 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan. In addition, surveys were sent to all 83 county sheriffs and county prosecutors, as well as 430 local police departments and public safety departments. More information is available at <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2024-spring>.

The Spring 2024 wave was conducted from April 1– June 10, 2024. A total of 1,307 local jurisdictions returned valid surveys (67 counties, 216 cities, 171 villages, and 853 townships), resulting in a 70% response rate by unit. A total of 343 law enforcement leaders returned valid surveys (54 sheriffs, 234 police chiefs, and 55 county prosecutors) for a 58% response rate across various agencies. Quantitative data are weighted to account for non-response. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations unless otherwise specified. Some report figures may not add to 100% due to rounding within response categories. “Voices Across Michigan” verbatim responses, when included, may have been edited for grammar and brevity.

See CLOSUP’s website for the full question text on the survey questionnaires. Detailed tables of the data in this report, including breakdowns by various jurisdiction characteristics such as community population size, region, and jurisdiction type, will be available at <http://mpps.umich.edu>.

## Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

*This material is based upon work supported by a grant from The Joyce Foundation. The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials, while further analysis represents the views of the authors. Neither necessarily reflects the views of The Joyce Foundation, the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS.*

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