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# **The Need for Increased Police Funding in Detroit**

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### The Need for Increased Police Funding in Detroit

Detroit, for all intents and purposes, used to be one of the most thriving cities in the United States. Following the end of World War Two, the auto industry in Detroit was one of the most promising the world. In 1950, Detroit was home to roughly 1.85 million people and employed 296,000 manufacturing jobs<sup>1</sup>. It was the fourth largest city in the country and seemed to have an infallible economy that was propelled by the Big Three auto companies: Ford, General Motors and Chrysler.

Ultimately, however, the auto-industry proved to be the false-promise and the downfall of Detroit. The reliance on a single industry to power the city's economy simply could not adjust to the globalization of the auto industry. Foreign competitive automobile companies caused profits to plummet. While other cities experienced their own ups and downs, they had diverse economies that could adjust to foreign competition; they did not put all of their economic eggs in one basket. The downfall of the Detroit economy sent a rippling effect to the city's public services, and one of the hardest hit was the Detroit Police Department.

As with the rest of the United States, high racial tensions have been a major factor in the history of Detroit. The tension started rising in the 1940s when Southern blacks began moving to Detroit to find jobs in the auto industry. The influx of a large black population in the city was mirrored by middle-class whites retreating to the newly built suburbs, and the 1967 riots acted as a catalyst in many ways. Around the time of the riots, the Detroit police were

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<sup>1</sup> Citation 11

“hated by large segments of the black community, and officers were viewed more as an occupying army than keepers of the peace”<sup>2</sup>. The riot in 1967 had a lot of racial undertones and a former police commissioner even warned, prior to the riots, that the relations between blacks and the police could incite a race riot. Following the riots, “Detroit failed to bounce back...businesses followed their customers. Thousands of houses were abandoned as the city’s population plunged<sup>3</sup>.” The racial divide has been ever-present and continues to perpetrate the divide of city from the suburbs today.

The state of Michigan as a whole had large economic turmoil during the “lost years” from 2000-2009. Detroit’s mayor for a large portion of this period was Kwame Kilpatrick, who served from 2001-2008. Kilpatrick drastically increased the city’s debt obligation and ended up resigning after a series of scandals that landed him 28 years in prison for fraud, extortion and racketeering. The stagnant economy decimated the quality of life in Detroit; large parts of the city are were total darkness because of broken street lights, student enrollment in Detroit’s public schools dropped from 164,496 in 2002 to 52,981 in 2012, and the unemployment rate hovered around 19 percent<sup>4</sup>. By 2010, the residential vacancy rate was at a dreadful 27.8 percent. Around 36 percent of Detroit’s population was below the poverty level and the average police response time was 58 minutes<sup>5</sup>. The graphs below illustrate the sharp drop-off

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<sup>2</sup> Citation 10

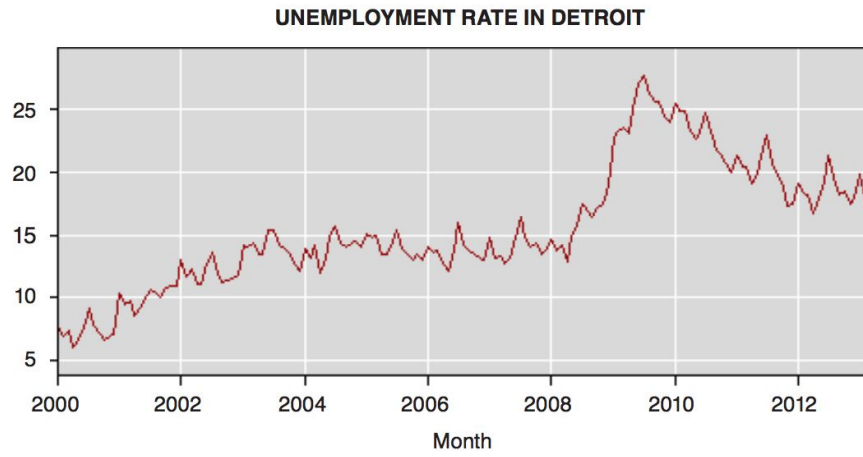
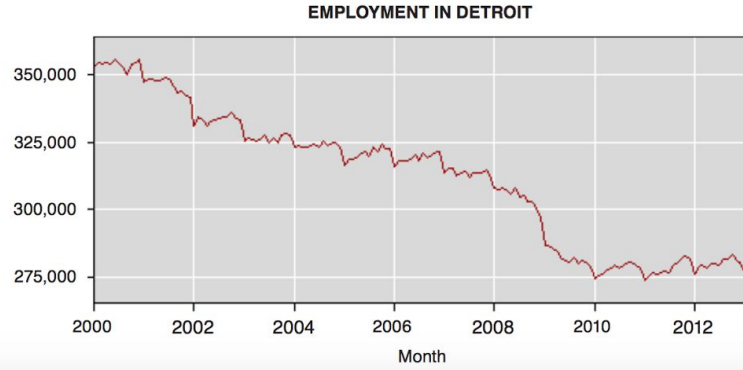
<sup>3</sup> Citation 2

<sup>4</sup> Citation 2

<sup>5</sup> Citation 2

of employment that Detroit experienced during the “lost years.”

- The number of employed Detroit residents has dropped more than 53% since 1970.



Unfortunately, corruption in Detroit has been present for a good portion of its history. The largest scandal involved former mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, however even the Police Department has not been corruption-free. As recently as 2015, two members of the Detroit police force were indicted on drug dealing charges and extortion<sup>6</sup>. Measures must be taken in order to prevent future scandals involving the DPD. In addition to adhering to the basic principles of law enforcement, a corruption-free police department will have an improved image in the public eye.

The city of Detroit has lost nearly half of its police officers since 2000. From 2012 to 2015, the police force shrank by 37%<sup>7</sup>. According to FBI statistics from 2015, Detroit had the highest violent crime rate in the United States<sup>8</sup>. While there is evidence to suggest that across the state of Michigan, both the funding and the citizens' relationship with their local police force are adequate if not above-average, in Detroit this is not the case. Additionally, some people may argue that the city of Detroit must allocate its funds to other places because federal grants have already been given to Detroit police. However, the size of the federal grants have not been enough to curb the crime rates and improve the police-community relations; the \$3 million grant to the Detroit Police Department only hired 15 additional police officers in a city with almost 700,000 people<sup>9</sup>. An essential part of Detroit's revitalization is a budget increase for the police services in the city, as public safety is paramount in order to attract new citizens and spark economic growth.

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<sup>6</sup> Citation 1

<sup>7</sup> Citation 9

<sup>8</sup> Citation 8

<sup>9</sup> Citation 15

The high crime rate, murder rate, and lack of police services are a result of the economic downturn that has fallen over Detroit. A major factor in the lack of police services stems from the fact that the city is simply deferring its debts owed to public servants; in 2013 “the city has deferred payment of its year-end Police and Fire Retirement System contributions...by fiscal year end the City will have deferred over \$100 million of pension contributions.<sup>10</sup>” This is simply unacceptable for those who have given a life of service to the city of Detroit. Acts like this deter many people from wanting to join the police force; why would they want to serve on the frontlines of Detroit crime when the city will not honor its debt to them when they retire? In addition to the lack of pension funds, the lack of police academy funds contributes to the low levels of police officers in Detroit. In 2013, the department conducted a recruiting fair that resulted in more than 650 applications, however the current academy class only had 25 recruits due to class limitations<sup>11</sup>. Higher matriculation rates to the police academy will ensure more officers are employed to patrol the streets of the city. Funding for improved police academies will be required to increase graduation and matriculation rates.

The 2013 numbers of the Detroit Police Department were astounding. In 2013, almost every aspect of the Detroit Police Department was way below the national average; the national average response time for police services was about 11 minutes, Police response times in Dearborn averaged 24 minutes, Detroit was at 58 minutes. While those numbers have certainly improved (as of 2015, average police response time in Detroit was 16 minutes and 41 seconds<sup>12</sup>), the not-so-distant past illuminates the problems Detroit has dealt with since the

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<sup>10</sup> Citation 16

<sup>11</sup> Citation 4

<sup>12</sup> Citation 14

start of the “lost years.” From 2003 to 2013, approximately 40% of DPD’s manpower had been reduced<sup>13</sup>.

Similarly to other public services, DPD is operating with an extremely outdated fleet of squad cars and police facilities. According to a report given by the Detroit emergency manager in 2013, “Most DPD police cruisers lack necessary information technology. A majority of vehicles in the fleet have reached replacement age (a typical replacement cycle is three years). [and] Operating with an aged fleet drives up maintenance costs.<sup>14</sup>” Detroit is a large metropolis, sprawling over 142 square miles. Adequate patrol cars are absolutely essential to ensuring the safety of the vast city. Updated and refurbished police facilities will help DPD conduct its business in a much more efficient manner and improve its response times.

Another essential fix that needs to occur within DPD are the information systems. The emergency manager reported in 2013 that the information technology infrastructure is not integrated within departments, meaning that police precincts cannot share their information to one another. He recommended that “the City urgently needs to upgrade or replace the following IT systems, among others: payroll; financial; budget development; property information and assessment; income tax; and DPD operating system.<sup>15</sup>” Upgrading the information systems will help the communication between the police and other emergency services such as the fire department and ambulances, two key areas of improvement that will help revitalize Detroit.

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<sup>13</sup> Citation 17

<sup>14</sup> Citation 17

<sup>15</sup> Citation 17

Police service funds include money for civilian-police relationship building, which can mitigate fears of police brutality in the inner-city. In the past few years America has experienced a high number of tragic civilian deaths at the hands of police officers, and as a result America has a strained civilian-police relationship. According to Michigan Public Policy Survey data from 2016, 40% of local officials in cities that have a population greater than 30,000 are at least somewhat concerned that a major incident of civil unrest connected to police use-of-force could happen in their jurisdiction<sup>16</sup>. Detroit is by far the most populous city in Michigan with 677,124 citizens as of the last census in 2010. Although MPPS data is aggregated to protect confidentiality, with Detroit's high population and crime rate, we can interpolate this percentage to increase when discussing Detroit's civilian-police relationship.

Although the relationship between the police and the community in Detroit may be strained, that is not to say the public does not want an increased budget. According to an MPPS survey, 59% of citizens living in cities in Michigan would choose higher taxes to avoid service cuts to police funding. Detroit's economy has had problems for a while now, but the police budget got hit the hardest in 2012-2013 fiscal year when \$75 million—18% of the total budget—was cut. There is hope on the horizon, however, as the city's post-bankruptcy plan calls for a \$114.2 million increase in Detroit's police department in 2018<sup>17</sup>. Unfortunately, what is planned in fiscal policies does not always get implemented, so it is up to not only the people of Detroit to push for this budget to get approved but the entire state of Michigan from Rick Snyder to the citizens in the upper peninsula. Detroit's revitalization starts with its police force, and a healthy Detroit will go a long way for the state of Michigan. According to a report by the

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<sup>16</sup> Citation 16

<sup>17</sup> Citation 9

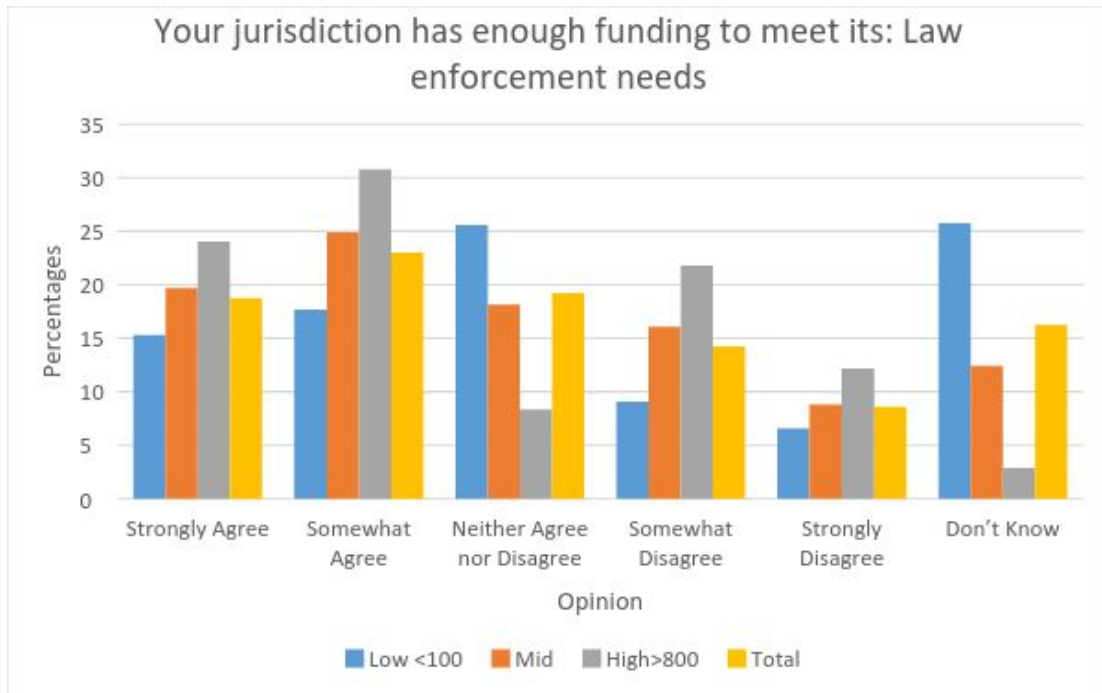


Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), “rational choice theories support the belief that during times of high unemployment there is a greater likelihood that individuals determine that engaging in illegitimate opportunities to gain wealth—namely through criminal activities such as robbery, burglary and theft—is their own rational self interest”<sup>18</sup>. Going off of this theory, an increased police presence in the unemployment-ridden Detroit will mitigate the effects of crime and a lower crime rate is attractive to prospective citizens.

According to MPPS Data, only 24% of local officials who serve in districts that have >30000 people “strongly agree” that their jurisdiction has enough funding to meet its current law enforcement needs, which is illustrated by the graph below. Statistics like these can be used to apply for federal funding in order to improve the police services in Detroit. If politicians use statistics like these in campaigns, the federal government will be pressured into providing the necessary funding.

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<sup>18</sup> Citation 18



There must be a complete overhaul of the police operations in the city of Detroit. From 2008 to 2013, there have been five different police chiefs, all of whom have attempted varying approaches to their operations. As a result of this, the effectiveness in ensuring public safety and employee morale are extremely low. Electing a police chief with a clear agenda and a transparent way of overhauling the Detroit Police Department is important in the first steps of increasing public safety. The current chief is James Craig and while he has increased the effectiveness of the Detroit Police, the public must keep a close eye to ensure that he keeps this improvement going.

Another step that can be taken to increase the ranks of police manpower is to rebrand the image of the Detroit Police Department. Since the declaration of bankruptcy and the deferral of pension payments, there has been a negative shadow cast upon the career as a police officer. The \$100 million deficit in pension payments should be split up in terms of funding. There are multiple avenues that this deficit can be funded. A temporary increase in tax to citizens is something that MPPS data shows would not be met with great criticism<sup>19</sup>. Additionally, the city of Detroit can apply for a federal grant to partially pay back money owed to retired police officers. An effective tactic in this grant application would include personal anecdotes from veterans from the DPD to illustrate how the local government failed them and humanize the need for funds. This pension payment is essential to increase positive public opinion toward a career in law enforcement.

Another way to increase the ranks of Detroit Police Officers is to create a detailed recruiting strategy. The 2013 Detroit Emergency manager suggested that the city should explore “outsourcing all of a portion of Police Academy training to local MCOLES (Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards) certified academic institutions; continue to provide training course on DPD rules, regulations, policies, and City ordinances; develop overall training plans for metrics financials and operations.<sup>20</sup>” Outsourcing is also a way to mitigate the high costs of the new police budget, as long as other cities are willing to help or the state government is willing to fund it without cutting into the direct police budget of Detroit.

An interesting approach to improving community-police relations came former Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper. He believes the problem “is that police officers in the United States

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<sup>19</sup> Citation 16

<sup>20</sup> Citation 17

believe that they must maintain control from beginning to end of every single contact they make. They're taught that by their culture. In some cases, they're taught that in the police academy.<sup>21</sup>” He goes on to argue that the police academies need to train their officers to understand that fear can come into play when they are patrolling, and try to not let it get the best of them in avoidable situations. Bringing in ex-police officers such as Norm Stamper to speak to young recruits could be vital to changing the mentality of fear that can be found in many law enforcement officers. This is one of the many steps to improve the police-community relationship.

The race relations in the country are undoubtedly strained today. In Detroit, a way to improve the relationship between the police and minority communities is through third-party non-profit organizations such as the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion and the American Civil Liberties Union. Detroit should fund these organizations through subsidies and incentives. Legal organizations such as the ACLU are a champion of citizens' rights and increased funding will aid their cause to fight laws and cases where minorities feel their rights were violated.

Updating and overhauling both the police squad cars and the facilities will be essential to improving the quality of police services. This is a part of the budget that will require a large amount of funding, especially given how old the current equipment is. An effective way to improve the equipment, facilities and vehicles is by bringing in an outside consultant. Hiring an expert in police services from a similar city in the United States, perhaps Portland given the similar size and population, and having them advise on all matters of restructuring could prove

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<sup>21</sup> Citation 5

to be very effective. Having an outsider's perspective has proven successful in the business world, so it is time to take apply tactics in the public sphere. Additionally, a step that can be taken to improve squad cars is to expand the partnership between the Police Department and local automobile manufacturers such as Ford or GM. Ford, Dodge and GM are all in competition to win over police departments across the country. Detroit purchased 105 Dodge Charger squad cars in 2014 and that is most certainly a step in the right direction in terms of upgrading, however negotiating a long term contract with one of the local automobile contractors would ensure a permanent step towards improving the entire police fleet<sup>22</sup>. Contracting these companies to mass produce upgraded police cars is a way to both spur the local economy and improve police services at a lower cost.

The exceedingly high crime rate is an issue that must be addressed with more funding to the DPD. A measureable objective in order to lower the crime rate is simple, the DPD must reduce the response time for a crime reported. While there is no direct way to allocate funds toward this goal, it is a result that will be achieved if all aspects of police services are improved. The results from MPPS data show that only 23% of government officials in the cities of Michigan believe that there is enough funding to meet its current law enforcement needs.

Although there is a lot of room for improvement with regards to police services in Detroit, this proposal does not suggest that the city has been completely ignorant of the problem. In March of 2016, the Detroit Police Department announced their plans to allow public access to department data that includes complaints against officers<sup>23</sup>. Police Chief James Craig acknowledges the fact that there needs to be an effort to increase the trust between the

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<sup>22</sup> Citation 13

<sup>23</sup> Citation 7

citizens and the officers of the law. “The Detroit information will be integrated into crime data on the city’s website, which already includes details on type of crime, when and where it occurred and information such as whether a gun was involved”<sup>24</sup>. Additionally, the Detroit City Council approved a \$5.2 million contract to equip Detroit police officers with body cameras<sup>25</sup>. This is a tactic that police departments across the nation are implementing in order to ensure professionalism is being conducted during routine stops, and is another step towards a better relationship between the public and the police. The contract is a good first step, however passing a law requiring all on-duty officers to have body cameras is a way to ensure these cameras go to good use. Rialito, a town in California, equipped all 70 of its police officers with body cameras and the results were remarkable; public complaints against officers dropped 88% and the officers’ use of force dropped by 60%<sup>26</sup>. The requirement of DPD officers to have body cameras will assuredly have similar results and will help curb police officer corruption.

The measures that have been taken to improve services simply must be increased and expanded. The improvement on police services from the 2013 statistics is a start, however the foot must not be let off the gas peddle. The Detroit Police Department still has a long way to go in terms of improving its overall quality. Curbing corruption, lowering crime rates, adding more policemen, systems upgrades and a better community relationship are all essential to the improvement and will require funding. Statistics and surveys show that the public is not opposed to personal tax sacrifices in order to aid this improvement, but tax increases can only

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<sup>24</sup> Citation 7

<sup>25</sup> Citation 15

<sup>26</sup> Citation 3

help so much. A combination of taxes and federal grants will provide the necessary funding in order to improve the aforementioned areas of the Detroit Police Department.

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