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SUMMARY

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**Nathan James**
Analyst in Crime Policy

# The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program: History, Funding, and Potential Issues for Reauthorization

The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program is one of the primary sources of federal support for state and local law enforcement in the United States. The program is administered by the COPS Office in the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The COPS program was established by the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-322). While the initial authorization created multiple grant programs under COPS, the program that provided grants to hire law enforcement officers to engage in community policing activities was the one that received the greatest attention. P.L. 103-322 authorized appropriations for the COPS program from FY1995 to FY2000. The COPS program was last reauthorized by the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-162). This act changed the structure of the COPS program and authorized appropriations from FY2006 to FY2009. The COPS program has not been reauthorized since, though legislation to do so has been introduced in nearly every Congress since authorized appropriations for the program expired at the end of FY2009. Even absent reauthorization, several laws have been enacted since P.L. 109-162 that have expanded the scope of the COPS program, including, most recently, by the Recruit and Retain Act (P.L. 118-64), which allowed COPS grants to be used for programs to make it easier to hire new officers and to promote careers in law enforcement.

Annual appropriations for the COPS program averaged nearly $1.5 billion from FY1995 to FY1999. Annual COPS funding largely decreased from FY2000 to FY2014, with a few exceptions. The decrease in funding during these years was partially a result of moving funding away from hiring programs, a change in the account structure for the COPS program (funding that was previously provided under the COPS account, but which was eventually transferred to other grant making organizations at DOJ, was moved to other grant-related accounts), and likely related to a ban on congressionally directed funding that started in FY2011. COPS funding increased from FY2015 to 2024, which was the result of increasing funding for hiring programs and for existing and new nonhiring initiatives such as anti-heroin task forces, active shooter training, and grants under the Matching Grant Program for School Security. Also, from FY2022 to FY2024 appropriations for the COPS account included funding for community project funding. The decrease in COPS funding in FY2025 was the result of community funding projects being zeroed out under the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4).

This report discusses issues policymakers might consider, if they take up legislation to reauthorize the COPS program. It starts by providing legislative and funding histories for the COPS program. It then discusses select issues for Congress related to potential reauthorization legislation. This includes issues that are specific to the structure of the COPS program, such as the limit on the total amount a law enforcement agency can receive to hire an officer, how funding is allocated among large and small jurisdictions, and how appropriations for COPS compare to the authorization for the program. It also includes discussion of the role of the COPS program in addressing two larger issues facing law enforcement: decreases in law enforcement staffing and their potential effect on crime, and the use of force by officers and law enforcement's relationship with communities of color.

# Contents



## Tables



## Appendixes



## Contacts

The mission of the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program is to advance community policing in jurisdictions across the United States.[1] The COPS program awards grants to state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies, so they can hire and train law enforcement officers in community policing, purchase and deploy new crime-fighting technologies, and develop and test new and innovative policing strategies.

The COPS program was originally authorized by the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-322; 1994 Crime Act). Though the 1994 Crime Act established multiple programs under COPS, the program that provided grants to hire law enforcement officers to engage in community policing activities was the one that received the greatest attention. The program supported the Clinton Administration's goal to fund 100,000 new law enforcement officer positions.[2] Initial authorization of appropriations for the COPS program expired at the end of FY2000. The COPS program was last reauthorized from FY2006 to FY2009 through the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-162; 2005 DOJ reauthorization).

Legislation to reauthorize the COPS program has been introduced in nearly every Congress since authorized appropriations expired at the end of FY2009.[3] Legislation was also introduced in the 117th and 118th Congresses that would have expanded the allowable uses of COPS grants to address staffing shortages by allowing the grants to be used for, among other things, paying hiring and retention bonuses and funding recruiting activities. During an April 2024 Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on the COPS program, several members of the committee noted the need to reauthorize the program.[4]

This report discusses issues policymakers might consider if they take up legislation to reauthorize the COPS program. It starts by providing legislative and funding histories for the COPS program. It then discusses select issues for Congress related to potential reauthorization legislation. This includes issues that are specific to the structure of the COPS program, such as the limit on the total amount a law enforcement agency can receive to hire an officer, how funding is allocated among large and small jurisdictions, and how appropriations for COPS compare to the authorization for the program. It also includes discussion of the role of the COPS program in addressing two larger issues facing law enforcement: decreases in law enforcement staffing and their potential effect on crime, and the use of force by officers and law enforcement's relationship with communities of color.

# Legislative History

The COPS program was first authorized by Title I of the 1994 Crime Act. The program was subsequently reauthorized by the 2005 DOJ reauthorization. Though appropriations for the COPS program have not been reauthorized since the 2005 DOJ reauthorization, laws have been enacted that have modified the scope of the COPS program. This section of the report provides an

[1] U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *About the COPS Office*, https://cops.usdoj.gov/aboutcops.

[2] U.S. Department of Justice, *The Clinton Administration's Law Enforcement Strategy: Combatting Crime with Community Policing and Community Prosecution*, March 1999, p. 1.

[3] See, for example, the COPS Improvements Act of 2009 (H.R. 1139, 111th Cong.), COPS Improvements Act of 2011 (H.R. 1896, 112th Cong.), COPS Improvements Act of 2014 (S. 2254, 113th Cong.), COPS Improvements Act of 2015 (S. 2401, 114th Cong.), COPS Reauthorization Act of 2018 (S. 2774, 115th Cong.), COPS Reauthorization Act of 2021 (S. 3374, 117th Cong.), and COPS Reauthorization Act of 2023 (S. 1306, 118th Cong.).

[4] U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Oversight of the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Grant Program*, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., April 10, 2024.

overview of legislation related to the COPS program. It does not provide a comprehensive account of every change made to the program's authorization; rather, it highlights significant changes to the authorization that have shaped the current structure of the program.

## Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

The 1994 Crime Act authorized the Department of Justice (DOJ) to award COPS grants to state, local, and tribal governments, other public and private entities, and multijurisdictional or regional consortia to "increase police presence, to expand and improve cooperative efforts between law enforcement agencies and members of the community to address crime and disorder problems, and otherwise to enhance public safety." To further this stated purpose of the COPS program, the act authorized DOJ to make grants to (1) hire law enforcement officers and train them in community policing; (2) rehire law enforcement officers who were laid off due to budget cuts to serve in community policing; and (3) procure equipment, technology, or support systems, or pay overtime, if it would increase the number of officers serving in community policing equal to or greater than the increase in the number of officers that would result from a grant for a similar amount to hire or rehire law enforcement officers to serve in community policing. The act also authorized DOJ to award grants for a Troops-to-Cops program, which could be used to hire former members of the armed services to work as community policing officers. Under the act, authority to award hiring grants expired on September 13, 2000.

In addition, the act authorized DOJ to award COPS grants for other programs, projects, and activities (nonhiring programs) that would

- increase the number of law enforcement officers engaging members of the community on proactive crime prevention and control strategies;
- provide specialized training to law enforcement officers to enhance their conflict resolution, mediation, problem solving, service, and other skills needed to partner with members of the community;
- increase police participation in multidisciplinary early intervention teams;
- develop new technologies to help law enforcement agencies reorient their focus from reacting to crimes to preventing crimes;
- develop and implement programs to help citizens engage in efforts with law enforcement agencies to prevent crime and to increase their access to the criminal justice system;
- establish programs to decrease the amount of time law enforcement officers must spend attending court hearings;
- establish and implement programs that partner law enforcement officers and young persons in proactive efforts to control and prevent crime in the community;
- establish management and administrative systems to facilitate adoption of community-oriented policing as an organizational philosophy;
- establish, implement, and coordinate crime prevention and control programs with other federal programs to better address the comprehensive needs of the community; and
- help purchase service weapons for law enforcement officers.

The act established a 25% match requirement for COPS grants. Further, the act required that for any grant for hiring or rehiring a law enforcement officer that is longer than one year, the match

provided by the grant recipient is required to increase each year.[5] The act also established a $75,000 per officer maximum amount for grants for hiring or rehiring a law enforcement officer.

The act required DOJ to award not less than 0.5% of the total amount of grant funding available each fiscal year to each qualifying state, unless all applications from the state have been funded. It also provided that half of the annual funding for the COPS program must be awarded to jurisdictions of 150,000 or fewer people and the other half must be awarded to jurisdictions of more than 150,000 people.

The act required that those applying for a COPS grant submit an application for funding that

- includes a long-term strategy and an implementation plan that reflects consultation with community groups and appropriate private and public agencies;
- demonstrates a specific public safety need;
- explains the applicant's inability to address public safety needs without grant funding;
- identifies related governmental and community initiatives that complement or will be coordinated with the proposal;
- certifies there has been appropriate coordination with all affected agencies;
- outlines the initial and ongoing level of community support for implementing the proposal, including financial and in-kind contributions;
- specifies plans for obtaining necessary support and continuing the proposed program, project, or activity following the conclusion of the grant;
- specifies plans for how the applicant will pay an increasingly higher share of the officer's salary and benefits, if the application is for a grant for hiring or rehiring additional career law enforcement officers;
- assesses the effect, if any, of the increase in police resources on other components of the criminal justice system;
- explains how the grant will be utilized to reorient the law enforcement agency's mission toward community-oriented policing or enhance its involvement in or commitment to community-oriented policing; and
- provides assurances that the applicant will, to the extent practicable, seek, recruit, and hire members of racial and ethnic minority groups and women in order to increase their ranks within the agency.

The act authorized DOJ to waive one or more of the application requirements for jurisdictions of fewer than 50,000 people and for any applications for grants for nonhiring programs under $1 million, and to "otherwise make special provisions to facilitate the expedited submission, processing, and approval of such applications."

The act also required DOJ to include a monitoring component for any COPS grant. Monitoring must include systematic identification and collection of data about activities, accomplishments, and programs throughout the life of the program, project, or activity and presentation of such data

[5] For example, over the course of a three-year hiring grant, a grantee could provide a 15% match the first year, a 25% match the second year, and a 40% match the third year.

in a usable form.[6] Further, it required selected grant recipient programs to be evaluated by a local evaluator or as part of a national evaluation, pursuant to guidelines established by DOJ.

The act authorized DOJ to use any component of the department to administer the COPS program. It authorized appropriations for the program at $1.332 billion for FY1995, $1.850 billion for FY1996, $1.950 billion for FY1997, $1.700 billion annually for both FY1998 and FY1999, and $268.0 million for FY2000.

## P.L. 105-302

P.L. 105-302 amended the COPS authorization to allow DOJ to award grants to "establish school-based partnerships between local law enforcement agencies and local school systems by using school resource officers who operate in and around elementary and secondary schools to combat school-related crime and disorder problems, gangs, and drug activities."

## The Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act of 2003

The PROTECT Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-21) amended the COPS authorization to allow DOJ to award grants to assist state and tribal governments with enforcing sex offender registry laws.[7]

## Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005

The 2005 DOJ reauthorization changed the structure of and reauthorized appropriations for the COPS program.

The act amended the COPS authorization to make the COPS program a "single grant program under which the Attorney General makes grants to States, units of local government, Indian tribal governments, other public and private entities, and multi-jurisdictional or regional consortia" for a variety of purposes. These purposes were the nonhiring programs enumerated in the initial COPS authorization along with those added by P.L. 105-302 and the PROTECT Act. The 2005 DOJ reauthorization removed the authorization for the separate hiring and Troops-to-Cops programs. Under the new grant program DOJ was authorized to make grants to hire new law enforcement officers and rehire laid-off officers for community policing activities. Despite making this an allowable purpose under the new grant program, the act did not extend the date on which DOJ's authority to make hiring grants expired (September 13, 2000). The act also authorized DOJ to award COPS grants to "procure equipment, technology, or support systems, or pay overtime, to increase the number of officers deployed in community-oriented policing" and to "pay for offices hired to perform intelligence, anti-terror, or homeland security duties." In addition, the act modified the technologies for which the grants could be used to help law

[6] The COPS Office notes in the FY2024 COPS Hiring Program grant solicitation that "awarded organizations will be responsible for submitting Programmatic Performance Reports on a semiannual basis and SF-425—Federal Financial Reports on a quarterly basis. In addition, awarded organizations will be responsible for the timely submission of a final Closeout Report and any other required final reports" and that "the COPS Office may take a number of monitoring approaches, such as site visits, enhanced office-based award reviews, alleged noncompliance reviews, and periodic surveys to gather information and to ensure compliance"; U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *FY204 COPS Hiring Program*, p. 34, https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2024ProgramDocs/chp/solicitation.pdf.

[7] For more information on sex offender registry laws, see CRS Report R46863, *Federal Requirements for State and Military Registered Sex Offender Management*.

enforcement agencies reorient their focus from reacting to crimes to preventing crimes to include "interoperable communications technologies, modernized criminal record technology, and forensic technology." The act reauthorized COPS appropriations at $1.047 billion each year from FY2006 to FY2009.

## Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010

The Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-211) authorized DOJ to award grants to tribal governments receiving direct law enforcement services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for many of the purposes for which COPS grants can be awarded.[8] The act also required DOJ to award grants to tribal governments to assist them in carrying out any of the purposes for which COPS grants can be used. Per the act, tribal governments are not required to provide matching funds for the cost of the program and grant funds can be used to cover indirect costs.[9] The act authorized $40 million per fiscal year from FY2011 to FY2015 for grants to tribal governments.

## The Protecting Our Lives by Initiating COPS Expansion (POLICE) Act of 2016

The POLICE Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-199) authorized DOJ to award COPS grants to allow law enforcement officers to participate in nationally recognized, scenario-based active shooter training.

## 21st Century Cures Act

The 21st Century Cures Act (P.L. 114-255) authorized DOJ to awards COPS grants to

- provide specialized training to law enforcement officers in recognizing individuals who have a mental illness, and in how to properly interact with such individuals;
- establish programs that enhance the ability of law enforcement agencies to address the mental health, behavioral, and substance abuse problems of individuals encountered by law enforcement officers in the line of duty;
- provide specialized training to correctional officers to recognize individuals who have a mental illness; and
- enhance the ability of correctional officers to address the mental health of individuals under their supervision.

## Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017

The Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-113) authorized DOJ to award COPS grants to establish peer mentoring mental health and wellness pilot programs in state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies.

[8] For more information on how BIA provides law enforcement services on tribal lands, see CRS In Focus IF12569, *Law Enforcement on Tribal Lands*.

[9] For more information on indirect costs, see U.S. Department of Justice, *DOJ Grants Financial Guide*, January 2024, Section 3.11, pp. 87-90.

## Substance Use-Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment (SUPPORT) for Patients and Communities Act

The SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act (P.L. 115-271) authorized DOJ to use funding appropriated for the COPS program to make grants to state law enforcement agencies with "high seizures of precursor chemicals, finished methamphetamine, laboratories, and laboratory dump seizures for the purpose of locating or investigating illicit activities, such as precursor diversion, laboratories, or methamphetamine traffickers."

The act also authorized DOJ to use funding appropriated for the COPS program to make grants to state law enforcement agencies with "high per capita rates of primary treatment admissions, for the purpose of locating or investigating illicit activities, through Statewide collaboration, relating to the distribution of heroin, fentanyl, or carfentanil or relating to the unlawful distribution of prescription opioids."

## Recruit and Retain Act

The Recruit and Retain Act (P.L. 118-64) authorized DOJ to award COPS grants to support hiring efforts for law enforcement agencies that have experienced declines in recruits by reducing application-related fees, such as fees for background checks, psychological evaluations, and testing.

The act required the COPS Office to award grants to law enforcement agencies that have partnered with an elementary or secondary school or college for recruiting activities, which can include the following:

- helping students explore potential future career opportunities in law enforcement;
- strengthening recruitment by law enforcement agencies that have had a decline in recruits or high rates of resignations or retirements;
- enhancing community interactions between youth and law enforcement agencies that are designed to increase recruiting; and
- supporting other recruitment activities such as dedicated programming for students, work-based learning opportunities, project-based learning, mentoring, community liaisons, career or job fairs, worksite visits, job shadowing, apprenticeships, or skills-based internships.

The act limited spending for these purposes to not more than $3 million of the amount of funding made available for the COPS program for these purposes. The act also required that grantees not spend more than 2% of funding they receive for hiring or rehiring officers on administrative costs.[10]

[10] Documents from the COPS Office indicate that COPS hiring grants cannot be used for administrative costs. Frequently asked questions published by the COPS Office regarding the FY2024 solicitation for the COPS hiring program state, "CHP [COPS hiring program] funding may not be used for indirect costs. CHP only pays for approved entry-level salaries and fringe benefits of full-time sworn officers over three years." U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *FY24 COPS Hiring Program (CHP) Pre-Award Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)*, p. 9, https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2024ProgramDocs/chp/faqs.pdf.

# Appropriations for the COPS Program

**Table 1** provides appropriations data for the COPS program since its inception. From FY1995 to FY1999, the annual appropriation for the program averaged nearly $1.5 billion and most of the annual funding was for hiring programs. The relatively high levels of funding during this period, compared to post-FY2000 appropriations, were largely the result of the effort to fund 100,000 new law enforcement officer positions.

After the initial push to fund the 100,000 new officers, the COPS program changed into a conduit for supporting a wider range of local law enforcement needs. Starting in FY1998, an increasing portion of the annual appropriation for COPS was dedicated to programs that helped law enforcement agencies purchase new equipment, combat methamphetamine production, upgrade criminal history record systems, and improve their forensic science capabilities. Increased funding for nonhiring initiatives under the COPS account coincided with decreased funding for hiring programs. By FY2005, appropriations for hiring programs were nearly nonexistent, and funding for them was eliminated for FY2006 and FY2007. Funding for hiring programs was revived when the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-5) provided $1 billion for the COPS hiring program. Appropriations for hiring programs from FY2009 to FY2012 were the result of efforts to help local law enforcement agencies facing budget cuts (as a result of the recession) either hire new law enforcement officers or retain officers they would have otherwise had to lay off. Appropriations continued to be provided for hiring programs even as the effects of that recession waned.

There was a notable reduction in the total amount of funding provided for the COPS program after FY2012 relative to previous fiscal years. Prior to FY2012, the least amount of annual funding (in nominal dollars) provided for the program was $472 million for FY2006. Although COPS funding has increased over the past several fiscal years, annual funding from FY2012 to FY2021 remained significantly lower than it was before FY2012. Lower annual appropriations for the COPS program during these fiscal years can likely be generally attributed to (1) a decrease in the amount of funding provided for hiring programs, (2) a ban on congressionally directed spending, and (3) restructuring of the COPS account. Increases in annual COPS funding starting in FY2022 are attributable to a partial reversal of some of these trends.

Congress prohibited congressionally directed spending—so-called *earmarks*—from FY2011 to FY2021. This ban substantially decreased funding for the Law Enforcement Technology and the Methamphetamine Clean-up programs, which were being administered by the COPS Office. By FY2012, there was no funding for the Law Enforcement Technology program and the only funding remaining for the Methamphetamine Clean-up program was transferred to the Drug Enforcement Administration to assist with the clean-up of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories. Funding for the Methamphetamine Clean-up program ceased in FY2018.

From FY2010 to FY2012, appropriations for several programs that were funded under the COPS account—such as Project Safe Neighborhoods, DNA backlog reduction initiatives, Paul Coverdell grants, offender reentry programs, the National Criminal History Improvement program, and the Bulletproof Vest Grant program—were moved to the State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance (S&LLEA) account in the annual Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations legislation. Programs funded under this account are administered by the Office of Justice Programs (OJP). Prior to the programs being moved to the S&LLEA, appropriations for them were transferred from the COPS Office to OJP for administration. In general, from FY2001 to FY2011 appropriations for programs that were transferred to OJP accounted for one-third to one-half of the annual funding for the COPS account. In recent fiscal years, differing proportions of the COPS account have again been transferred to OJP. Since

FY2017, Congress has also provided funding for the Regional Information Sharing System (RISS) program under the COPS account, which is transferred to OJP.

Funding for the COPS program increased from $208 million for FY2015 to $685 million for FY2024. Increased funding for the COPS account during this time is the result of increasing funding for hiring programs and for nonhiring initiatives such as anti-heroin task forces, active shooter training, and grants under the Matching Grant Program for School Security. Also, the COPS account included funding for the COPS Law Enforcement Technology program from FY2202 to FY2024, which provided community project funding (also known as *earmarks*). Decreased funding for the COPS account in FY2025 was the result of funding for the COPS Law Enforcement Technology program being zeroed out under the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4).

**Table 1. Appropriations for the COPS Program, FY1995-FY2025**

(in millions of dollars)

| Fiscal Year | Total Appropriation | Hiring Programs Appropriation | Percentage Transferred to OJP |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1995 | $1,300 | $1,057 | 0% |
| 1996 | 1,400 | 1,128 | 0% |
| 1997 | 1,420 | 1,339 | 0% |
| 1998 | 1,633 | 1,338 | 0% |
| 1999 | 1,520 | 1,201 | 4% |
| 2000 | 913 | 481 | 21% |
| 2001 | 1,042 | 408 | 30% |
| 2002 | 1,105 | 385 | 33% |
| 2003 | 978 | 199 | 35% |
| 2004 | 748 | 114 | 36% |
| 2005 | 598 | 10 | 38% |
| 2006 | 472 | — | 53% |
| 2007 | 542 | — | 51% |
| 2008 | 587 | 20 | 41% |
| 2009 | 1,551 | 1,000 | 18% |
| 2010 | 792 | 298 | 26% |
| 2011 | 495 | 247 | 34% |
| 2012 | 199 | 141 | 0% |
| 2013 | 209 | 155 | 0% |
| 2014 | 214 | 151 | 0% |
| 2015 | 208 | 135 | 0% |
| 2016 | 212 | 137 | 0% |
| 2017 | 222 | 137 | 16% |
| 2018 | 276 | 150 | 13% |

| Fiscal Year | Total Appropriation | Hiring Programs Appropriation | Percentage Transferred to OJP |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2019 | 304 | 153 | 12% |
| 2020 | 343 | 156 | 11% |
| 2021 | 386 | 157 | 10% |
| 2022 | 532 | 157 | 8% |
| 2023 | 683 | 225 | 6% |
| 2024 | 685 | 157 | 6% |
| 2025 | 437 | 157 | 10% |

**Source:** FY1995-FY2017 appropriations were provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. FY2018-FY2024 appropriations were taken from the explanatory statement to accompany the annual Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act and from the text of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (P.L. 117-159). FY2025 appropriations are based on CRS analysis of the text of the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4).

**Notes:** Amounts include all supplemental funding, and are in nominal dollars. Amounts for hiring programs reflect all set-asides (see **Table A-1** for more information).

# Select Issues for Reauthorization

There are several issues that policymakers might consider, if Congress takes up legislation to reauthorize the COPS program; this section discusses some of these.

## Cap on Hiring Grants

The authorization for the COPS program sets a cap of $75,000 per officer for hiring grants. A provision in the annual CJS appropriations act since FY2012 has increased this cap to $125,000.[11] Because hiring grants are three years in duration, a grant would cover $41,667 of a new or rehired officer's salary and benefits each year.

**Table 2. Percentile Annual Salaries for Police and Sheriff Patrol Officers**

May 2024

| Percentile | Annual Salary |
|---|---|
| 10% | $47,640 |
| 25% | $58,980 |
| 50% | $76,290 |
| 75% | $97,190 |
| 90% | $115,280 |

[11] For example, the language in the FY2024 CJS appropriations act (P.L. 118-42) states that "$256,168,839 is for grants under section 1701 of title I of the 1968 Act (34 U.S.C. 10381) for the hiring and rehiring of additional career law enforcement officers ... *Provided*, That, notwithstanding section 1704(c) of such title (34 U.S.C. 10384(c)), funding for hiring or rehiring a career law enforcement officer may not exceed $125,000 unless the Director of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services grants a waiver from this limitation."

**Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2024, 33-3051, Police and Sheriff Patrol Officers.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (**Table 2**), the total salary for a law enforcement officer making the median salary over a three-year period is $228,870, meaning that a grant recipient would be required to pay the remaining $103,870, which is equivalent to a 55% match. Law enforcement agencies employing officers making a salary in the 25th percentile would be able to cover a majority of the officer's three-year salary costs with grant funds and come close to the statutory 25% match requirement (a $125,000 grant would cover 71% of the officer's salary over the three-year grant period).

Policymakers might consider whether to increase the $75,000 per officer cap on hiring grants in the COPS authorization (which has effectively been $125,000 since FY2012 because of a provision in the CJS appropriations act) to reflect the higher salaries for law enforcement officers since the COPS program was created in 1994. If policymakers chose to increase the cap on hiring grants, they might also consider whether to establish a mechanism so that the cap increases in subsequent years, such as indexing the cap to inflation. While a higher cap might make it easier for grant recipients to cover the cost of hiring new officers, it might also mean that the COPS Office would make fewer awards, assuming that appropriations for the hiring program do not increase at a rate commensurate with the increasing cap.

## Changing Allocation Among Jurisdictions

The current authorization for the COPS program requires the COPS Office to award half of annual funding for the program to jurisdictions of 150,000 or fewer people (*small jurisdictions*) and the other half to jurisdictions of more than 150,000 people (*large jurisdictions*).

Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) 2020 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey indicate that there are 175 local police departments serving large jurisdictions and 11,538 serving small jurisdictions.[12] The police departments serving large jurisdiction employ the equivalent of 202,430 full-time officers and the departments serving small jurisdictions employ the equivalent of 263,006 full-time officers.[13] The data show that large police departments make up a small percentage of all police departments and these departments employ a disproportionately large number of officers. The police departments serving large jurisdictions account for 1.5% of all police departments, but they employ 43.5% of all officers in local police departments.

Congress might consider whether to change the way that COPS grants are allocated between small and large jurisdictions. The current requirement to split funding between small and large jurisdictions provides small jurisdictions, which tend to have fewer resources, with access to COPS funding. Requiring half of the annual funding to be awarded to these jurisdictions ensures that they will be able to receive COPS grant funds and they will not get out-competed for grants by larger jurisdictions that might be able to employ personnel who have expertise in applying for grants. However, there are many more small jurisdictions competing against each other for grants than there are large jurisdictions. Policymakers could consider a more gradated division of annual

[12] CRS analysis of data from the 2020 LEMAS survey.

[13] Law enforcement agencies that responded to the survey indicated the number of full-time and part-time officers they employed. The number of part-time officers was divided in half and added to the number of full-time officers to calculate the number of full-time equivalent officers. This assumes that two part-time officers are equal to one full-time officer.

COPS funding.[14] Should Congress seek to alter the distribution of grant funding, it could consider a number of adjustments. For instance, removing the current requirement to allocate half of funds to small jurisdiction and the other half to large jurisdictions and placing a limit on the number of officers a law enforcement agency can apply for, could leave more funding available for smaller agencies.[15] Other adjustments could be made to facilitate different targeting priorities.

## Altering the Structure of the COPS Authorization

Congress changed the structure of the COPS program in the 2005 DOJ reauthorization. When the COPS program was initially authorized, there were distinct programs with specific purposes under COPS. The reauthorization changed the COPS program into a single grant program under which DOJ could award grants for a variety of enumerated purposes. However, appropriations under the COPS account do not reflect the structure of the COPS authorization. Congress continues to appropriate funding for specific purposes under the COPS account (e.g., hiring programs, active shooter training, anti-methamphetamine and anti-heroin task forces, school security programs) rather than providing funding for the general COPS program that would give DOJ some discretion regarding which purposes would be funded each fiscal year.

If policymakers decide to take up legislation to reauthorize the COPS program, they might consider whether to amend the COPS authorization to reflect what has been emphasized in the COPS account (i.e., distinct programs with specific purposes). Policymakers could also evaluate the list of authorized purposes for which COPS grants can be awarded, which is now up to 23, to determine if any should be repealed given that some have never received funding or have not been funded in more than a decade (see **Table A-1** for a detailed breakdown of COPS funding, by program, for the past 10 fiscal years).

## Authorizing the COPS Office

The law that first authorized the COPS program did not authorize an office to administer the program. Rather, DOJ created the COPS Office administratively.[16] The COPS Office is the only grant-making agency in DOJ that does not have an authorization. Both OJP (34 U.S.C. §10101) and the Office of Violence Against Women (34 U.S.C. §10442) are authorized in statute. In addition, the grant making bureaus and offices in OJP have their own statutory authorization:

- Bureau of Justice Assistance (34 U.S.C. §10141)
- Bureau of Justice Statistics (34 U.S.C. §10132)
- National Institute of Justice (34 U.S.C. §10122)
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (34 U.S.C. §11111)
- Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (34 U.S.C. §20945)

[14] For example, Congress could require the COPS Office to award 25% of annual funding to each quartile of agencies based on the size of jurisdiction they serve.

[15] Currently, requests for officer positions through the COPS hiring program are capped at 20% of the number of sworn officers employed by the requesting agency, with a maximum of 50 officers for any agency. The COPS Office imposed this restriction administratively; it is not statutory. U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *FY24 COPS Hiring Program (CHP) Pre-Award Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)*, p. 7.

[16] U.S. Department of Justice, "Establishment of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services," 60 *Federal Register* 8932, February 16, 1995. For more information on executive branch authority to shape the federal bureaucracy, see CRS Report R44909, *Executive Branch Reorganization*, and CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10158, *Organizing Executive Branch Agencies: Who Makes the Call?*

- Office for Victims of Crime (34 U.S.C. §20111)

The authorizations for these agencies provide for considerations such as who will head the agency, how that official will be appointed, who the official reports to, the agency's responsibilities and jurisdiction, and where the agency resides in DOJ's organizational structure.

If Congress takes up legislation to reauthorize the COPS program, policymakers might consider whether to authorize the COPS Office in statute. While the COPS Office has existed uninterrupted since the program's inception, its structure is established through rulemaking, which means that its functions could be changed without congressional consent. For example, the Trump Administration in FY2019 and FY2020 proposed merging the COPS Office with OJP to "streamline services, save taxpayer dollars, and eliminate duplication among DOJ's grant components."[17] If Congress chooses to pursue this, authorizing the COPS Office would allow Congress to establish the office's role in DOJ, its responsibilities, and its organizational structure (such as whether the director should be Senate-confirmed).

## Law Enforcement Staffing

Recent reports of law enforcement agencies losing officers because of retirement, leaving the profession, or moving to another (usually larger and better paying) agency has raised concerns among some policymakers about law enforcement staffing levels and their effects on public safety. Legislation introduced in 118th Congress would have allowed COPS funding to be used to pay hiring and retention bonuses and supplement current officers' salaries.[18] In addition, as discussed above, the Recruit and Retain Act allows COPS grants to be used for recruitment efforts.

The most recent data from the Census Department's Annual Survey of Public Employment and Payroll show that the number of state and local law enforcement officers decreased from 2019 to 2023 (**Table 3**). There was an increase in the number of law enforcement officers from 2023 to 2024, though there are fewer law enforcement officers than there were in 2019, when the decrease began. The decrease in law enforcement officers from 2019 to 2023 did not greatly change the number of officers per 1,000 people. There were 2.2 law enforcement officers per 1,000 people in the United States in 2019, and 2.1 law enforcement officers per 1,000 people each year from 2020 to 2022. However, the number of law enforcement officers did dip to 2.0 officers per 1,000 people in 2023 before rebounding to 2.1 per 1,000 in 2024.

**Table 3. Law Enforcement Officers in the United States, 2015-2024**

| Year | Number of Law Enforcement Officers | Rate per 1,000 People |
|---|---|---|
| 2015 | 683,850 | 2.1 |
| 2016 | 687,643 | 2.1 |
| 2017 | 698,277 | 2.1 |
| 2018 | 710,428 | 2.2 |

[17] U.S. Department of Justice, *FY2019 Performance Budget, Community Oriented Policing Services*, February 12, 2018, p. 3.

[18] See, for example, the Enhancing COPS Hiring Program Grants for Local Law Enforcement Act (H.R. 3376); the Invest to Protect Act of 2023 (H.R. 3184 and S. 1144); the COPS on the Beat Grant Program Parity Act of 2023 (S. 1530); and the Filling Public Safety Vacancies Act (S. 972).

| Year | Number of Law Enforcement Officers | Rate per 1,000 People |
|---|---|---|
| 2019 | 711,387 | 2.2 |
| 2020 | 702,508 | 2.1 |
| 2021 | 694,774 | 2.1 |
| 2022 | 686,898 | 2.1 |
| 2023 | 668,375 | 2.0 |
| 2024 | 697,749 | 2.1 |

**Source:** Census Bureau's Annual Survey of Public Employment and Payroll. Rate calculated by the Congressional Research Service using U.S. population estimates from the Census Bureau.

Interest in law enforcement staffing levels stems from concerns among some policymakers about what effect it might have on public safety. The assumption that more law enforcement officers will result in lower levels of crime is based in economic theory. In theory, criminals act in rational ways, meaning that they balance the costs and benefits of different courses of action. As such, criminals will engage in criminal activity if they believe that the potential benefits outweigh the potential costs. Having more law enforcement officers theoretically increases the probability that criminals will be caught and punished, thereby increasing the costs associated with criminal activity and deterring criminal behavior. More arrests can also result in more criminals being incarcerated, which could have an incapacitation effect; in other words, criminals will not be able to commit more crimes because they are imprisoned. More law enforcement officers could also potentially decrease crime though specific deterrence (i.e., tracking specific offenders, who in turn reduce their criminal activity).

Those concerned about the effect of fewer law enforcement officers on public safety point to studies showing that having more police officers contributes to decreases in crime. They argue these studies suggest a decrease in police force size will result in more crime. The research on the relationship between the size of police forces and crime is mixed (see the text box below). Research suggests that the complete absence of law enforcement—during a police strike, for example—can result in an increase in crime,[19] but there is little research on the effects of a marginal decrease in the number of law enforcement officers. An exception is a 2021 study of two neighboring jurisdictions that revealed increases in violent and property crimes after Newark, NJ, laid off 13% of its police officers in 2010, while the adjacent Jersey City, NJ, was able to forgo layoffs, and experienced decreases in violent and property crimes during the same period.[20]

### Effects of the Number of Law Enforcement Officers on Crime

There is a robust body of research on the effects of increases in the number of law enforcement officers on crime levels. Researchers at various points in time have conducted studies to summarize the body of research on this topic. Generally, research on the effects of more law enforcement officers on crime levels has produced mixed results, and when research finds a positive effect, the size of the effect tends to be small. Methodological issues

[19] YongJei Lee, John E. Eck, and Nicholas Corsaro, "Conclusions from the History of Research into the Effects of Police Force Size on Crime—1968 Through 2013: A Historical Systematic Review," *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, vol. 12 (2016), pp. 433-434 (hereinafter, "Lee et al., "Effects of Police Force Size on Crime").

[20] Eric L. Piza and Vijay F. Chillar, "The Effect of Police Layoffs on Crime: A Natural Experiment Involving New Jersey's Two Largest Cities," *Justice Evaluation Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2021), pp. 163-183.

with these studies might make it difficult to measure how much of an effect more law enforcement officers have on crime.[21]

- One meta-analysis conducted in 2004 found that increasing the number of law enforcement officers is associated with a decrease in the amount of both violent and property crime. The researcher estimated that the increase in the number of law enforcement officers between 1991 and 2001 accounted for a 5% to 6% reduction in crime.[22]
- A 2006 review of studies on the effects of law enforcement on violent crime found mixed results. The studies in the review confirmed all possible results—law enforcement led to increases in violent crime, led to decreases in violent crime, and had no effect on violent crime.[23] The researchers concluded that there is not a consistent body of evidence to support the assertion that hiring more law enforcement officers can decrease violent crime.
- A 2015 meta-analysis found evidence that the number of law enforcement officers had an effect on crime rates, though the effect was small.[24] The authors concluded that the number of law enforcement officers have a small, negative effect on overall crime rates. But they also note that "when this relationship is examined across individual crime types, the effect decreases in magnitude, loses statistical significance and, in some cases, changes direction."[25]
- A 2016 meta-analysis concluded that the relationship between the size of a police force and crime is "negative, small, and not statistically significant."[26] The authors concluded that "merely increasing police force size does nothing to reduce crime."[27] The authors also found that more recent studies did not support a link between increased numbers of law enforcement officers and lower crime. The same was true for studies utilizing more rigorous research designs or statistical techniques.
- More recent research has found that an increase in the number of law enforcement officers can decrease crime. A 2019 study used a natural experiment created by cities that received COPS hiring grants in 2009 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-5); it estimated hiring grants increased police forces by 3.2% and crime rates in cities that received grants were 3.5% lower relative to cities that did not receive a grant.[28] A 2022 study found that additional police had an effect on homicide, but consistent with

[21] One of the challenges in studying the relationship between the number of law enforcement officers and crime is unraveling the simultaneity problem (i.e., when the value of one variable is determined by the value of a second variable, but at the same time the value of the second variable is determined by the value of the first variable). In the context of the relationship between the number of law enforcement officers and the amount of crime, the number of law enforcement officers is contingent upon the amount of crime (cities might hire additional officers in response to rising crime rates), but the amount of crime is determined by the number of officers (crime might decrease if more officers are hired or crime could appear to increase because more crimes are reported). If statistical models do not control for this problem, it could appear that having more officers leads to more crime. Researchers have noted that the statistical methods utilized to test the relationship between the number of law enforcement officers and crime might not be sensitive enough to detect a link between the two variables. They note, "in contrast to the quasi- and randomized controlled experimental literature, nonexperimental studies are easy to implement, but their collective findings may be too weak and unreliable to inform policy." There has been little change in the overall number of law enforcement officers in the United States since the early 1990s, which could make it hard to detect the effect of marginal increases in law enforcement officers on crime. Lee et al., "Effects of Police Force Size on Crime," pp. 446-447.

[22] Steven D. Levitt, "Understanding Why Crime Fell in the 1990s: Four Factors That Explain the Decline and Six That Do Not," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter 2004), p. 176.

[23] John E. Eck and Edward R. Maguire, "Have Changes in Policing Reduced Violent Crime? An Assessment of the Evidence," in *The Crime Drop in America, Revised Edition*, eds. Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 210-214.

[24] Michael L. Carriaga and John L. Worrall, "Police Levels and Crime: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *The Police Journal*, vol. 88 (December 2015), pp. 265-346.

[25] Ibid., p. 328.

[26] Lee et al., "Effects of Police Force Size on Crime," p. 445.

[27] Ibid., p. 446.

[28] Steven Mello, "More COPS, Less Crime," *Journal of Public Economics*, vol. 172 (April 2019), pp. 147-200.

some past research, the effect was small. The study found that one additional law enforcement officer is associated with 0.1 fewer homicides, meaning it would require hiring 10 new officers to prevent 1 homicide.[29]

Concerns about law enforcement staffing levels and their effects on crime might raise questions for policymakers about the scope of the COPS program. If Congress wants to fund the COPS program as a means of supporting public safety, the research on the effects of increasing the number of law enforcement officers on crime might raise questions about whether this is an effective way of accomplishing that goal. It has been argued that having the police engage in evidence-based practices such as hot-spots policing, problem-oriented policing, and focused deterrence is more effective at reducing crime than just increasing the number of law enforcement officers.[30] If Congress takes up legislation to reauthorize the COPS program, policymakers might consider whether to allow COPS grants to be used to aid law enforcement agencies in adopting evidence-based policing practices instead of or in addition to hiring additional law enforcement officers. On the other hand, law enforcement agencies might need a minimum level of staffing in order to engage in proactive, evidence-based policing activities while still being able to provide other policing services, such as responding to calls for service.[31]

In light of recent reports about law enforcement agencies losing officers due to resignations, transfers, or retirements, policymakers might consider whether to allow COPS funds to be used for purposes other than law enforcement officers' salaries that could help agencies hire and retain officers. Congress took a step in this direction through amendments made by the Recruit and Retain Act (see above). Policymakers might consider whether to make further changes to the COPS program regarding recruiting and retaining law enforcement officers by allowing grant recipients to use COPS grants for hiring or retention bonuses, to provide housing stipends for officers who live in the jurisdiction, to help officers repay student loans or take college courses that could help them advance in the department, or to fund studies of ways to streamline the hiring process or reshape the curriculum at training academies. Congress might also consider whether to allow COPS grants to be used for programs to promote law enforcement careers in high schools and colleges or to create internship or apprenticeship programs; or whether to allow the grants to be used to hire non-sworn personnel to handle administrative tasks, which could allow officers to spend more time on patrol and responding to calls for service.

## Law Enforcement Reform

Several high-profile deaths of people at the hands of law enforcement officers, particularly young Black men, over the past decade have contributed to ongoing demands for law enforcement reforms. Congressional efforts on this front culminated with the House's consideration and passage of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020 (H.R. 7120, 116th Congress) in June 2020 and the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021 (H.R. 1280, 117th Congress) in March 2021. Both pieces of legislation would have placed conditions on COPS grants as a means of promoting law enforcement reforms. Both bills would have

- prohibited COPS grant recipients from entering into a contract, such as a collective bargaining agreement, that would prevent DOJ from seeking or enforcing equitable or declaratory relief against a law enforcement agency

[29] Aaron Chalfin et al., "Police Force Size and Civilian Race," *American Economics Review: Insights*, vol. 4, no. 2 (June 2022), pp. 139-158.

[30] Lee et al., "Effects of Police Force Size on Crime," pp. 440-441.

[31] Jeremy M. Wilson and Alexander Weiss, *A Performance-Based Approach to Police Staffing and Allocation*, U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, Washington, DC, 2014, pp. 15-16.

engaging in a pattern or practice of unconstitutional misconduct, or that conflicts with any terms or conditions contained in a consent decree;

- required COPS grant recipients to have policies and procedures designed to eliminate racial profiling and show that they have eliminated any existing practices that permit or encourage racial profiling;
- made state and local governments ineligible for COPS funding unless they have a law that prohibits the use of no-knock warrants in drug cases;
- made state and local governments ineligible for COPS funding unless they have a law that prohibits the use of chokeholds or carotid holds by state and local law enforcement officers; and
- made state and local governments ineligible for COPS funding unless they have a law that makes it a criminal act for a law enforcement officer to engage in a sexual act with an individual in their custody.

Both bills would have also authorized COPS grants to be used to

- create civilian review boards;
- recruit, hire, incentivize, retain, develop, and train new career law enforcement officers or current law enforcement officers who move to communities where there are poor relationships between community members and the police or where there are high crime rates and officers will reside in or close to these communities;
- collect data on the number of law enforcement officers who move to the communities in which they work and its effect on crime; and
- develop strategies to recruit, hire, promote, retain, develop, and train a diverse and inclusive law enforcement workforce.

Some advocates and policymakers have argued that more resources should be invested in more general programs that could help reduce criminal behavior, such as antipoverty programs and mental health services, rather than investing additional resources in hiring more police officers. Others have argued that non-law enforcement personnel should respond to situations that do not involve threats of violence and where the presence of an armed officer could potentially escalate a situation. There have also been arguments for alternative responses to violence, such as interventions by community violence interruption organizations that try to break the cycle of violence and save lives without the involvement of law enforcement.

Even though the research is mixed on the effect of increasing the number of law enforcement officers in a jurisdiction, experts in the field note that having an adequate number of law enforcement officers is important to providing effective policing. Research suggests that attrition in law enforcement agencies can contribute to a greater workload for remaining officers; reduced morale, effectiveness, operational capacity, and service delivery; and accelerated loss of the highest-performing officers.[32] The Council on Criminal Justice also asserts that by diversifying recruitment efforts, law enforcement agencies can improve their relationship with the community. Recruiting more female officers could decrease the use of force because they are more likely to use communication skills instead of resorting to physical force, as a de-escalation strategy.[33] Recruiting and retaining more officers who are well suited to engage the public and hiring

[32] Jeremy M. Wilson et al., "Police Retention: A Systematic Review of the Research," *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, vol. 17 (2023), p. 10.

[33] Council on Criminal Justice, Task Force on Policing, *Recruitment, Diversity, and Retention*, May 2021, p. 7.

officers that reflect the demographics of the communities in which they work could increase community trust, if these officers are trained, supervised, and held accountable in ways that engender trust.[34] In addition, increasing the quality and diversity of police recruits may help lessen the likelihood of discriminatory policing.[35]

If Congress takes up legislation to reauthorize the COPS program, policymakers might consider whether to allow COPS grants to be used to support reforms at law enforcement agencies, such as those proposed in the George Floyd Justice in Policing acts. From FY2021 to FY2023, the explanatory statement to accompany the CJS appropriations act directed the COPS Office to use funding for community-policing development for specific purposes, such as crisis intervention and de-escalation training, supporting law enforcement agency accreditation, and diversity and antibias training. Congress could consider codifying these or other specifications in the authorization for the COPS program. Congress might also consider whether to allow law enforcement agencies to apply for COPS grants to support programs that provide alternative responses in certain situations, such as mental health professionals either responding with or in lieu of a law enforcement officer during calls for service involving individuals suffering from a mental health crisis or nonsworn personnel handling most traffic enforcement.

The George Floyd Justice in Policing reform legislation would have incentivized law enforcement reforms by placing conditions on COPS funding. Congress could consider providing similar or new reform incentives in a reauthorization bill. One question policymakers might face is how the incentive would be structured. The reform legislation would have made state and local governments ineligible to apply for funding if they did not have certain measures in place. Congress could promote reforms through a similar requirement, or policymakers could consider providing preferential consideration for grant applicants who meet particular requirements. Some provisions of the reform legislation would have required grant recipients to do something as a condition of receiving funding. One issue with that is that COPS grants have a limited implementation period and reform efforts can take time to implement. Also, unlike a formula grant program such as the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program,[36] state and local governments are much less likely to receive a portion of COPS funding each year as long as the program is funded. The lack of regular, annual funding might raise questions about how effective it would be to place reform-related requirements on COPS grants. In addition, if Congress did pass such requirements, recipients would not have to adhere to them after grant funding ends.

## Defining Community Policing

Under the authorization for the COPS program, grants can be awarded for hiring or rehiring law enforcement officers "for deployment in community-oriented policing," to procure technology to "to increase the number of officers deployed in community-oriented policing," or to facilitate the adoption of "community-oriented policing as an organization-wide philosophy." However, the authorization for the program does not contain a definition of *community-oriented policing*.[37]

It is not always clear what actually constitutes *community-oriented policing.* The COPS Office states community policing is a "philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] For more information on the JAG program, see CRS In Focus IF10691, *The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program*.

[37] See 34 U.S.C. §10389 (definitions).

immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime."[38] Two scholars, in their review of trends in policing, describe community policing as "a catchphrase that has been used to describe a potpourri of different strategies" and that "one complication in determining the extent to which [community policing] has transformed policing is determining exactly what it is."[39] A 2018 review of proactive policing strategies conducted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine stated that "despite [community policing's] longevity as a reform—it dates back more than three decades—there is still considerable variation in how community-oriented policing is defined."[40] The academy noted that community policing started with an emphasis on community-focused tactics, such as foot patrol, neighborhood watch, and community meetings or newsletters.[41] However, community policing practices evolved to include collective efficacy and empowerment; procedural justice and legitimacy; and efforts to increase police accountability through citizen review boards, body-worn cameras, and improved complaint processes.[42] In a literature review of community oriented policing and problem oriented policing, community oriented policing is described as "a broad policing strategy that relies heavily on community involvement and partnerships, and on police presence in the community, to address local crime and disorder."[43]

While there are different conceptualizations of community policing, some common elements emerge from the literature:[44]

- *An emphasis on partnerships:* Community policing posits that the police can rarely solve public safety problems alone; therefore, law enforcement should develop partnerships with community stakeholders (e.g., other government agencies, community members, nonprofit organizations/service providers, businesses, and the media) to develop solutions to problems and promote trust in police.
- *Citizen input:* Under community policing, law enforcement should engage the public in making decisions about public safety priorities, addressing identified problems, and making decisions about how their communities should be policed. In addition, the police should carefully consider citizen input when making policy decisions that affect the community.

[38] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, *Community Policing Defined*, 2014, https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-p157-pub.pdf.

[39] Edward R. Maguire and William R. King, "Trends in the Policing Industry," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 593 (May 2004), p. 23.

[40] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Proactive Policing: Effects on Crime and Communities* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2018), p. 64.

[41] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

[42] Ibid., p. 65.

[43] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Community-Oriented Policing and Problem-Oriented Policing, Literature Review: A Product of the Model Program Guide*, https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/community-oriented-problem-oriented-policing#2-0, last updated January 2023.

[44] See, for example, U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *Community Policing Defined*, 2014, https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-p157-pub.pdf; Gary W. Cordner, "Community Policing: Elements and Effects," in *Critical Issues in Policing*, 6th ed., eds. Roger G. Dunham and Geoffrey P. Alpert (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2010), pp. 432-449; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, *Understanding Community Policing: A Framework for Action*, NCJ 148457, August 1994, https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/commp.pdf; and Sarah Lawrence and Bobby McCarthy, *What Works in Community Policing? A Best Practices Context for Measure Y Efforts*, University of California Berkeley School of Law, The Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy, November 2013, https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/What_Works_in_Community_Policing.pdf.

- *A focus on prevention and problem solving:* Community policing promotes proactive efforts to address conditions that are contributing to public safety problems rather than responding to crime after it occurs. One of the more commonly cited problem-solving models in the community policing literature is SARA (scanning, analysis, response, and assessment). *Scanning* involves identifying and prioritizing problems. *Analysis* involves researching what is known about the problems. *Response* includes developing solutions to permanently reduce the number and extent of the problems. *Assessment* involves evaluating the success of the response to the identified problems.
- *Changing officer assignments:* One of the key tenets of community policing is a focus on long-term geographic assignments. This means assigning officers to a place (i.e., a specific beat) for an extended period of time to facilitate interactions between the officers and residents and foster a sense of mutual accountability for what happens in the neighborhood.
- *Fostering positive interactions:* Policing involves some negative or coercive interactions with members of the public, such as making arrests, issuing tickets, stopping people based on reasonable suspicion, or ordering people to desist disruptive behavior. As such, under community policing law enforcement also works to develop ways to have positive interactions with the public. The theory is that positive interactions can help offset the negative interactions, foster a sense of familiarity and trust, and allow police officers to become more knowledgeable about people and conditions on their beat.
- *Organizational change:* Community policing emphasizes the need for flatter organizations (i.e., reduced layers of hierarchy) and decentralized authority. These changes are necessary so that officers can act more independently, be more responsive to their communities, and take responsibility for their roles in community policing. In addition, management should empower officers to be proactive and creative in solving public safety problems and developing relationships with the community. Community policing also places an emphasis on organizational culture, mission, and values, and less emphasis on rules and policies, with the idea that if officers are instilled with certain values they will generally make good decisions. Evaluations of officers' performance should be based on the quality of their community policing and problem-solving activities instead of traditional performance indicators (e.g., tickets issued, arrests made, calls handled).
- *Access to information:* Community policing relies on collecting and producing data on a range of police functions—not just enforcement and call-handling activities—as a means to developing solutions to community problems and providing citizen-focused services. Community policing also emphasizes the need for police to conduct crime analysis at a more localized level (e.g., a neighborhood) so that officers can identify and respond to problem hotspots.

There may be some questions about whether COPS grants move law enforcement agencies to embrace community policing agency-wide rather than just at the officer level. According to the COPS Office, the agency has received more than $20 billion in funding and it has awarded grants to over 13,000 of the 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States.[45] However, data from

[45] U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *About COPS*, https://cops.usdoj.gov/ (continued...)

BJS indicate that as of 2020, 32% of police departments have a written community policing plan, though a majority of police departments serving jurisdictions of 50,000 or more people have such a plan.[46] BJS's data indicate that nearly 40% of police officers work in agencies that do not have a community policing plan.[47] A 2014 study concluded that COPS grants awarded to law enforcement agencies serving 50,000 or fewer people in the mid-1990s did not promote widespread adoption of community policing principles among these agencies.[48]

During the mid- to late 1990s, the COPS Office awarded billions of dollars in grants for law enforcement agencies to hire officers to engage in community policing. However, some scholars argue that there is not great consistency in what constitutes community policing, and the concept of community policing can just be a way for law enforcement agencies to present their old ways in a new package. For instance, two scholars have previously noted, "[law enforcement agencies] are managing to reconstitute their image away from the citizen-controller paradigm based in the autonomous legal order and towards a more comforting Normal Rockwell image—police as kind, community care-takers."[49] They contend that community policing is more about police transforming their image rather than the substance of their work.

Some research suggests that community policing might help improve the perception of the legitimacy of the police, but it has a limited effect on reducing crime and citizens' fear of crime. Policing scholars at George Mason's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy note

> Evidence for the effectiveness of community policing is mixed. Several systematic and narrative reviews find that its impact on crime prevention is limited and that it has little impact on reducing citizens' fear of crime.... However, community policing was originally intended to emphasize the non-crime-fighting roles of the police, such as building community trust, and to increase citizen satisfaction with and confidence in the police.... [A 2014 study found] that community policing is associated with significant increases in citizen ratings of satisfaction with the police and also has positive benefits for police legitimacy and citizen perceptions of disorder.[50]

At the same time, and consistent with the debate over what community policing is, these experts also note

> As with many areas of policing, research guidance on implementing community-oriented policing is limited. A key challenge is the diversity of strategies that have been deployed under the umbrella of community policing over time and across different agencies. The

aboutcops; and U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *U.S. Department of Justice FY2025 President's Budget, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services*, March 2024, p. 4.

[46] BJS reported that 92% of police departments serving jurisdictions of 1 million or more residents have a written community policing plan; 74% of departments serving jurisdictions of 500,000-999,999 residents have a plan; 62% of departments serving 250,000-499,999 residents and 100,000-249,999 residents have plan; 58% of departments serving jurisdictions of 50,000-99,999 residents have a plan; 48% of departments serving jurisdictions of 25,000-49,999 residents have a plan; 38% of departments serving jurisdictions of 10,000-24,999 residents have a plan; 28% of departments serving jurisdictions of 2,500-9,999 residents have a plan; and 24% of departments serving jurisdictions of 2,499 residents or fewer have a plan. Sean E. Goodison and Conor Brooks, *Local Police Departments, Procedures, Policies, and Technology, 2020—Statistical Tables*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 307405, Washington, DC, November 2023, p. 17.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Scott W. Phillips and S. Marlon Gayadeen, "The Coercive Impact of Federal Grants: COPS Grants and the Diffusion of the Community Policing Philosophy," *Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, vol. 87 (2014), pp. 49-60.

[49] Victor E. Kappeler and Peter B. Kraska, "A Textual Critique of Community Policing: Police Adaption to High Modernity," *Policing: An International Journal of Policing Strategies & Management*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1998), p. 306.

[50] Cynthia Lum et al., *An Evidence Assessment of the Recommendations of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing—Implementation and Research Priorities*, Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, 2016, p. 28.

> extent to which departments who claim to be doing community policing engage in community partnerships, systematic problem-solving, and organizational transformation varies substantially, and there is not always a formal process for citizen engagement in identifying and responding to problems.[51]

Before allocating more funding for COPS hiring grants, policymakers might consider whether there need to be clearer expectations for how law enforcement agencies use the officers hired with the grants, or at least whether there should be some limitations on COPS-funded officers' activities. For example, policymakers could consider legislation that would prevent law enforcement agencies from placing COPS-funded officers on SWAT teams or specialized units that engage in aggressive enforcement of specific offenses.

## Clarifying the Purpose of the COPS Program

The COPS program has had multiple goals since its inception, some of which arguably may not have fully aligned at times. This may be a good time to assess program goals.

On one hand, the COPS program was created as a means of adding 100,000 new law enforcement officers to police forces across the country. As discussed above, more recent legislation introduced in Congress has viewed the COPS program as a way to help law enforcement agencies boost their ranks. In this sense, the COPS program is a means of aiding law enforcement hiring. On another hand, one of the stated purposes of the COPS program was to promote the adoption of community policing by helping law enforcement agencies hire officers to engage in community policing activities. The COPS program has also been viewed as a way to address violent crime in the United States by placing more officers on the streets.

If policymakers take up legislation to reauthorize the COPS program, they might consider which goals to prioritize and whether any goals conflict. For example, there are questions about how much of an effect the COPS program had on agencies adopting community policing practices, as discussed previously. A law enforcement agency hiring a few officers to engage in community policing might not reorient the entire agency toward this practice. Past literature on the issue of community policing suggests that in order for community policing to be effective it requires organizational change rather than having a small number of officers conducting community policing activities.[52] Plus, if a law enforcement agency retains officers whose salaries were initially funded with COPS grants, they are not required to continue using those officers for community policing after the grant period expires and they assume responsibility for funding the positions. If policymakers want to promote the adoption of community policing in more agencies across the country, they might consider whether focusing on helping law enforcement agencies hire new officers is the best way to accomplish this goal.

If policymakers want the COPS program to be a source of support for law enforcement, this might raise a question about if it is necessary to require law enforcement agencies to hire officers for community policing. As discussed above, several amendments to the COPS program since it

[51] Ibid., p. 29.

[52] See, for example, U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, *Community Policing Defined*, 2014, https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-p157-pub.pdf; Gary W. Cordner, "Community Policing: Elements and Effects," in *Critical Issues in Policing*, 6th ed., eds. Roger G. Dunham and Geoffrey P. Alpert (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2010), pp. 432-449; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, *Understanding Community Policing: A Framework for Action*, NCJ 148457, August 1994, https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/commp.pdf; and Sarah Lawrence and Bobby McCarthy, *What Works in Community Policing? A Best Practices Context for Measure Y Efforts*, University of California Berkeley School of Law, The Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy, November 2013, https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/What_Works_in_Community_Policing.pdf.

was created by the 1994 Crime Act have added purposes that focus more on supporting law enforcement operations or programs rather than advancing community policing. If Congress views the COPS program as a way to help state and local governments address violent crime, for instance, policymakers might consider whether the COPS program should retain as heavy a focus on helping law enforcement agencies hire new officers or whether greater emphasis should be placed on providing funding to help law enforcement agencies in other ways (e.g., to encourage adoption of evidence-based crime prevention programs and practices).

## Continuing the COPS Program

Policymakers might also consider whether to continue supporting the COPS program. While many cities saw an increase in violent crime in 2020 and 2021, which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and protests related to George Floyd's death in Minneapolis, MN, violent crime decreased in 2022 and 2023.[53] While violent crime in some cities is still above the level it was before 2020, it is generally at historically low levels. This, combined with concerns about what effects more police have on communities of color and the mixed research on the effect of more police on crime rates, might raise questions about whether there should be continued funding for the COPS program and whether those funds could be allocated to other programs to address violence.

Some questions have been raised about whether the COPS program addresses issues that should be the focus of federal policy. For instance, a Heritage Foundation report published several years ago asserts that crime is not a national issue—rather, it is an issue that all states share in common—and it would be most appropriate for Congress's role in addressing crime to focus on criminal matters that are squarely within the purview of federal law enforcement.[54] It suggests that local governments are better positioned to fund law enforcement agencies because there is more direct oversight of how those agencies use those funds.[55] More direct oversight means that law enforcement agencies have an incentive to spend funds provided by state and local governments in a manner consistent with legislative and constituent goals.[56] Also, if law enforcement agencies do not spend their funding properly, it is easier for local governments to reallocate those funds for other uses.[57] While the COPS Office has the responsibility of monitoring how grant funds are spent, there might be a question about if the office can effectively monitor its grant load given its level of resources and with grant recipients being spread across the country.[58] Past audits of COPS grants conducted by DOJ's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) have found that some grantees have misused COPS funding, including improperly

[53] Ernesto Lopez and Bobby Boxerman, *Crime Trends in U.S. Cities: Year-End 2023 Update*, Council on Criminal Justice, January 2024, https://councilоncj.org/crime-trends-in-u-s-cities-year-end-2023-update/.

[54] Brian Walsh and David Muhlhausen, *COPS Reform: Why Congress Can't Make the COPS Program Work*, Heritage Foundation, September 26, 2008, https://www.heritage.org/crime-and-justice/report/cops-reform-why-congress-cant-make-the-cops-program-work.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] The COPS Office's FY2025 congressional budget submission indicates that the COPS Office has 100 authorized FTEs. The COPS Office did not provide a break out of how many of these positions are grant managers.

charging salaries and fringe benefits to COPS grants and supplanting local funds.[59] It is possible that these audit findings do not apply to COPS grants in general.[60]

There are also questions about whether the COPS program met its original goals of funding 100,000 new law enforcement officers. A 2005 study conducted by the Government Accountability Office found that COPS funding paid for a total of about 88,000 additional *officer-years* from 1994 to 2001.[61] An evaluation of the COPS program sponsored by the National Institute of Justice found that under the best-case scenario, of the 105,000 officer and officer equivalents funded by the COPS program by May 1999, an estimated 84,600 officers would have been hired by 2001 before declining to 83,900 officers by 2003.[62] Under the worst-case scenario, an estimated 69,000 officers would have been hired by 2001 before declining to 62,700 officers by 2003. A more recent study that examined the effects of COPS hiring grants awarded from 2009 to 2016 found that for each officer position funded through a hiring grant, the sworn police force size increased between 0.3 and 0.5 officers.[63] The study indicates that while COPS hiring grants did increase the number of law enforcement officers, one funded position did not result in one additional officer on the force.[64]

There may be some questions as well about whether COPS grants move law enforcement agencies to embrace community policing agency-wide rather than just at the officer level, as discussed previously.

[59] See, for example, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Hiring Program Grant Awarded to the Camden County Police Department, Camden, New Jersey*, Audit Report 22-009, Washington, DC, November 2021; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Hiring Program Grant Awarded to the Essex County Sheriff's Office, Newark, New Jersey*, Audit Report 20-095, Washington, DC, August 2020; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Hiring Program Grant Awarded to the Arlington Police Department, Arlington, Texas*, Audit Report 20-070, Washington, DC, June 2020; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Tribal Resources Grant Program Awards to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Durant, Oklahoma*, Audit Report GR-60-19-013, Washington, DC, September 2019; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Grants Awarded to DeKalb County, Georgia*, Audit Report GR-40-15-002, Washington, DC, October 2014; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services 2009 COPS Hiring Recovery Program Grant Awarded to the Toledo Police Department, Toledo, Ohio*, Audit Report GR-50-14-007, Washington, DC, July 2014; and U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Hiring Recovery Program Grant Administered by the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma*, Audit Report GR-60-14-005, Washington, DC, March 2014.

[60] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, review of grants made to the Honolulu Police Department and Polk County, FL, found no issues with how those grants were managed.

[61] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Community Policing Grants: COPS Grants Were a Modest Contributor to Declines in Crime in the 1990s*, GAO-06-104, October 2005, p. 57.

[62] Jeffery A. Roth et al., *National Evaluation of the COPS Program*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, NCJ183643, August 2000, http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183643.pdf.

[63] Steven Mello, *Empirical Analysis of COPS Hiring Program Grants, 2009-2016*, U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services Office, 2024, p. 9.

[64] There are several reasons why a law enforcement agency might not be able to turn a funded position into a new officer on the force: the agency might not be able to find enough qualified candidates, a candidate might not pass a background check, candidates might not complete academy training, or an officer might be let go or resign during his or her probationary period.

# Appendix. Funding for Programs Under the COPS Account

**Table A-1. Appropriations for the COPS Account, by Program: FY2016-FY2025**

(in millions of dollars)

| | FY2016 | FY2017 | FY2018 | FY2019 | FY2020 | FY2021 | FY2022 | FY2023 | FY2024 | FY2025 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| COPS Hiring Program | 187 | 195 | 223 | 229 | 235 | 237 | 246 | 324 | 256 | 256 |
| *Transfer to Tribal Resources Grant Program* | *30* | — | *30* | *27* | *27* | *30* | *32* | *34* | *34* | *34* |
| *Community Policing Development* | *10* | *5* | *10* | *7* | *7* | — | — | — | — | — |
| *Regional Information Sharing Program* | — | *35* | *36* | *37* | *38* | *40* | *42* | *44* | *44* | *44* |
| *POLICE Act* | — | *8* | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| *Tribal Access Program* | — | — | — | *3* | *3* | *3* | *3* | *4* | *4* | *4* |
| *Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness* | — | — | — | *2* | *5* | *8* | *8* | *10* | *10* | *10* |
| *Collaborative Reform Model* | *10* | *10* | — | — | — | — | *5* | *8* | *8* | *8* |
| Community Policing Development | — | — | — | — | — | 35 | 40 | 45 | 25 | 25 |
| *Crisis Intervention Teams* | — | — | — | — | — | *10* | *10* | *11* | — | — |
| *De-escalation Training* | — | — | — | — | — | *15* | *15* | *16* | — | — |
| *Accreditation Support* | — | — | — | — | — | *5* | *8* | *9* | — | — |
| *Community Policing Development Microgrants* | — | — | — | — | — | *3* | *5* | *6* | — | — |
| *Diversity and Anti-bias Training* | — | — | — | — | — | *2* | *2* | *3* | — | — |
| Methamphetamine Enforcement and Clean-up | 11 | 10 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| *Transfer to the Drug Enforcement Administration* | *11* | *10* | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Law Enforcement Equipment and Technology Program | — | — | — | — | — | — | 112 | 178 | 247 | — |
| Anti-methamphetamine Task Forces | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 13 | 15 | 15 | 16 | 16 | 16 |
| Anti-heroin Task Forces | 7 | 10 | 32 | 32 | 35 | 35 | 35 | 35 | 35 | 35 |
| Regional Gang Task Forces | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |

| | FY2016 | FY2017 | FY2018 | FY2019 | FY2020 | FY2021 | FY2022 | FY2023 | FY2024 | FY2025 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| POLICE Act | — | — | 10 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| STOP School Violence Act | — | — | — | 25 | 50 | 53 | 73 | 73 | 73 | 73 |
| Law Enforcement Officer De-escalation Training | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 20 | 20 |

**Source:** FY2016 and FY2017 appropriations were provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. FY2018-FY2024 appropriations were taken from the explanatory statement to accompany the annual Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations acts and the text of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (P.L. 117-159). FY2025 appropriations are based on CRS analysis of the text of the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4).

**Notes:** Amounts in italics are set-asides.

## Author Information

Nathan James
Analyst in Crime Policy

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