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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Is Sheriff Danita Ball from Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office. Danita, come on up.

[00:00:30] **Speaker 2** Good morning. As stated, I am Milwaukee County Sheriff Danita Ball. And first of all, I'd like to thank the committee on urban revitalization for inviting me to be here today to talk about the different challenges that Milwaukee County has faced as it relates to hiring as well as retaining qualified deputy sheriffs and correctional officers. Is, as you know, the strength. And integrity of public safety depends on having dedicated individuals who answer the call to serve and protect over 900,000 residents in the 19 counties within Milwaukee County. The 2,200 acre campus at the Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport and patrol over 150 miles of expressway and county roads and over 150 parks provide security for 47 branches of court as well as a daily average population of 922 pre-trial detainees in our care and custody. Yet, we are witnessing locally and across the nation unprecedented challenges that have hindered our ability to attract new candidates and encourage experienced deputies and correctional officers to remain with or transfer to our agency. In recent years, we have seen drastic decline in the number of people seeking law enforcement as a career choice. Various factors have contributed to this decrease in interest, including the erosion of public trust due to high profile use of force incidents that have occurred in other parts of the country. These incidents can have a chilling effect Whether you are entering into remaining in or supporting the profession. And they have led to protests, evolving expectations, and increased scrutiny being placed on law enforcement. Because frequently, the entire profession has been painted or tainted with that same broad brush. Additionally, In the case of our deputy shares, MCSO is competing with 19 municipalities and the federal government for those who will still view law enforcement as a viable career choice. However, trying to do so with less increases the reliance on overtime staffing, overtime to staff-critical. Positions and compromises the work-life balance. So many are seeking and honestly deserve. These are just a few of the factors which have contributed to staffing challenges and have also affected the culture, morale and effectiveness of our agency. That concludes my prepared remarks, but I'm here to answer any questions that you may have.

[00:04:23] **Speaker 1** Thank you, Sheriff. Now, you've been sheriff for how many years in Milwaukee?

[00:04:30] **Speaker 2** So since October of October 27th of 2022 is when the governor appointed me and I started my term January 2nd of 2023.

[00:04:42] **Speaker 1** Okay. And the sheriffs are responsible for not only highway patrol in Milwaukee County, I might add the only county in the state that doesn't have state patrol enforcement, but you're responsible for that as well as staffing the jail, correct? Correct. And then also bailiffs, is that correct?

[00:05:09] **Speaker 2** Correct. So we're responsible for the courts, the parks, the airport. Of course, you mentioned the expressway and the county roads and the jail.

[00:05:25] **Speaker 1** Now, what is the authorized strength of the Milwaukee County sheriffs, and how does it, the authorized string today compare with what it might have been five years ago?

[00:05:38] **Speaker 2** So the authorized strength is 275 deputy chairs. And I know you said five years ago, but just going back even more years than that, we had over 900 deputies. Now they. Now we have correctional officers who take some of the strength or some of the work that the deputies used to do because before they started in a jail and then they were able to go out on the highway and go into courts and things like that. And so five years ago, I would say we probably had over maybe 3 25

[00:06:23] **Speaker 1** And now it's down to 275. Now it's down to 270. And at one time it was 900.

[00:06:28] **Speaker 2** 900. Yes, sir.

[00:06:29] **Speaker 1** But because of adding the position of correctional officer that it used to be sheriff's deputies that were doing all of that. Correct. One of the things that, you've got your own training academy, correct?

[00:06:50] **Speaker 2** Yes.

[00:06:51] **Speaker 1** Yeah. And where is that located? It's in Franklin. And how long is the training period? And what requirements are there of individuals who have been chosen to go to the academy? Do they have to have a bachelor's degree? Do they to have any kind of previous training in law enforcement?

[00:07:16] **Speaker 2** So, the training is over 26 weeks because we had an issue with staffing as it relates to our correctional staff. We do dual certification, so they will also be certified as correctional officers if they didn't come to us as a correctional officer. So they spend those 26 weeks and then they spend additional four weeks as a, in the academy. And so one of the requirements that you have to have is 20, be 21, not have a felony Bye. Also, we used to have it where you had to come with either 60 college credits or a degree, but now we reduced that to, or we changed it so that a person can get their degree within five years of hire.

[00:08:19] **Speaker 1** And you mentioned you currently have 200, or your authorized strength is 275.

[00:08:25] **Speaker 2** Yes, sir.

[00:08:25] **Speaker 1** And what is your current strength, where are we at, how many vacancies?

[00:08:31] **Speaker 2** So we are down 31 deputy chairs. We do have a cat Academy class that's going down. We have one that is coming up in a few weeks. But right now we are down 31.

[00:08:50] **Speaker 1** And you mentioned you've got a class in the academy currently. Yes, sir. How many in that class?

[00:08:57] **Speaker 2** We started out with 28, which is a full class, and we're down to 22 now.

[00:09:01] **Speaker 1** Okay. Any questions or comments by committee members? Go ahead, Representative.

[00:09:11] **Speaker 3** After they graduate the uh thanks for being here today by the way thank you my name is representative franklin i have a couple brothers that are in law enforcement one's an fbi agent the other is a detective in senate senate in the police department so uh i'm percent back blue and really appreciate you all being here thank you um now your requirements are a little bit different which is no surprise as you go from department to department I guess my first question would be number one is who sets the requirements that you have to abide by when you're recruiting individuals and then secondly when they graduate the 26 week program at your academy do they go to an FTO program how long is that and then what does the washout look like for you.

[00:09:59] **Speaker 2** So the requirements are set by our law enforcement standards board. And so even the requirements that may be different because some jurisdictions do require a bachelor's degree or a degree as you enter to the door, they are still set by those standards that are set LESB so that we can make sure that we have uniform standards, so if someone were to leave our agency and go someplace else, they still had those standards and would maintain those standards. As it relates to the training, once they do finish, they will go to an FTO program. We usually start them out in the courts and then rotate them to the airport as as to patrol and so they are on probation for about 18 months and the FTO program I believe is about 12 weeks.

[00:11:19] **Speaker 3** Thank you.

[00:11:21] **Speaker 4** Go ahead, if you have any questions about this. Absolutely. Thank you so much for being here. Out of the classes you've taken students through, how long do you folks stay in the department? And then based off that, has there been a train of folks moving to other shared departments? Over time, and it's always that average year long.

[00:11:53] **Speaker 2** That's a great question because often times we feel that we train them and then they go some place else and I know that was one of the questions that you asked. Typically, within the first three years, we see a number of people who will leave. Oftentimes, it's because of the overtime that they have to work, because we don't have a relief factor. That means that if someone calls in sick, someone is on vacation, someone is suspended, someone's on military leave. The only way that we can feel that position is by mandating somebody to be on overtime. And so, because of the lack of work-life balance, as I mentioned in my remarks. Oftentimes, they will go to a different jurisdiction, but sometimes they go because they want to start out on the streets, and we start them out, they want start on the patrol, we start them out in the courts. And so some believe, some want to be closer to home, some just feel that the job is not for them. So I don't have the exact numbers, but we tend to lose. I would say anywhere in the first one to three years, about ten.

[00:13:26] **Speaker 3** Got another question. So I'm seeing a little bit of a pattern on some of these things. So you're with the Milwaukee County. I see we're seeing on here. I see West Dallas. See where I'm going with that? Yes, yes. So what is the number one thing that you would like to see from the state legislators that could help you in your recruiting efforts?

[00:13:51] **Speaker 2** That's a great question. It would be great if they didn't have the ability to move from agency to agency so fast. But it's a choice, and I understand that. And we all are fishing in the same pond. And a lot of people have left and gone to West Alice. A couple have gone to Ray Seenberg Field and so the surrounding areas. Um, but, uh... Just to help us be able to have a stable workforce and what that looks like, I'm not exactly sure at this time, but moving around from agency to agency is not helping us. It helps the other agencies because they get someone that's already trained and they don't have to train them or pay to have them trained. But it does hamper what we're trying to do.

[00:14:52] **Speaker 1** Go ahead.

[00:14:53] **Speaker 4** Representative Madison. Can you speak more to the cost of training and that impact on your work?

[00:15:00] **Speaker 2** So we're reimbursed, so it really isn't any impact to us because LESB will reimburse for the training. But just the fact that we have our deputy sheriffs. Most of them are not assigned to the academy, so now we have to pay them overtime to work and provide those core functions, and then the uniforms that they have to wear, the equipment, and just, you know. Just working with them, there's some that need more attention than others, and so just working with them to make sure that they're passing the exams and they know what to do and have confidence in doing it. It does take a lot of resources to do that. To quantify it would be very hard because it depends on the level that someone comes in and their ability to learn and things like that.

[00:16:14] **Speaker 5** Go ahead, Representative Gavola. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you Sheriff for being here. I really appreciate it and I respect your appearance here. I'm a supporter of law enforcement and I find it shameful for those that are out there dissing law enforcement. Thank you. So for you to be here is a big, big step and I appreciate it. I want to refer you to, and for those who follow, could Look at it while they're waiting assembly bill 196 companion bill Senate bill 170 and this is a Regarding the rehiring of a new intense those that have retired from from the law enforcement Agencies and it's something that I have heard for a good number of years now from the local law enforcement I'm just outside So those chiefs have all been very supportive and have sought some relief in this area. And this would simply make it more palatable or allowable for retirees to come back and continue to serve in the law enforcement environment. So I would just, if you're not familiar with it, I'd just throw it out there now to look at it. We really need to hear from those that are in the profession to see, as Representative Franklin mentioned, what can we do. If what we are doing is the right thing to do, or a positive thing for it. I believe this is, this has bipartisan support on this bill coming out. It's going to be exact out of the assembly committee tomorrow. So it's something we can see on the floor soon. But do you have an opinion, just overall, on the rehiring of annuitants? Just a little more background. Some of the trouble that came up with this was a double-dipping-type situation in the past. But I feel that this addresses that concern. But would there be an advantage, advantageous to you to be able to hire?

[00:18:35] **Speaker 2** Yes, it would because they come with experience already. We don't have to train them. Some of them, they come from a different agency. Of course, we will train them in our computer system and the various things that they need to function to do, they need do to function in the position that we put them in. We hire retirees right now. We have hourly bailers that, you know, Many of them are retirees. They still want to give back to the profession, but they don't want to work full time. And oftentimes, they don't want to be out on patrol. And so they will work 20 hours. So they'll work one week on and one week off. We also have Thank you very much. Investigators where, background investigators, where we can tap into that experience that they have. And they have been very successful in helping us to do the backgrounds of people who are candidates who are choosing to, you know, work for us. And so there's a need. Oftentimes in law enforcement you can retire at a very young age and so you still have you know that desire to do the work but maybe do it in a different way and so I think it is important to tap into those resources and we would welcome our retirees.

[00:20:13] **Speaker 5** So you mentioned that the 20 hours, which is limited to that actually now, but this would open that up. Do you have some individuals that are doing 20 hours a week that could be willing to do more hours a week, which this I think would open up that avenue for that.

[00:20:31] **Speaker 2** Absolutely, because there was one person that was hired as an hourly bailiff, but because of other benefits that they had, it would interfere with that, and so they ended up not accepting that position. So it would assist us, and not having the 20 hour limit would definitely help us.

[00:21:01] **Speaker 1** Very good. Any other questions, go ahead and represent an avalanche.

[00:21:06] **Speaker 6** Thank you, Sheriff, for being here, and thank you for your dedication to public service. We do appreciate that. I apologize for my tardiness. I might have missed what you had to say on the subject, but I read through your testimony and talk about increased scrutiny being placed on law enforcement. I'm wondering, Todd, could you maybe elaborate on that and what do you think we can do from a public sector standpoint to address that, if anything?

[00:21:36] **Speaker 2** So when I mention the increased scrutiny, you have high profile use of force incidents that occur across the country. And so everybody is considered to, or painted, like I said, painted with the same brush that we all are the same. And that's not the case. I'm not sure what you can do because it's a matter of public trust. And so I'm just showing your willingness to support public safety and provide us with the resources. And to speak out because oftentimes it's the minority that is speaking out. You have a handful of people that everybody seems to listen to. But when I go to the town hall, I have town hall meetings, or if I go the other meetings, the people are so supportive of law enforcement. But oftentimes, you can't tell that just because of those people who have a megaphone and are willing to speak out. And oftentimes, it's not. Um. You know, in support of what we're trying to do. We're trying provide public safety for everyone. And so I get it that money needs to go to mental health because oftentimes people in our care and custody have mental health issues. But if they are creating or they are, you know doing something that's criminal. We have a job to do, we have to arrest them as well, and so I think working hand in hand with you as well as just increasing the public trust will go a long way. But as far as the legislators doing something to reduce the scrutiny, I'm not sure that there's anything that you can do. I just think that we have show up every day to do our job. To the highest standards and then hopefully those people who don't trust law enforcement will eventually, you know, turn around and, you know, realize that we're here to help and not to harm.

[00:24:01] **Speaker 1** I know one of the things you mentioned was you trained an officer or a sheriff's deputy and then a month after the training they are hired by someone else, they leave, and I know that is a concern as well in the city of Milwaukee. Am I understanding you correctly? I think you mentioned you'd like to see some state legislation, if possible, to curtail that or at least create a situation where if an individual is trained by one department and leaves to go to another. At the very least, that individual might have to pay back that community. The cost of the training, the expenditures involved and so on. Is that something that you're interested in seeing?

[00:25:02] **Speaker 2** Absolutely, but I'm being selfish and it would definitely help stabilize our workforce because we tend to see people leave, but like I said, some of that is on us with the overtime. But we have put steps in place to reduce that overtime. But, you know, going from agency to agency, to agency to agency, you now, it's just... I'm sure it's not helpful for the other agencies who are looking for stability as well. They're looking for someone that they don't have to train that is highly qualified, and we do that. We provide that service, unfortunately, but yes, it would definitely help us because of the fact that we're running an academy and we're competing with, again, the 19 municipalities and the federal government for these resources.

[00:25:57] **Speaker 1** Any other questions or comments by committee members? If not, oh, I'm sorry, go ahead.

[00:26:04] **Speaker 4** I just wanted to create an opportunity for you to speak to how you, as Sheriff, have been in a deep relationship with the public.

[00:26:17] **Speaker 2** If you'd like to share. That was one of the things that the platforms that I ran on was to increase my relationship not only with my law enforcement partners, but also with the public. And we do that by holding those, myself as well as those who work for the Sheriff's Office to a high standard. And I'm always willing to have... Town hall meetings to give a report card as to what we are doing and where we are We had the jail audit and so yes, there were some things that didn't have us, you know and a great light, but we made those changes. So I was willing to stand before the community and let them know this is what we have done. And you can ask any questions that you want to ask. Even my first year in office, I had a town hall meeting. And to my knowledge, no other sheriff in Milwaukee County has done that. And so I have just tried to foster that relationship When I'm asked to come and appear, I try to come, or I have my Chief Deputy or someone in higher authority who can speak on my behalf to be there, but most of the time, I am there because I believe that if we're going to change the minds and hearts of people that at the very least, I need to show up and be willing to. Ask those hard questions.

[00:28:04] **Speaker 1** Very good. Any other questions or comments by committee members? If not, Chair, thank you so very much. We appreciate you taking the time. Good luck and let's talk more about some possible legislation. Thank you, sir. That hopefully can at least help a little bit in the challenges you're up against. Thank you, thank you Next is Sheriff Roger Bradner from the Badger State Sheriffs Association and Wisconsin sheriffs and deputy sheriffs association and also the sheriff of the county accountant.

[00:28:42] **Speaker 7** Yes, good morning. Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Donovan and committee members for just having an open dialog and listening to the law enforcement leaders on this very important topic. It's much appreciated that we can even have that dialog. I have Sheriff Grantner from Columbia County. I represent the Badger sheriffs. They represent all 72 sheriff's departments, sheriff's offices in the state, but also the Wisconsin Sheriff's and Deputy Sheriff's Association. And that's all of our deputy sheriffs. That's all our jailers and it encompasses a wider larger group of our professionals in law enforcement I've been in law Enforcement 34 years sure for seven and we have really seen this recruitment and retention concern Just grow and it's Know the larger departments are here, but I would like to speak for all those sheriff's offices that you know Have the 12 15 20 deputies or run a jail or a dispatch center as well Because it's just not our street officers that we're seeing the struggle and recruitment and retention But it's the jailers and especially for us that run sheriff's offices and have the only PSAP public safety answering point in their county running dispatch centers has really been a concern the last couple of years, so thank you. County law enforcement of Wisconsin varies as much as our state does from large urban counties such as Milwaukee, Dane, and Brown to the smaller rural counties of Florence, Bayfield and forest and those like mine that fall somewhere in between. Sheriff's offices are facing the same fundamental challenge, not enough people to fill the critical role of deputy sheriffs, jail officers, and 911 dispatchers. The demand for qualified professionals in each of these positions is high, yet the competition for workers in today's job market makes it increasingly difficult to attract and retain staff. You know, Sheriff Ball spoke of that. We're seeing that in every law enforcement jurisdiction across the state. You will hire someone, you will train them, and they will move for 50 cents more an hour, better equipment, or just for whatever reason. And when I started 34 years ago, it was a career. It was to retire in that jurisdiction that you started in. And every law enforcement agency is seeing these officers switching departments sometimes every couple of years. So that is a huge challenge. Sheriff's statewide continue to report persistent vacancies and significant recruitment and retention challenges. While agencies have implemented a variety of strategies to draw new hires and keep experienced staff, the pool of candidates is too small to meet the demand. This reality has created a strain on public safety that is felt in every county across Wisconsin. For each of these areas, there are both fiscal and policy options for the legislature to implement that could alleviate the hiring constraints. There are more straightforward options such as the $10 million fund at the Department of Justice as proposed in the 23 to 25 state budget to support recruitment and retention efforts for local law enforcement. Recruitment efforts are also challenged by the cost of training. Some counties hire jailers who are not law enforcement standard board certified and sponsor them through the training programs paying higher wages once the certification is achieved. While this creates opportunities for these young men and women, it also means counties bear the financial and fiscal burden when sponsoring a candidate that then leaves the agency a short time later. Reimbursement for LESB training at the state level would reduce the strain and strengthen the workforce statewide. See, there is a financial burden for all of our smaller departments especially. It cost me $53,000 to hire a deputy sheriff to get them to solo patrol, which means they're out and about. They're actually serving the community. They're doing something productive. That's $53,000 every time someone leaves and goes to another agency into a different field or retires early. And with that $53000, yeah, we do backfill some of those overtime shifts to make sure our communities have that adequate staffing. Let's be honest, most of the time we're just running short and we're not providing that coverage that our communities and our citizens deserve. There is also legislation, AB 138 SB 105, currently pending in the legislature, which would allow retired law enforcement officers and jailers to return to duty without jeopardizing their pensions. This change would provide an immediate and practical way to strengthen staffing by bringing back experienced professionals who are ready to serve their communities once again. It is a long overdue reform and we urge the legislator to act on its session. And I know that the question came up with Sheriff Ball. It is especially important for all of us that don't have a couple hundred officers or deputies in their department. Cannot tell you how important that would be I run court services. We run four branches. I've got 13 gun carrying Deputies and they're all part-time all retired law enforcement from before and yes are limited to the 1200 hours Many of them could do more But they can't because of the current laws and rulings But on the law enforcement side we have not been full staffed in many, many years. These law enforcers that retire at 50, 51, they're getting additional jobs. They're getting other jobs to support their families. So we talked about the double dip and I heard that and and I get it But if they're trained they're willing they're capable to do so Instead of working in the private sector making the money Why not come back in another law enforcement agency and maybe help that department that community for a couple years? Nowhere is the staffing shortage more visible than in our county jails After more than a decade of advocacy, 2023 Wisconsin Act IV finally created a pathway for county jail officers to receive protected status, granting them early retirement eligibility and access to duty disability insurance. While this was a significant step forward, Act IV also required jail officers to bear the full cost of this change. Faced with this financial burden more than 65 percent of all county jail officers in this state have opted out of act for 90 percent opted out in Columbia County Because the jailers tell me they live truly check-to-check and they couldn't afford that extra burden of paying into The retirement protected status, so they just don't do it So I think the intent was good. I think there's more work to potentially be done if we want to retain those jail officers. Compounding this problem act for prohibited counties from covering the additional costs on behalf of jailers Even though counties are permitted to pay those Contributions for other protected status employees this restrict restriction has left counties unable to support their jail Staff in the same way they support deputies other protective status positions The unintended consequences of act for have been heightened by the sizable state funded salary increase for the Department of Corrections and state prisons where correctional officers have protected status. This is especially burdensome in us counties or our counties that have state prisons in their jurisdictions like Columbia does. County jails cannot compete with the state even if counties increase salaries. There remains that uneven playing field with the Department of Corrections getting protected status and our jail staff not. Our organizations deeply appreciate the legislature's work on these issues, and we acknowledge the fiscal realities that counties face. We also recognize there may not be a single, simple solution, but the current system is not working. The workforce challenges in county law enforcement and jails are real, they are urgent, and they jeopardize the ability of every sheriff's office across Wisconsin to keep their communities safe. Just to give you a snippet of what it looks like in our county, we have 128 employees. Just in the past three years, we've completed 124 background investigations for new staff. Each one of those background investigations take one of our investigators about four to five days. One of our investigations for three years in a row has been doing nothing but background investigations to hire staff to try to get us to full staff. That's taking them away from act of. ICAC investigations for our child pornography and sensitive crimes against children, our drug cases, other criminal investigations. We're just not as proactive as we used to be because we're trying to fill our staff to get full staff. Fifty percent of our jailers have less than two years with Columbia County. 88% of our dispatchers have less than three years with our county, and 47% of our deputies have less in three years. I hear concerns like this from almost all the sheriff's departments, especially the ones up north. We have increased the pay, implemented incentives locally for longevity and retirement, changed their hours of work, but the struggle of constant hiring processes continues. I have seen many law enforcement departments lower their hiring standards, but that is a dangerous and risky reality But it's a reality I've seen a number of these officers these deputies that we have terminated get hired in other local departments Because these four or five ten men and women law enforcement agencies across this state They're not finding law enforcement. So they're not getting the cream of the crop like some of the sheriff's departments are This is going to take a multi-faceted approach with help from the state where our citizens will continue to suffer with a lack of professional and adequate law enforcement staffing. And I just want to mention dispatch for a minute. I think finally The communities, law enforcement in general, are looking at our dispatchers as professionals. The traumas that these men and women face every single day answering these calls for service is real and it's concerning. This is the area that I hear is now taking over the number one concern of filling the jail, is filling our dispatch centers. And the reason this is so important. When your mom, your dad, your neighbor, your son, your daughter call 9-1-1 and we don't have adequate dispatching, we don't have those centers filled up with staff, trained staff, there's going to be a delay in getting the appropriate first responders to those communities, to that incident. We're seeing it already. I know of a lot of departments that are looking at AI for helping with their dispatch, phone trees. I think all that really delays some of that, you know, critical time of getting our first responders to that scene. So I don't know all the solutions because it's a relatively new problem for us just in the last couple of years. But I just want to mention the dispatch centers across this state because I don't know too many of them are full staff right now And for example, we had we took on the Wisconsin Dells Police Department's dispatch center two years ago. It was expensive They decided they were going to run a dispatch center by state statute They don't have to that falls on the burden of the sheriff then so we had to just take that over Well, we've been short four to five dispatchers for over two years now since we took that on We still have to take their calls for service. We still help their officers out on the radio, dispatch their fire and EMS. But we've been doing it short staffed. Our dispatchers are averaging about 20 hours of overtime every pay period. You want to talk about burnout, that's where we're seeing it in our dispatch centers. Thank you for the opportunity again to share this perspective today. I'd be glad to answer any questions that you may have.

[00:41:44] **Speaker 1** Well, thanks, Sheriff, I appreciate your comments and I think you had some very good suggestions for legislation that hopefully we can work on. What's changed? Would you say that things have become...