



**SHERIFF'S OFFICE
CITY OF STAUNTON**

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MATTHEW H. ROBERTSON
SHERIFF

Date: July 9, 2020

To: Members of Council

From: Sheriff M. H. Robertson

Ref: Courthouse Security fee increase

Dear members of City Council,

As you are aware, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 149 regarding courthouse security fees this year. This Bill gives localities the option to raise this fee from \$10 to \$20. The adoption of this fee would increase revenue for the courts and allow us to hire the personnel we have needed for several years. The inevitability of increasing the number of staff at the courthouse is real and can not be put off any longer. There has been mention that this fee is across the board and will affect everyone in the city. This however is far from the truth. In reality, this fee will not affect everyone, only those that violate the law and are found guilty. The increased revenue from this fee will provide resources at the cost of an offender and not burden the law-abiding citizens in our community. Many localities across the state, including our neighboring localities, have already adopted the increase because of this very reason.

Just to give you a little insight on the reasoning behind this and the need for additional staff funded from this increase, the Staunton Sheriff's Office has been collecting data over the past two years regarding the increase in responsibilities and workload. It shows a remarkable increase in several areas over the past several years that directly affect the ability of this office to carry out its duties effectively, efficiently and safely. With the courts starting to reopen and hear more in-person cases and with the backlog due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our office is experiencing an overload because of the restrictions placed on the courts and the necessary precautions that have to be taken. For example, this past Wednesday in General District Court we had a 222-case docket. This is a small docket for any other time and would only require the use of one courtroom and take two deputies to run. However, with the "social distancing" requirements put in place by our government as well as the Supreme Court of Virginia, this docket required the use three courtrooms to separate people and also required five deputies to provide the necessary security, screening and logistics. This included two deputies at the metal detector in order to screen people properly, ask the necessary questions concerning Covid-19 exposure, taking temperatures of everyone that enters the courthouse and directing those people to the proper staging area in order to comply with restrictions.

As you will see from the numbers provided in this letter, coupled with the fact that we have been operating at the same number of staff since April 2006, there is a paramount need for additional staff.

Transportation: The Staunton Sheriff's Office is responsible for the transportation of prisoners to and from court. These transports range from local, statewide and out of state jails/correctional facilities. They also include a wide variety of offenders and mental health patients with a majority of these transports requiring two deputies due to distance and to ensure officer safety.

Year	Transports to court	Mental health transports	Extraditions (Out of State transports)
2013	89	22	0
2014	85	19	7
2015	102	18	8
2016	126	23	3
2017	117	14	8
2018	200	16	5
2019	241	20	7

Court Activities: One of the main duties of our office is to provide security for the courts and ensure the safety of the people that work, visit and conduct business in the courthouse. And with over 36,000 people that entered the courthouse last year, you can surely understand my concern. Over the past several years we have seen an increase in the number of days we hold court as well as an increase in the number of cases on our dockets. With the increase in numbers in a majority of courts across the state, several jurisdictions had additional Judges appointed in order to handle the increased case load. Staunton was no exception. Our courts saw the addition of three Judges to the bench. One in Circuit Court, one in General District Court and one in the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. This alone has added a tremendous strain on staff in our office and is justification for the addition of deputies.

Number of court days:

Year	Circuit Court	General District Court	Juvenile and Domestic Court	Total Courts in Session
2013	128	146	157	431
2014	133	145	148	426
2015	132	135	150	417
2016	139	124	174	437
2017	130	113	202	445
2018	149	117	213	479
2019	150	117	213	480

Civil Process: Another responsibility of our office is to serve civil process. The process we serve includes many different types of papers. They include subpoenas, summons, warrants in debts, divorce papers, and Writs of possession to just name a few. We also serve arrest warrants issued by the Court. Below is a list of the number of papers we have served over the past several years.

Year	Number of Civil Process received	Number of arrest warrants received
2013	20,856	149
2014	19,285	159
2015	22,888	158
2016	23,224	141
2017	24,620	148
2018	25,156	212
2019	25,149	220

As you can see, the numbers that have been provided above are just for the years from 2013 to 2019. As I stated before, our staff has not increased since 2006, and I'm sure you can understand why our office needs help.

In closing, I want to say that I am not asking for anything that other localities have already asked for and received. The Senate Bill that was passed and signed by our Governor was passed to allow localities to collect the extra fees to offset cost to localities. My goal is to provide the citizens of Staunton with the best services I can. If this means assessing additional cost to offenders in order to achieve this, then so be it. What I don't want to do is penalize law abiding citizens by making them pay, through increased taxes, for what someone else has done. The numbers that I have provided you have been provided to City Council for the past two budget cycles. I have asked for additional staff for three years to no avail. This fee is a way to pay for additional staff and not burden taxpayers that choose to not violate the law.

Therefore, I respectfully ask that you approve the additional \$10 fee for courthouse security.

Sincerely,

Matthew H. Robertson
Staunton Sheriff