



# **DENVER SHERIFF DEPARTMENT LODGE 27** **FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE**

8400 Alcott Street • Westminster, Colorado 80031

Phone (303) 477-1863 • [Lodge27@coloradofop.org](mailto:Lodge27@coloradofop.org)

W e b s i t e : [denverfop27.com](http://denverfop27.com)

Mike Jackson  
President

Janelle Orozco  
Secretary

July 19, 2021

## **Open Letter to Mayor Hancock, City Council, Executive Director of Public Safety Robinson, and Sheriff Diggins**

We are writing to convey to you, as we have done many times in the past, the serious public safety crisis occurring in the Denver Sheriff Department which is a matter of significant public concern. For some time now, the Sheriff Department has suffered from a severe staffing crisis which has steadily gotten worse where presently the agency is down to below 65% of its authorized strength. From our perspective, this staffing crisis is negatively impacting the security and safety of the jail, court, and medical facilities of the Sheriff Department, and we are in serious danger of the compromising the integrity, safety, and security of the facility.

The Executive Board of this organization has been trying for years to force city leaders to recognize these problems and to address them as quickly as the City has addressed other issues. Unfortunately, those efforts have been in vain. In our attempts to communicate the urgency of the Sheriff Department's problems we have tried to meet with elected and appointed officials to provide information and to offer our perspective on possible solutions. We have done this because of our genuine desire to rectify the problems and provide the best public safety service to this community. We believe that working in a collaborative manner with city officials we can solve these problems and we are grateful to those of you who have previously engaged with us in this effort. However, we remain very disappointed in those of you who have not shown a willingness to meet and engage in a productive dialog regarding issues in the Sheriff Department.

It is imperative that we address the severe staffing shortage as quickly as possible before some terrible event befalls us. The few of you who have been talking to us understand the seriousness of the situation, but it is very disheartening when elected city officials do not feel the need to meet with us as we attempt to resolve problems. The rapidly increasing deputy turnover rate can no longer be ignored. Both the Denver Police and Fire departments are operating at over 90% of their authorized strength while the Sheriff's Department is at or below 65%. And it continues to fall with each passing day as Deputies leave our Department at an alarming rate.

The staffing crisis has begotten an overtime situation that is untenable. Deputies are overworked, burned-out and fatigued, and it is impacting their emotional wellness. The coupled with a brutal working environment is the root cause of the high turnover. Deputies' morale is unmeasurably low.

If the problems in the Sheriff Department are going to be addressed in any meaningful way, we need to work in a collaborative effort between elected and appointed city officials and the elected representatives of this organization as the designated and recognized representative of Denver Deputies. We stand ready, as we always have, to engage with you all in the effort to address the problems but we need a commitment from you to find and implement successful solutions.

Recently, we were encouraged after meeting with Public Safety Director Robinson about some of the problems. He acted quickly to resolve a persistent problem regarding deputy's vehicle parking. This was an uncomplicated issue that we have proposed solutions to in the past and the city was never prepared to address it. But when Director Robinson listened to our concerns, it was addressed. This is an example of how true and productive dialogue can solve problems. However, we recognize, that not all the problems in the Sheriff's Department are as easy to resolve, and they will require a philosophical shift in the manner in which city officials approach and address the Sheriff's Department.

The collective bargaining process provides us with a clear mechanism for dealing with many of these issues. There are tools that are available in this process to address recruitment, retention, and some other workplace problems. However, for us to achieve real success, it will be necessary for the city management and its negotiation team to come to the table with an open mind and a clear motivation to solve problems. In the past, it seems the City's motivation in negotiations was to trim costs. Because the city's team is directed by the City Council and the Mayor (especially the Mayor), the city's team will need to be given the tools and direction to properly address deputy turnover.

In past negotiations, we have tried to offer ways that would address various problems in the agency, but it seems to us that the city team did not trust or value our perspective because those issues still remain unresolved. The process of collective bargaining should be about management and labor working collaboratively to address issues and find common solutions, but the lack of trust inhibits us from moving forward together. This is certainly one of the reasons that we are in this current staffing crisis and, even though it cannot be addressed in bargaining, the reduction and two-tiered system of retirement benefits is a significant factor in deputy turnover.

There are other issues that can be address outside the collective bargaining process involving workplace environment and culture. We believe that we can succeed with continual meaningful dialogue, open minds, and mutual respect. Only then can we achieve necessary results. We are hopeful that you will see this letter as it was intended as a call to action and genuine offer of cooperation in working together to address the problems in the Sheriff Department. If we cooperate and work together, we can solve these problems and avoid a negative public safety event. All we want is to ensure a high level of public safety services at the Sheriff's Department. If you would like to begin the dialogue, feel free to contact us, and we will also continue reaching out to all of you. Thank you for your time in reviewing this. We look forward to hearing from you.

Mike Jackson, President  
Denver Sheriff FOP Lodge 27