

To: Members of the Joint Committee On Transparent Policing and Use of Force Reform

From: Shelly Studebaker, Community Services Officer
Pendleton Police Department

Date: July 15th, 2020

Re: Behind the Badge - Testimony re The Police Officer Experience in Eastern Oregon

Good morning Co-Chairs Bynum and Manning and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Shelly Studebaker. I am a sworn police officer with the Pendleton Police Department, assigned to the investigation division, and currently hold the position of Community Services Officer. Prior to my service in Pendleton, I was a Deputy Sheriff in Gilliam County. I am honored to be the first female deputy in the history of Gilliam County, and later to be hired as Pendleton's first female police officer in nearly 20 years.

Gilliam County is the third-least populated county in the State of Oregon with a population of just under 2000 and spans 1223 square miles. The Gilliam County Sheriff's office has seven sworn Deputies, including a "working Sheriff." The majority of my patrol time was as a solo on-duty deputy. We did not have 24 hour coverage and it was not uncommon to be called out of bed for an early morning traffic crash or other incident that required police presence when no one was on duty.

I had been a Gilliam County Reserve Deputy for over a year prior to being hired full time. At DPSST, the difference between the policing in "The Valley", and how we policed as "Country Deputies" became quickly apparent. I would chuckle at instructors who spoke of handling a major incident solo for five minutes or so until a dozen backup officers arrived to help. If I was lucky I'd get an OSP trooper, maybe a neighboring county deputy, or the Sheriff or one of my fellow deputies might get called from home to assist. A dozen backup officers was a pipe dream.

I recall being told at academy to expect to hold my own in a physical fight with a suspect for "several minutes" until other officers could arrive. In Gilliam County, at best I could expect backup to be 20 minutes away; at worst, it could be an hour and a half or more. If I got into a physical altercation with someone, I was on my own. It doesn't take long to learn your policing style needs to lean more to generating voluntary compliance rather than trying to use brute force to accomplish your duties.

Rural law enforcement professionals have a personal connection to our people and communities. Some of us grew up in the community we serve, and the people are the same folks we sit next to at our children's holiday programs, with whom we stand shoulder to shoulder at school sporting events, and in houses of worship. We arrest a person on Sunday and run into them at the grocery store or gas station later that week. We see the short and long-term consequences of poor decision making, and watch with frustration as children with so much innate joy and potential wither in homes where they are unfortunately more familiar with the proper way to

ingest controlled substances and how to stay out of a parent's reach than they are with the feeling of being safe, secure, and happy with those who should be their fiercest protectors.

The personal connection between rural law enforcement professionals and our communities can be a great advantage when someone is in crisis. That familiarity can also be a huge disadvantage when someone knocks on your door on your day off, angry you arrested his or her relative the night before.

Rural law enforcement professionals wear many hats. We serve on county boards, city commissions, school groups, and in other community centered endeavors. As a deputy, I was also a certified EMT and a member of the local volunteer ambulance service. Other deputies were volunteer EMTs or firefighters. More than once I responded as a deputy to a traffic crash and left the scene on the ambulance, performing EMT duties. My experience is not uncommon for rural law enforcement professionals.

Crime in Eastern Oregon is the same found anywhere. Crime knows no boundaries and does not cease just because there may be a higher population of jackrabbits than people. The difference is the volume is a little lower, but when we look at the ratio of officer to incident, it isn't unusual to find we are actually busier in some instances than those agencies with ten to twenty times the staff numbers. Due to this similarity in what we respond to as rural law enforcement, though we have to do it a bit different than our more populous areas, it is essential that rural agencies be part of the conversation when passing legislation.

Law enforcement training is challenging in Eastern Oregon. We send our agency instructors across the state to gain knowledge they then bring back and pass along to others. Where many throughout the state can spend a day at DPSST and be home in time for dinner, or find regional training within commuting distance, we often have to plan on spending multiple days and nights away from our agencies and families to get the same training,

One of the biggest frustrations rural law enforcement professionals have is the lack of alternate resources to assist us in helping the public. Our own resources are stretched so very thin, yet a high number of our daily calls for service revolve around those with addiction and mental health issues rather than simply criminal acts. Law enforcement professionals have been saying for years that we are not the best entity equipped to deal with every mental health/suicidal/addiction related incident. Additional records requirements and feel good studies do little but keep us from actively performing our law enforcement duties.

Rural policing is not so unlike being the police anywhere else. We want to do the right thing. We want to be there when people need us. We want our communities to be nice places in which to live and to learn, and for our families to thrive.

If I had two requests I could make of the committee, I would ask that you consider small agencies when passing legislation. Every additional requirement, report, etc. adds a burden when we are already under resourced. Second, please properly fund mental health and addiction services and facilities. I could talk about the need for this in rural areas for an hour, example after example. The need for this funding is great.

The conversations currently ongoing across our country have the potential of transitioning the currently unsustainable practice of using law enforcement professionals as clean-up for societal shortcomings, to appropriately funding and providing the services which will actually help people, not just lock them up. We would like to go back to the job dealing with those who commit crimes and holding them accountable.