



**Business Research &
Diagnostics**

EVIDENCE-BASED RESULTS

Understanding Recruitment and Retention in the BC Sheriff Service

July 2023



Understanding Recruitment and Retention in the BC Sheriff Service

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Executive Summary

The British Columbia Sheriff Service (BCSS) is one of the oldest law enforcement agencies in the province, providing security and support to the Provincial Court of BC, Supreme Court of BC, and the BC Court of Appeal. While it remains a critical component of the province's law enforcement community, issues with recruitment and retention have long impacted the agency, occasionally leading to staff shortages that could interfere with the delivery of justice through court closures and trial delays.

Over the past three years, problems with staffing shortages have once again come to the forefront, with the number of exits surpassing the organization's capacity to recruit and train new staff. Consequently, there have been numerous instances where courtrooms throughout the province have operated without a Deputy Sheriff present. If this situation continues unchecked, it could lead to court closures and limited access to justice for British Columbians.

In late 2022, the Chief Sheriff requested that the Business Research & Diagnostics team (BR&D) conduct an in-depth research project to identify the causal factors behind the recurring issues of recruitment and retention. In response to this request, the BR&D Team undertook the most extensive mixed methods review of the BCSS to date. Between October 2022 and February 2023, the team conducted 35 focus groups across the province, involving Deputy Sheriffs, Sergeants, Staff Sergeants, Inspectors, and Superintendents. Additionally, the team conducted 17 structured interviews with the two Deputy Chief Sheriffs, the Chief Sheriff, branch subject matter experts, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Court Services Branch, and members of the Superior Courts Judiciary, Provincial Court Judiciary, BC Prosecution Service, and BC Bar Association. To supplement the focus groups and interviews, both an all-staff exploratory survey and a data portal were implemented, providing participants with a safe platform to anonymously disclose any sensitive information.

The project collected over 800 pages of data, and upon completion, it was able to clearly identify the issues impacting recruitment and retention across the BCSS. Failures in the recruitment of new staff were found to be primarily caused by low and uncompetitive pay and benefits, inadequate allocation of resources for recruitment efforts, and the structure and management of the recruitment process. Regarding the retention of existing staff within the BCSS, the project found that it was mostly affected by low and uncompetitive pay and benefits, structural and management issues resulting from the BCSS's placement within Court Services Branch, and dissatisfaction with the limited role and duties of Deputy Sheriffs. These factors were followed by dissatisfaction with leadership at the executive and supervisory levels, as well as with the organization's supports and systems, including tools and workspace, professional development, and staffing practices. Some of the issues brought forward during the course of the research were historic or legacy issues that, while still causing problems, have improved somewhat under the current Assistant Deputy Minister; however, other matters remain unaddressed.

While there are numerous recommendations to address the issues identified, several critical changes will likely need to be implemented to reduce attrition rates and enable the BCSS to replenish its complement of sheriffs. These changes include a significant increase in sheriff pay to narrow the gap with external agencies competing in the same labour market, the detachment of the BCSS from Court Services Branch, and the establishment of the BCSS as an independent agency reporting directly to the Deputy Attorney General. Additionally, there should be an expansion of sheriff roles and responsibilities, enhanced organizational support for sheriffs, higher levels of training for managers and supervisors, and a thorough assessment of the existing radio and communication infrastructure.

Introduction

Overview of the BC Sheriff Service

The British Columbia Sheriff Service is one of the oldest law enforcement agencies in the province, providing security and support to the Provincial Court of British Columbia, Supreme Court of British Columbia, and the British Columbia Court of Appeal. The origins of the BCSS date back to the mid-19th century when the province was a British colony.

The sheriff service was formally established in 1860 under the *Sheriffs Act*, which created the office of the sheriff and granted them the authority to execute court orders and writs, among other law enforcement functions at the time. As the province grew and developed, so did the role of the sheriff service. In the mid-20th century, the service began to assume a larger role in the province's criminal justice system. Sheriffs began specializing in a wide range of duties, differentiating themselves from other law enforcement officers such as municipal police agencies and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The BCSS as we know it today was created in 1974 through the formal merger of the nine existing county sheriff offices into a single entity under the authority of the Attorney General of British Columbia. In 1979, the *Sheriff Act* was passed to establish the BCSS as a separate and distinct law enforcement agency within the province. The *Sheriff Act* of 1979 outlines the responsibilities of the BCSS, including providing courtroom security and executing court orders and warrants. The *Sheriff Act* was revised in 1996, with subsequent amendments in 2002, 2009 and 2017, to reflect modern law enforcement practices and the changing needs of the justice system in B.C.

Throughout its history, the BCSS has remained committed to upholding the rule of law and maintaining order in the province. Its officers are dedicated and professional law enforcement officials in B.C., and their work is essential to ensuring that the justice system operates smoothly and efficiently.

Role of a Sheriff

Today, sheriffs in B.C. serve as provincial peace officers and collaborate closely with various stakeholders in the justice system to ensure the secure operation of all levels of court within the province. Their primary focus is to provide protective services for the Judiciary, Crown, defence, public, and court personnel, as well as all individuals participating in the justice system. Deputy Sheriffs contribute to establishing a safe environment across all court locations in B.C.

The responsibilities of sheriffs include:

- Ensuring court safety and the well-being of its users.
- Coordinating court appearances, including high-security situations.
- Conducting ground and air prisoner escorts, which involve transporting accused and convicted individuals to and from courthouses, correctional facilities, police detachments, and hospitals.
- Supervising holding cells, ensuring the proper custody and timely presentation of accused individuals in court, and conducting necessary checks and clearances before their release.
- Engaging in intelligence gathering and risk assessments, which entail evaluating and mitigating threats and risks associated with high-security and high-profile trials, appearances, and transports.
- Managing and administering juries, facilitating the selection process, and overseeing the security of jurors during criminal and civil trials at the Supreme Courts of British Columbia.
- Providing document services, including serving court orders, civil/family warrants of arrest, and orders of committal.
- Executing arrest warrants and exercising their authority as peace officers to arrest and detain individuals who disrupt the peace during the performance of their mandated duties.

History of Retention Issues

For the past 10 years or more, the BC Sheriff Service has faced persistent challenges in retaining Deputy Sheriffs, leading to acute staffing shortages that have impacted the operation of the Provincial and Supreme Courts of British Columbia. While the Lower Mainland region has been particularly affected, the Northern region and remote areas of the province have also experienced the consequences of these shortages.

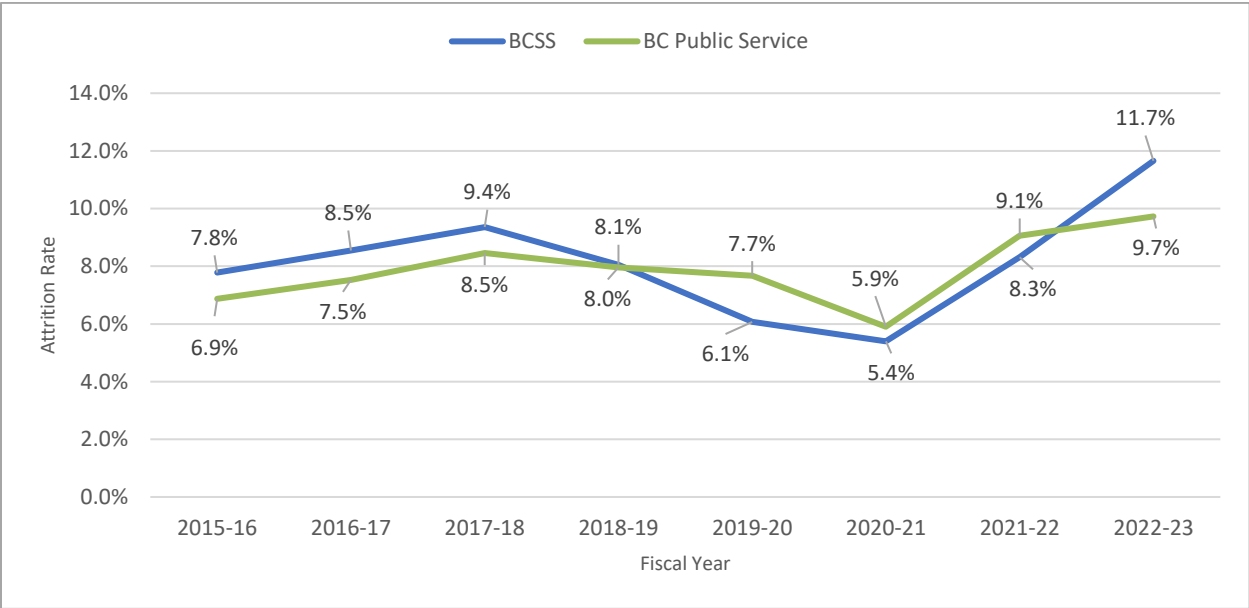
The issue reached a critical level in the winter of 2017 when the number of sheriffs on staff fell to an insufficient level to meet the organization's and courts' needs. One of the primary reasons for this was the ongoing lack of funding and budgetary pressures in the BCSS. The BCSS had been operating with a fixed budget for several years, which failed to keep pace with increasing staffing costs and other operational expenses. As a result, the BCSS had to make budget allocation changes over time, leading to a reduction in the number of employed sheriffs. Additionally, the organization faced a vacancy rate of approximately 20% for uniformed officers, significantly higher than other law enforcement agencies in the province. These factors combined resulted in several issues for the province's justice system, including increased workload for existing staff, longer wait times for court appearances, and delays and procedural stays in some high-profile trials due to a lack of available sheriffs for courtroom security and accused transport.

In response to these staffing challenges, the BCSS secured additional funding in 2017 to increase the number of sheriffs and the frequency of recruitment classes. Other initiatives to address staffing challenges included salary and benefits increases, additional training and development opportunities, and streamlining the recruitment process. However, despite these efforts, the staffing shortages within the BCSS continue to be a concern, as the organization is no longer able to attract enough applicants to fill recruitment classes and address the shortages. The lack of applicants is further exacerbated by the number of sheriffs leaving the organization, creating many vacancies that impact operations and workloads.

The attrition rate is the most commonly used metric in the BC Public Service for assessing employee retention. It represents the percentage of employees who leave an organization, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, over a specific timeframe. The attrition rate is calculated by dividing the number of permanent departures, including resignations, retirements, permanent transfers, and other voluntary or involuntary terminations, by the average number of employees during the same timeframe. Measuring attrition rate serves the primary purpose of gaining insights into an organization's employee retention efforts and identifying potential areas for improvement. High attrition rates can indicate underlying issues such as poor management, inadequate compensation or benefits, limited career growth opportunities, or an unfavourable workplace culture, among other factors.

Over the course of eight fiscal years, the BCSS has maintained an average attrition rate of 8.2%, with significant year-to-year variation. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the BCSS experienced a slight but consistent upward trend in the overall attrition rate, which underwent a notable reversal during the pandemic. However, since fiscal year 2020-21, the attrition rate has sharply increased and stands at 11.7% as of the fiscal year-end for 2022-23 (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - BC Sheriff Service Overall Attrition Rates Compared to BC Public Service



In fiscal year 2022-23, the overall attrition rate for the BCSS was approximately 2 percentage points higher than that of the BC Public Service. Although this difference may seem small, the impact of attrition on the BCSS is greater due to the higher cost, longer delays, and increased complexity associated with hiring and training Deputy Sheriffs to fill the vacancies left by departing employees.

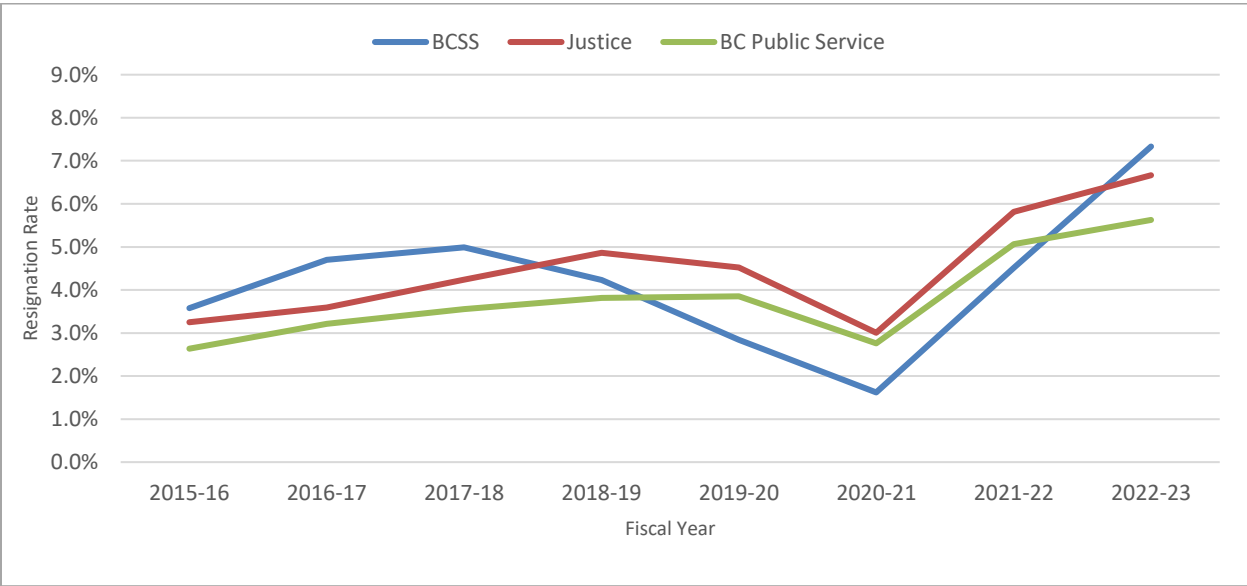
While the attrition rate encompasses both voluntary and involuntary departures, it is important to analyze employee-initiated exits separately to understand the impact of employees who choose to leave the organization. The retirement rate in the BCSS has remained steady between 1% and 2.5% since fiscal year 2015-16. However, the resignation rate has shown fluctuations across fiscal years. When compared to the rest of the justice sector and the BC Public Service as a whole, the pre-pandemic resignation rates from the BCSS have been slightly higher than those of the justice sector and BC Public Service. During the pandemic, BCSS resignation rates experienced a significant decline, dropping below the rates of the

justice sector and BC Public Service. However, post-pandemic, there has been a notable increase in resignations. At the end of the 2022-23 fiscal year, the BCSS had a resignation rate of 7.3%, which is approximately 0.6 percentage points higher than the justice sector and 1.7 percentage points higher than the BC Public Service overall (*Table 1, Figure 2*).

Table 1 - BC Sheriff Service Resignation Rates Compared to the Justice Sector and BC Public Service

Fiscal Year	BCSS	Justice Sector	BC Public Service
2015-16	3.6%	3.3%	2.6%
2016-17	4.7%	3.6%	3.2%
2017-18	5.0%	4.2%	3.6%
2018-19	4.2%	4.9%	3.8%
2019-20	2.8%	4.5%	3.9%
2020-21	1.6%	3.0%	2.8%
2021-22	4.5%	5.8%	5.1%
2022-23	7.3%	6.7%	5.6%

Figure 2 - BC Sheriff Service Resignation Rates Compared to the Justice Sector and BC Public Service



Resignation rates in the BCSS are notably higher amongst employees under the age of 30, and employees aged 30 to 39 (*Table 2*). These trends correlate with higher resignation rates among employees with lower service seniority (*Table 3*). These trends are not unique to the BCSS; resignation rates for younger employees and employees with less than 5 years of service are comparable in the wider justice sector (*Table 4*).

Table 2 - BC Sheriff Service Resignation Rates by Age Group

Fiscal Year	<30	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
2015-16	10.4%	5.0%	2.6%	1.8%	0.0%
2016-17	12.3%	9.9%	2.6%	0.0%	7.2%
2017-18	19.9%	7.7%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%
2018-19	15.8%	6.4%	0.6%	2.4%	7.4%
2019-20	1.3%	10.3%	1.1%	0.7%	0.0%
2020-21	4.4%	1.6%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%
2021-22	14.0%	5.4%	1.8%	1.3%	6.1%
2022-23	21.9%	11.4%	4.1%	1.8%	0.0%

Table 3 - BC Sheriff Service Resignation Rates by Estimated Service Seniority

Fiscal Year	0 - 5 Years	5 - 10 Years	10 - 15 Years	15 - 20 Years	20+ Years
2015-16	7.2%	6.5%	1.3%	2.8%	0.0%
2016-17	11.9%	4.6%	4.0%	1.3%	1.7%
2017-18	12.9%	9.0%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%
2018-19	7.8%	7.0%	4.7%	0.0%	1.7%
2019-20	4.8%	4.6%	3.8%	0.0%	0.8%
2020-21	3.1%	1.3%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%
2021-22	8.9%	5.7%	2.3%	3.1%	0.0%
2022-23	17.7%	7.0%	1.2%	4.3%	0.7%

Table 4 - Resignation Rates - Younger Age Groups and Newer Employees Compared to Justice Sector

Fiscal Year	Age <30		Age 30-39		Service Seniority 0 - 5 Years	
	BCSS	Justice	BCSS	Justice	BCSS	Justice
2015-16	10.4%	10.6%	5.0%	5.1%	7.2%	8.4%
2016-17	12.3%	12.5%	9.9%	5.6%	11.9%	10.8%
2017-18	19.9%	13.8%	7.7%	6.5%	12.9%	12.1%
2018-19	15.8%	12.1%	6.4%	8.7%	7.8%	11.4%
2019-20	1.3%	10.6%	10.3%	6.7%	4.8%	10.3%
2020-21	4.4%	7.7%	1.6%	4.2%	3.1%	6.6%
2021-22	14.0%	16.3%	5.4%	6.9%	8.9%	12.7%
2022-23	21.9%	16.9%	11.4%	8.5%	17.7%	17.5%

When faced with an employee departure, many other organizations within the justice and public safety sector and the BC Public Service have access to a large pool of pre-trained and educated individuals with diverse post-secondary or vocational training. Often, when a vacancy arises, the affected business unit can advertise the position through the BC Public Service Agency, screen and shortlist available candidates, extend a job offer, and onboard a new employee relatively quickly.

However, this is not the case for the BCSS. Since Deputy Sheriffs are armed peace officers, the recruitment and screening process for these positions is extensive, including 14 weeks of Sheriff Recruit

Training at the Justice Institute of BC. While this thorough process is necessary to ensure the suitability of candidates, it significantly lengthens the onboarding period for new sheriffs and amplifies the importance of staff retention within the BCSS compared to other areas of the BC Public Service.

The following section outlines the steps involved in recruiting a Deputy Sheriff and provides an overview of the time required for each step (*Table 5*).

Table 5 - BC Sheriff Service Recruitment Process as of 2022

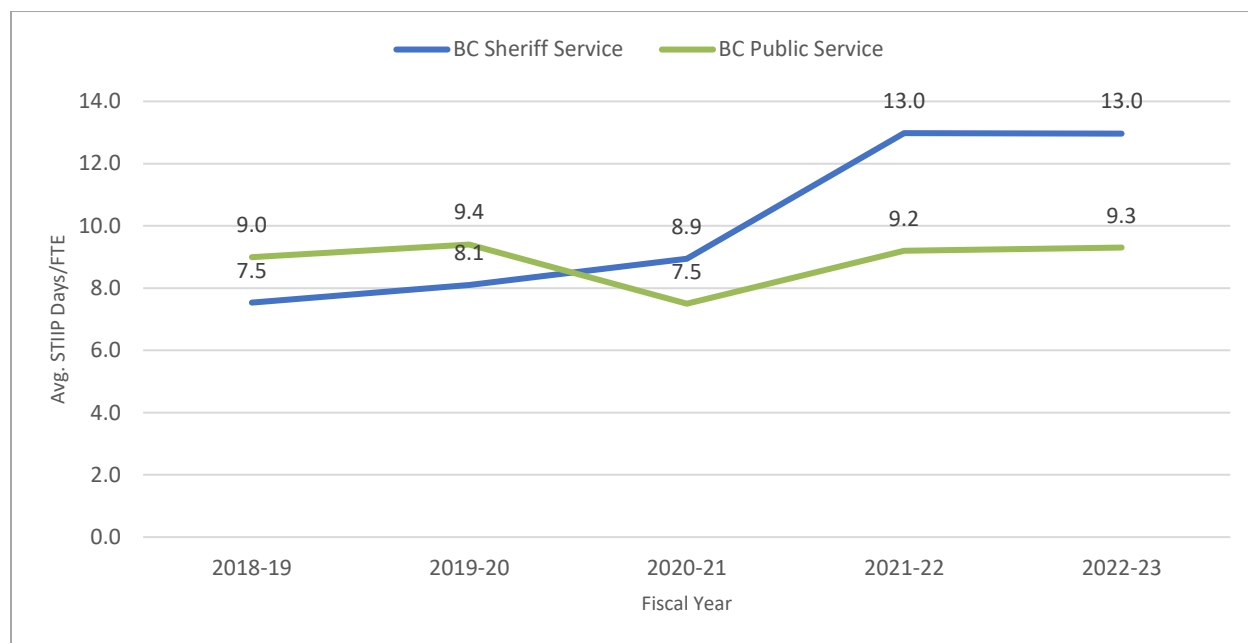
Recruitment Stage	Time Requirement	Notes
Job Posting	4-6 weeks	Open for applications on the BC Public Service website
Stage 1	Due 1 day after posting closes	Basic documentation including Driver's License, Proof of Eligibility to work in Canada, Proof of Grade 12
Stage 2	Due one week after Stage 1 documents have been received	English Requirement, First Aid, Typing Test, Driver's Abstract, Class 4 Learners, and BC Public Service Security Screening Questionnaire
Stage 3	4-6 weeks after stage two and must be completed no more than six months before class date	Completion of the Sheriff Officer Physical Abilities Test (SOPAT) or the Sheriff Officer Fitness and Agility Strength Test (SOFAST)
Interviews	3-6 weeks depending on number of interviews required	Basic competency-based interviews of all candidates remaining in the hiring pool
Enhanced Security Screening	3-12 weeks to complete and get needed reports back	CPIC and provincial criminal record checks and Computer Voice Stress Analysis
Medical Assessment	1-2 weeks to complete and get needed reports back	Comprehensive medical examination by an Occupational Health Programs physician which includes visual and hearing tests
Job Offers	3-4 weeks before Sheriff Recruit Training starts	Formal offer letter issued to successful candidates
Sheriff Recruit Training	14 weeks to complete	Completion of the basic sheriff training program at the Justice Institute of British Columbia

As of June 2023, the recruitment process including Sheriff Recruit Training is budgeted to cost the BCSS approximately \$47,000 per recruit. There are three recruitment classes per year, each with a capacity for 24 recruits, although recent classes have been half full or less. Sheriff recruitment and training costs far surpass those incurred in any other branch of the Ministry of Attorney General.

New Deputy Sheriffs are required to enter into a *Return of Service Agreement* for a period of two years; if they leave the BC Public Service during that time, they are required to repay up to \$11,000, pro-rated to the period remaining in the agreement. This can partially offset the expense of training a replacement, but still leaves a staffing gap that needs to be filled to meet operational requirements.

In total, the recruitment process for Deputy Sheriffs spans 6 to 8 months, from the initial job posting to starting work. Consequently, when an employee departs, there is a significant delay in finding a suitable replacement. This places an additional burden on existing staff members, who are required to shoulder the increased workload. As a result, there is an observable rise in stress and burnout, higher usage of sick leave, increased overtime expenses, and augmented travel costs due to the redeployment of employees between locations. Notably, the spike in resignation rates during the fiscal year 2020-21 coincided with an increase in the utilization of the Short-Term Illness and Injury Plan (STIIP) within the BCSS. The average number of STIIP days per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for the last two fiscal years was 13, which is almost 4 days higher than the average for the BC Public Service overall (*Figure 3*).

Figure 3 - BC Sheriff Service Average STIIP Days Per FTE Compared to BC Public Service

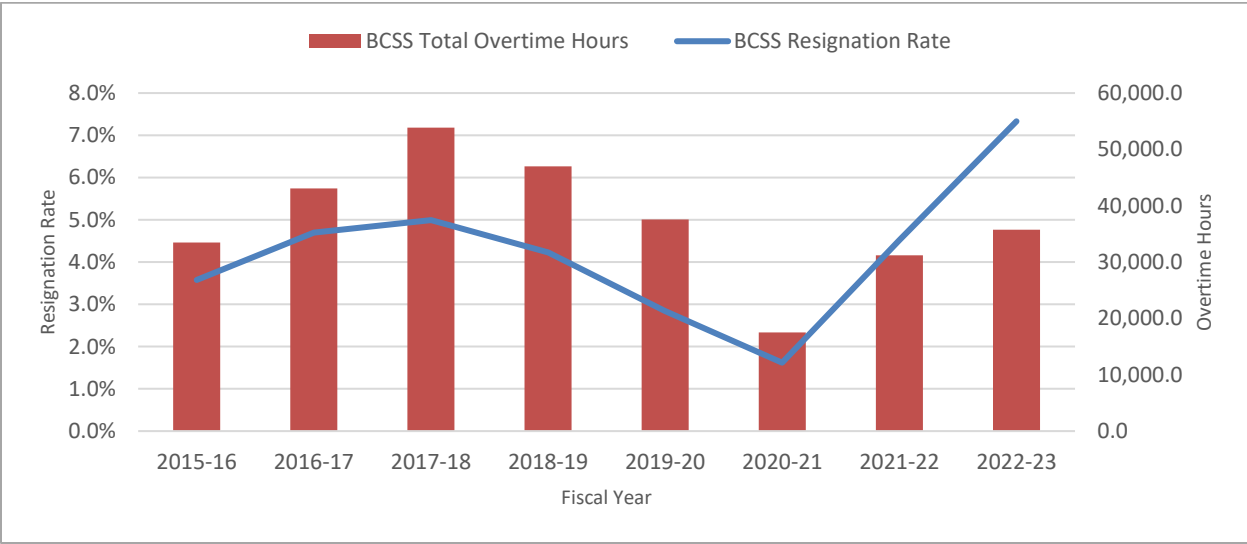


Furthermore, a correlation exists between changes in resignation rates and overtime hours, as remaining employees work more overtime to compensate for the lack of staff. This incurs financial costs for the BCSS, as overtime rates of pay are higher than regular rates, and can also create concerns of fatigue due to overwork for individual employees. (*Table 6, Figure 4*).

Table 6 - BC Sheriff Service Resignation Rates and Overtime Hours by Fiscal Year

Fiscal Year	BCSS Resignation Rate	BCSS Total Overtime Hours
2015-16	3.57%	33,473.5
2016-17	4.70%	43,096.5
2017-18	4.99%	53,888.2
2018-19	4.23%	47,006.5
2019-20	2.84%	37,572.8
2020-21	1.62%	17,522.3
2021-22	4.52%	31,187.0
2022-23	7.33%	35,721.4

Figure 4 - BC Sheriff Service Resignation Rates and Overtime Hours by Fiscal Year



Competition for Employees from External Agencies

Competition from other law enforcement agencies has a significant impact on the retention of the BC Sheriff Service workforce. Employers such as municipal police forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Corrections Canada, and the Canada Border Services Agency are actively seeking to recruit new members.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, resignations from the BCSS slowed down as competitive agencies scaled back or temporarily halted their recruitment activities. However, with the easing of lockdowns and health restrictions, competitor agencies have resumed their recruitment efforts throughout the province, leading to an increase in resignation rates for the BCSS. Additionally, there is competition from other private firms and sectors of the economy, as the wider labour market is currently experiencing a shortage of workers compared to the available job opportunities.

An analysis of publicly available salary data reveals that other law enforcement agencies consistently offer higher salaries compared to the BCSS. The table below presents the annual salaries for four different ranks of sheriffs: Deputy Sheriffs (Grid 18), Sergeants (Grid 21), Provincial Training Officers

(Grid 24), and Staff Sergeants (Grid 27). The table also includes the salaries for the lower ranks of other law enforcement agencies and the yearly salary progression for each subsequent year of service (steps) (Table 7).

Table 7 - BC Sheriff Service Annual Salary Comparison (Inclusive of Temporary Market Adjustments)

Service or Department	Annual Salary				
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Deputy Sheriff (Deputy Sheriff 18)	\$67,729	\$69,681	\$71,735	\$73,855	\$77,012
Sergeant (Deputy Sheriff 21)	\$73,856	\$76,047	\$78,312	\$80,652	\$84,135
Provincial Training Officer (Deputy Sheriff 24)	\$78,312	\$80,652	\$83,071	\$85,571	\$89,288
Staff Sergeant (Deputy Sheriff 27)	\$83,071	\$85,571	\$88,152	\$90,821	\$94,790
BC Legislative Assembly Protective Services (Special Cst.)	\$68,376	-	-	-	\$85,470
Correctional Services Canada (CX-1)	\$66,974	\$70,877	\$75,012	\$79,395	\$84,045
Canada Border Services (FB-3)	\$75,100	\$79,487	\$84,137	\$89,068	\$89,068
RCMP (Cst.)	\$65,776	\$85,461	\$92,722	\$99,988	\$106,576
Victoria PD (Cst.)	\$77,983	\$83,793	\$89,376	\$100,542	\$111,709
Saanich PD (Cst.)	\$76,697	\$82,175	\$87,653	\$98,610	\$109,566
Vancouver PD (Cst.)	\$77,983	\$83,793	\$89,376	\$100,542	\$111,709
West Van PD (Cst.)	\$80,544	\$86,292	\$92,040	\$103,548	\$115,056
Abbotsford PD (Cst.)	\$72,610	\$83,780	\$89,366	\$100,536	\$111,707
Delta PD (Cst.)	\$83,040	\$88,980	\$94,908	\$106,764	\$118,632
New Westminster PD (Cst.)	\$83,784	\$83,784	\$89,364	\$100,536	\$111,708
Port Moody PD (Cst.)	\$78,183	\$83,777	\$89,370	\$100,537	\$111,703
Surrey PS (Cst.)	\$80,542	\$86,295	\$92,048	\$103,554	\$115,060

*Salary rates effective April 9, 2023.

In the BCSS, the highest annual salary as of April 2023 for a Deputy Sheriff at Step 5 of Grid 18 is approximately \$77,012, including all temporary market adjustments. However, in nearly all municipal police departments, a constable in their first year of employment can earn more than the highest-paid Deputy Sheriff. This means that a Deputy Sheriff in the BCSS will reach the maximum salary level and still be paid less than an entry-level constable in most police forces. In those few departments or services where constables or officers do not exceed the salary of a Deputy Sheriff in their first year of service, they usually surpass it by their second or third year and continue to progress in salary beyond that. It is not surprising that external law enforcement agencies are attractive employers to current Deputy Sheriffs.

While the salary differences may appear significant, it is important to acknowledge that the BCSS is not the sole sector of the BC Public Service facing external competition for employees. Other branches and ministries constantly contend with competition from private IT firms, law firms, accounting firms, engineering firms, and various levels of government, many of which offer higher salaries than the BC Public Service. In numerous fields, the public service relies on factors beyond salary to attract and retain workers, such as comprehensive benefits packages, employment stability, support for work-life balance,

and a positive work environment. Retention involves considering both external factors that entice employees away and internal factors that either encourage employees to stay or push them to leave.

Internal Work Environment Factors

Many factors that affect retention are challenging to change as they lie beyond the organization's control and are external to its sphere of influence. However, every organization can shape its internal working environment to influence the experience of its employees. The results of the BC Stats Work Environment Survey (WES) indicate persistently low levels of employee engagement and satisfaction within the BC Sheriff Service. It is important to acknowledge that certain scores related to questions and drivers in the BC Stats WES model are influenced by external factors, such as disparities in pay compared to other organizations. Nevertheless, several of the most influential drivers are predominantly internal.

As shown in *Table 8*, there have been improvements in WES scores in some drivers over the years, with notable gains occurring between 2018 and 2020. However, the scores are still low in many of the outcomes and drivers of engagement.

Table 8 - BC Sheriff Service Historic WES Results, 2015 to 2022

Driver	2015	2018	Delta	2020	Delta	2022	Delta
Overall Employee Engagement	49	48	-1	57	+9	53	-4
BC Public Service Commitment	50	48	-2	54	+6	52	-2
Job Satisfaction	55	56	+1	65	+9	58	-7
Organization Satisfaction	43	41	-2	52	+11	49	-3
Empowerment	51	56	+5	58	+2	60	+2
Stress & Workload	54	58	+4	60	+2	63	+3
Job Suitability	68	69	+1	69	0	60	-9
Vision, Mission & Goals	39	41	+2	53	+12	50	-3
Teamwork	68	72	+4	75	+3	73	-2
Tools & Workspace	52	50	-2	54	+4	60	+6
Recognition	44	47	+3	54	+7	55	+1
Professional Development	50	52	+2	55	+3	56	+1
Pay & Benefits	21	15	-6	28	+13	35	+7
Staffing Practices	36	43	+7	45	+2	48	+3
Respectful Environment	58	63	+5	67	+4	68	+1
Executive-Level Management	38	39	+1	49	+10	45	-4
Supervisory-Level Management	60	65	+5	67	+2	68	+1
Average Driver Score* >>	49.15	51.54		56.46		57.00	
Net Driver Change** >>			+31		+64		+7

*Average Driver Score: Average of all drivers in the middle and lower sections of the BC Stats 'House' model (Empowerment to Supervisory-Level Management, inclusive).

** Net Driver Change: The sum of all of the year over year changes occurring in the middle and lower sections of the BC Stats 'House' model. This value was calculated by adding up all the values in the "Delta" column of the driver score table, from "Empowerment" to "Supervisory-Level Management", inclusive.

The scores also fall below those of other departments within the ministry and the broader public service. *Table 9* provides percentile rankings by driver for the years 2020 and 2022, illustrating the position of the BCSS relative to all other work units in the BC Public Service. In 2022, the majority of drivers placed below the 15th percentile.

Table 9 - BC Sheriff Service WES Percentile Placements, 2020 to 2022

Driver	2020	2022	Delta
Overall Employee Engagement	8 th	4 th	-4
BC Public Service Commitment	3 rd	3 rd	0
Job Satisfaction	23 rd	7 th	-16
Organization Satisfaction	12 th	9 th	-3
Empowerment	11 th	10 th	-1
Stress & Workload	32 nd	43 rd	+11
Job Suitability	12 th	2 nd	-10
Vision, Mission & Goals	11 th	9 th	-2
Teamwork	19 th	9 th	-10
Tools & Workspace	18 th	14 th	-4
Recognition	15 th	14 th	-1
Professional Development	15 th	11 th	-4
Pay & Benefits	3 rd	14 th	+11
Staffing Practices	6 th	10 th	+4
Respectful Environment	11 th	10 th	-1
Executive-Level Management	17 th	9 th	-8
Supervisory-Level Management	12 th	9 th	-3

An initial assessment of the WES scores, prior to any further research, indicated that the internal work environment in the BCSS was not sufficiently positive to counteract the allure of higher-paying positions in other organizations, but was probably not negative enough to be a primary driver of attrition. However, the researchers’ conclusions on this matter shifted considerably after conducting a further survey and focus group research with employees, as will be discussed in the [Research Findings](#) and [Analysis](#) chapters.

Furthermore, there are additional internal operational factors, such as policies, business processes, and organizational structure, that are not covered in the Work Environment Survey but may contribute to employee satisfaction with the organization.

Project Goals and Objectives

In April 2022, the Executive Director of the BC Sheriff Service requested that the Business Research & Diagnostics team develop a research project aimed at investigating attrition and retention issues within the BCSS. The primary objectives of the project were to gain a comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind employee departures from the BC Sheriff Service and gather information to facilitate necessary changes for improving recruitment and retention.

During this research initiative, the Business Research & Diagnostics team worked directly with key groups within the BCSS, including Deputy Sheriffs, sheriff supervisors (Sergeants and Staff Sergeants), divisional excluded managers (Inspectors and Superintendents), and the sheriff management team (Deputy Chiefs and the Chief Sheriff). The aim of this work was to identify the key environmental factors contributing to persistently high turnover rates, as well as distinguish between local factors and those that are systemic or structural in nature.

The key deliverables for the project include:

1. A review of the literature focusing on engagement and morale among similar positions to the Deputy Sheriff.
2. Conduct an in-depth province-wide research initiative investigating recruitment and retention issues in the BC Sheriff Service.
3. A written report outlining core findings and the identification of cross-regional themes and issues.
4. A series of written recommendations, based on findings, that can be implemented by the BCSS to address the identified systemic issues.
5. Ongoing support and monitoring to ensure that strategies implemented by the BCSS are yielding the required return on investment.

Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the published literature on employee retention and turnover. It is likely valuable to approach the current issue of turnover in the BC Sheriff Service with an understanding of established theories and research findings. Valuable insights from studies in other organizations may be applicable to the BCSS and provide a useful framework for conceptualizing potential retention strategies. The chapter begins with a discussion of general theories and causal factors of employee turnover, followed by a review of turnover research specific to law enforcement agencies.

The second part of the chapter focuses on documentation specific to the BCSS, including an overview of applicable legislation, regulation, and policy. Additionally, the section summarizes previous research and reports regarding the service.

Employee Turnover Theories and Research

Many theories have been developed over the decades regarding what causes employees to leave, and what can be done to encourage them to stay. There has been considerable interest in this subject from private businesses, public organizations and across academia. Studies have been conducted in the fields of public administration, business, economics, and psychology, among others. This section aims to summarize the most influential theories and findings.

Theoretical Frameworks: How We Think About Turnover

Rewards and Expectations

The Theory of Organizational Equilibrium, developed by Barnard (1938) and expanded upon by Simon (1947), was the first formal theory of employee turnover. This theory has provided a framework for numerous studies and has been the basis for many subsequent models developed in the 20th century. According to this theory, an employee's decision to leave an organization is based on a balance between their contribution to the organization and what the organization is providing to fulfill their personal goals. When this balance is off, and the employee does not feel they are getting enough back from their organization, they will have low job satisfaction and will be more likely to leave, as “the benefits for cooperation and compliance must outweigh their costs” (Barnard 1938). Job satisfaction, within this theory, is largely influenced by job fit and good relationships at work. Therefore, it is the responsibility of managers to ensure that employees receive the necessary incentives to remain motivated and contribute to the organization (Ngo-Henha 2017).

The Expectancy Theory of Motivation, developed by Victor Vroom, also addresses the need to provide sufficient rewards to employees. Vroom studied the motivations behind human decision-making and asserted that employee motivation is determined by three components: the expectancy that efforts will lead to good performance, the belief that good performance will be rewarded, and the expectation that the rewards will be valuable to them. Linking rewards to performance and understanding what rewards will be valuable to employees is key to improving retention (Vroom 1964).

Understanding and meeting employee expectations is also a central element of the Met-Expectations Model developed by Porter and Steers, which predicts that if an employee's expectations about the job are not met, they are more likely to be dissatisfied with their job and resign. They note that while most

employees are likely to value a core set of rewards such as pay, promotions, good supervisors, and positive relationships with peers, each employee's expectations for their job may vary. This emphasizes the importance of individual fit with the job and the importance of realistic job previews – transparent communication about the positive and negative aspects of the job – so that new members have a realistic understanding of what the job entails and are not faced with the dissatisfaction of unmet expectations later on, which is associated with turnover (Porter and Steers 1973; Hom et al. 2020).

Fairness and Equity

In addition to providing sufficient rewards to employees, some theories emphasize the importance of fair distribution of rewards. The Equity Theory of Motivation (Adams 1965) maintains that employee motivation depends on a balance between inputs (effort, skills, experience) and outcomes (pay, benefits, responsibilities, awards), but it also depends on fair compensation in relation to other employees. When people see others putting in similar effort and receiving higher pay, or putting in less effort and receiving the same or more, it may lead to tension, reduced performance, and eventually turnover (Adams 1965).

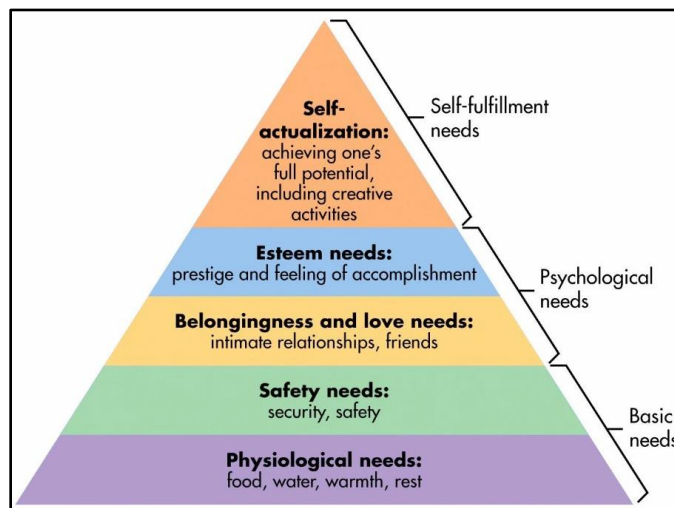
Theories such as the Equity Theory focus on what are often termed “distributive justice” approaches, which focus on employee expectations regarding the fairness of decisions and outcomes such as pay levels. There are other approaches that are termed “procedural justice” approaches, which focus more on the expectations of fairness in how decisions are made and how policies and procedures are applied to different employees. For example, employees consider the level of fairness in how promotional decisions are made, how performance ratings are determined, or how grievances are addressed. Along with distributive justice, procedural justice increases employee satisfaction and improves retention (Greenberg 1990).

Factors that lead to satisfaction with procedural justice include the perceived neutrality of decision-making processes, trust in decision-makers to apply rules fairly, and fair and respectful interpersonal treatment (Greenberg 1990). Employees take into consideration not only how they are treated but also how their peers are treated by organizational systems. In addition, perceptions of fairness are just as important as actual fairness when it comes to employee satisfaction. This implies that decision-makers must ensure that systems are not only designed to be fair to all members of the organization but also that they are executed in a fair and impartial manner to avoid any perception of bias. Managers and supervisors need to be trained in how to implement procedures fairly and communicate about them in such a way as to ensure they are perceived to be fair (Mossholder et al. 1998).

Human Needs and Motivations

Numerous theories have incorporated elements of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs to explain how employee satisfaction and commitment can be enhanced in the workplace. According to Maslow's well-known theory, humans have a variety of needs that they strive to fulfill, which are typically represented in a pyramid structure. The fundamental needs at the base of the pyramid must be met first before people can seek to satisfy higher-level needs (Maslow 1943). Theories that draw from this model suggest that in order to be satisfying, employment should fulfill both basic needs (such as physiological and safety needs) and higher-level human needs, including belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization (Ramlall 2004).

Figure 5 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Source: Maslow 1943 cited in Mcleod 2023

For instance, Job Design Theory builds on human needs theory and posits that the key to employee motivation and satisfaction is the work itself. While a boring job stifles motivation, a challenging and interesting job, with a variety of tasks, autonomy and decision authority, increases motivation and fulfills esteem and self-actualization needs. Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory also incorporates elements of this thinking. Herzberg suggests that every job has motivating factors that increase satisfaction (mostly job-related factors, such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, growth) and hygiene factors that produce dissatisfaction (mostly organizational-related factors, such as restrictive policies, poor supervision, conflict with coworkers, low pay). He argued that eliminating hygiene factors will reduce dissatisfaction but not necessarily increase overall job satisfaction; addressing these factors will bring the experience to neutral at best. Only improving motivating factors will increase satisfaction, which can be achieved mainly by enriching the job itself, namely, increasing responsibility, autonomy and opportunities for individual growth (Herzberg 1966).

Hackman and Oldham built upon the work of Herzberg with their Job Characteristics model, which has a slightly different view of what makes a job interesting. They assert that employees must feel personal responsibility for outcomes, find the work meaningful and contributing to the wider success of the organization, and receive meaningful feedback to understand the impacts of their work. Motivating jobs should incorporate skill variety, autonomy, ownership of a whole task, and task significance (Hackman and Oldham 1980).

Other theories have incorporated employees' psychological needs for social affiliation and belonging. For example, Social Exchange Theory maintains that people expect others to respect social norms and relationship rules, both written and unwritten. When an employee feels that another party (such as their supervisor, manager, or co-worker) is not respecting those rules, they are more likely to leave their organization. Individuals evaluate the effort they are putting into a relationship versus the benefit they are gaining from the relationship and factor this into their decisions about where to invest their time and energy (Homans 1958; Blau 1964; Emerson 1976). Related theories incorporate interpersonal elements such as the importance of supportive supervisors, perceived organizational support, cohesion and integration with coworkers, and overall organizational culture and climate, which is derived largely

from shared perceptions, the nature of interactions and levels of cooperation (Hussein 2015). McClelland’s Need Theory claims that employees have three fundamental needs: personal achievement, power, and affiliation, which is defined as the desire for close interpersonal relationships (McClelland 1961). Still, other theories have focused on organizational image and how employees’ perceptions of their organization’s level of prestige affect turnover. Affiliation needs can result in a desire to be affiliated with a prestigious, well-regarded employer, which will increase the social capital and self-esteem of the individual (Mignonac et al. 2006; Rho et al. 2015; Bright 2020).

In their 1989 book, authors Champagne and McAfee provide examples of how employers might strive to meet different types of needs in Maslow’s hierarchy:

Figure 6 - Employer Actions to Fulfill Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs

	Need	Examples
1.	Physiological	Cafeterias Vending machines Drinking fountains
2.	Security	
	Economic	Wages and salaries Fringe benefits Retirement benefits Medical benefits
	Psychological	Provide job descriptions Give praise/awards Avoid abrupt changes Solve employee’s problems
	Physical	Working conditions Heating and ventilation Rest periods
3.	Affiliation	Encourage social interaction Create team spirit Facilitate outside social activities Use periodic praise Allow participation
4.	Esteem	Design challenging jobs Use praise and awards Delegate responsibilities Give training Encourage participation
5.	Self-actualization	Give training Provide challenges Encourage creativity

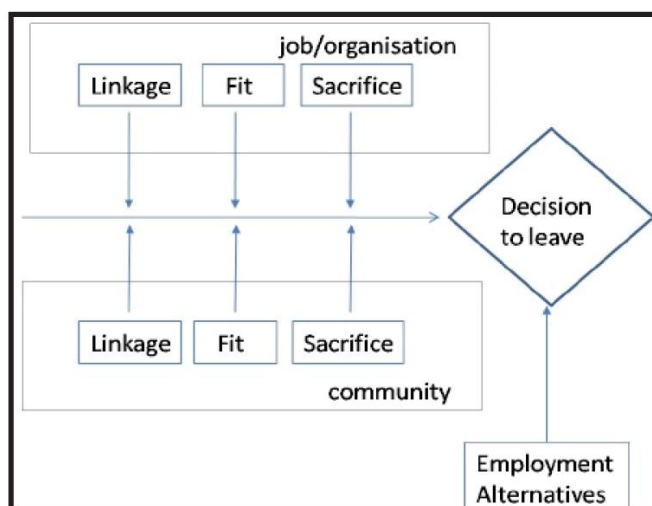
Source: Champagne and McAfee 1989.

Job Embeddedness

The majority of employee turnover theories in the 20th century focused on the relationship between job satisfaction, commitment, job alternatives, and turnover. However, in 2001, Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez introduced the theory of Job Embeddedness, which has influenced much of the research on employee turnover conducted in the 21st century. Unlike previous approaches, which focused on the factors that cause employees to leave, Job Embeddedness theory emphasizes the factors that encourage employees to stay. Also, it introduces the importance of off-the-job community factors in addition to the work environment and considers the whole picture of an employee’s life experience and the interweaving links and connections that may keep them embedded or “stuck” within their organization (Mitchell et al. 2001; Holtom and Darabi 2018).

Mitchell et al. identified three main factors that determine job embeddedness: social links, fit, and the level of sacrifice an employee would have to make if they left. *Social links* refer to the relationships an individual has with coworkers, friends, family, members of community groups, their spouse’s coworkers and friends, and their children’s school and activities. These connections, both within the workplace and in the community, are important for building an individual’s social capital, reputation, and feeling of belonging. The concept of *fit* refers to the degree of affinity or compatibility that an individual feels toward their job, their organization, and the community they live in. It is the level of alignment with their skills, interests, hobbies, goals, and values. Finally, *sacrifice* refers to what the individual would have to give up if they left their current job or community, and can be material, financial, or emotional in nature (Mitchell et al. 2001).

Figure 7 - Concepts of Job Embeddedness Theory



Source: Ngo-Henha 2017

As the diagram above indicates, the three factors of embeddedness should be assessed on the job and in the community. Individuals who are highly embedded in their organizations and communities are less likely to leave, as this would entail disrupting their social networks and possibly landing in a less favorable situation. Employers can increase job embeddedness in several ways. They can recruit locally or locate offices close to where employees live to reduce commutes and maximize the time employees can spend with family and friends. They can also offer paid time off for volunteer work to build community links, provide training and tailor tasks to employees' interests to increase levels of job fit, and increase opportunities to build interpersonal links at work. This can be done by encouraging formal and informal mentoring, involving employees in committees and team projects, and facilitating newcomer socialization and integration. Additionally, employers can assist employees in understanding and identifying with the organization's mission and values (Mitchell et al. 2001; Holtom and Darabi 2018).

While strong social ties are generally considered positive factors that encourage employee retention in job embeddedness theory, a sub-theory called Turnover Contagion Theory posits a potential downside to interpersonal links. This theory suggests that individuals can be greatly influenced by the decisions of their coworkers to leave an organization, and that a handful of departures can rapidly spread into a wave of resignations, especially if the departing employees were well-respected and influential within

the organization. As more people leave, even fairly content employees start considering whether they should leave and may start looking at what other jobs are available (Felps et al. 2009).

This summary has provided an overview of various theories and sub-theories related to employee turnover. While it is not feasible to delve into each of them in detail, the focus now shifts to empirical studies that have tested the main theories and identified the causal factors with the greatest impact on employee turnover.

Causal Factors of Employee Turnover

As the theories above indicate, there is a multitude of reasons why employees leave their organizations. These reasons may vary from individual-specific personal reasons to job-related factors, organizational management, and external factors such as social or economic conditions. This body of theory is supported by many empirical studies, which have measured the effects of specific causal factors and their correlation with and predictive value in explaining turnover. There are too many individual studies to describe them all individually; this section will instead highlight the findings of several meta-analyses, which combine quantitative findings from hundreds of studies and assess which factors are relatively more important than others and how they may interact.

Three notable meta-analyses published in 1995 (Hom and Griffeth), 2000 (Griffeth et al.) and 2018 (Rubenstein et al.), gather statistical information from a wide range of studies from multiple fields over multiple decades to compare the relative predicative value of different causal factors. In their 2020 book, Hom, Allen and Griffeth compare the findings from all three these meta-analyses and present combined tables that list significant factors identified by previous researchers, along with estimates of their predictive impact on turnover.

In general, the factors causing turnover tends to fall into four rough categories: individual characteristics; availability of alternative jobs; employee satisfaction with their job and various elements of the work environment that contribute to job satisfaction and commitment; and the level of job embeddedness of employees. These groups of factors are summarized in more detail below.

Individual Characteristics

Many researchers have examined turnover data looking for trends in which categories of individuals are more likely to leave organizations. In general, demographic or personal characteristics have only a weak association with turnover (Hom et al. 2020). However, some patterns have been identified. Older and longer-serving employees are less likely to quit than younger and newer employees. Employees with more children at home are less likely to quit than employees with no or fewer children. A small number of studies have also examined the role of personality traits in turnover, finding that individuals who are highly conscientious, emotionally stable, and internally motivated are moderately less likely to quit, while those who score high on "openness to new experiences" are moderately more likely to quit (Hom et al. 2020). Gender and ethnicity have also been analyzed, but meta-analyses of larger combined datasets show that the differences in these categories are generally small and not useful for predicting turnover (Griffeth et al. 2000; Hom et al. 2020).

Availability of Alternative Job Opportunities

Various studies and meta-analyses have confirmed that external economic factors have an impact on employee turnover, particularly the availability and perceived availability of alternative jobs. Research in labour economics, business and public administration has demonstrated that in a thriving economy when the labour market is tight and job opportunities are plentiful, turnover rates increase (Hulin et al. 1985; Griffeth et al. 2000; Hom et al. 2020). Moreover, job openings within a similar profession or field, unrelated to the overall economic situation, can also impact turnover rates in an organization. Some jobs are more transferable than others and may give individuals a greater ability to move between organizations. When jobs are perceived to be plentiful, employees may decide to leave before securing alternative employment, whereas when the availability of jobs is perceived as limited, they are more likely to remain in their current positions until they secure new employment (Hom et al. 2020).

Earlier theories and studies on employee turnover emphasized job dissatisfaction as the primary reason for considering alternative jobs (March and Simon 1958; Mobley 1982). While multiple studies have shown that satisfied employees are less likely to engage in job search activities, others have shown that alternative job search behaviour does not always stem from dissatisfaction. The decision to pursue alternative jobs may result from a disruption or shock in the employee's work or personal life, such as the failure to obtain an anticipated promotion, health issues, or the need to relocate for a spouse's job (Lee and Mitchell 1994). In any case, when alternative jobs are brought to an employee's attention, they will begin evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of the alternative job versus their current one, and the benefits and sacrifices associated with leaving or staying. Overall, based on the results of quantitative empirical studies, Hom et al. conclude that alternative job options have a modest impact on employee turnover and should be considered in conjunction with other factors (Hom et al. 2020).

Job Satisfaction, Commitment and Work Environment Factors

Job satisfaction, commitment and associated work environment factors were the focus of most studies on turnover from the 1950s to the early 2000s. Hom et al. note that across time and across many different fields and organizational contexts, these factors have been shown to consistently impact turnover, to a moderate degree. Many work environment factors have a direct impact on turnover but also have an indirect impact by impacting job satisfaction and commitment which have a stronger direct predictive impact on turnover (Hom et al. 2020).

The diagram presented at the end of this section displays the work environment factors that have been identified by Hom et al. as having a strong or moderate predictive impact on turnover (corrected mean r of 0.15 or greater). These factors include job-related factors such as job expectations, role clarity, scope and variety of tasks, and person-job fit; compensation-related factors such as salary, benefits, and rewards; opportunities for advancement within the organization; quality of leadership and supervision, particularly in terms of "leader-member exchange" or effective two-way communication between leaders, supervisors, and employees; peer-group relations, specifically the level of cohesion and integration among employees; stress levels related to the job and organizational context; and overall organizational climate and culture. Although numerous studies with more limited contexts have also identified other work environment factors as statistically significant predictors of turnover, these factors have been consistently identified as the most impactful in top-cited meta-analyses.

In the BC Public Service, the biennial Work Environment Survey (WES) aims to measure job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and various work environment factors. Although the WES focuses primarily

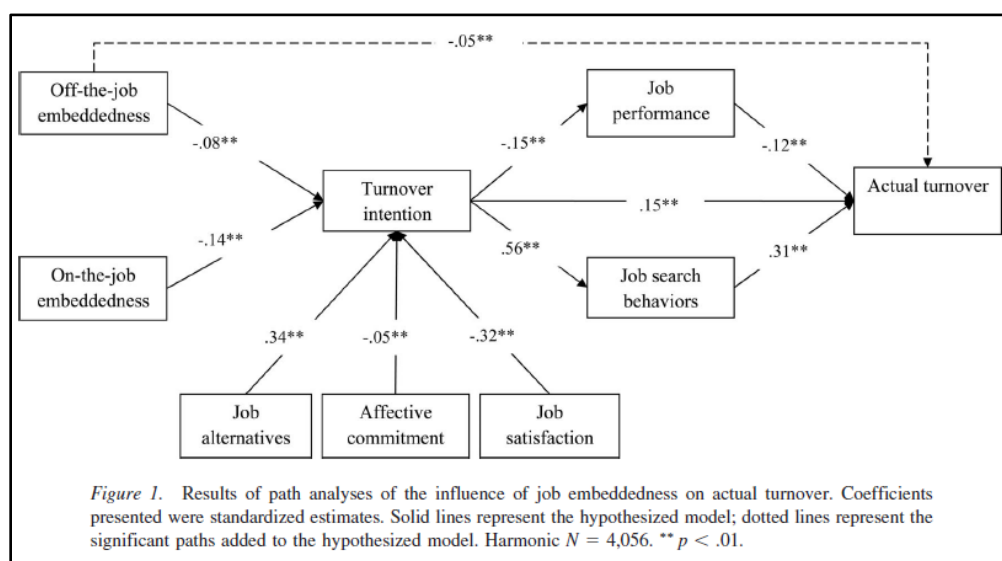
on employee engagement instead of employee turnover, many of the theoretical underpinnings of WES were informed by the same theories and studies as the employee turnover literature. This is because the same work environment factors directly and indirectly impact both turnover and engagement to a certain degree. The 13 drivers of engagement in the WES model overlap with many of the factors studied in turnover research. WES results for the BC Sheriff Service will be discussed in a later chapter of this report.

Job Embeddedness Factors

As previously mentioned, the components of job embeddedness are social links, job fit, organizational and community fit, and the amount an employee would have to sacrifice if they were to quit. Studies have been conducted to test this theory with thousands of employees across various countries, cultures, and work contexts, which has confirmed that these factors have a statistically significant effect on turnover rates, as well as on certain performance metrics and behaviours in the workplace (Lee et al. 2014).

In 2012, a meta-analysis by Jiang et al. aimed to determine whether on-the-job embeddedness and off-the-job embeddedness explained unique variance in turnover, beyond job satisfaction, commitment, and job alternatives. The findings are useful in demonstrating how job embeddedness factors complement these other predictors of turnover. They found that job embeddedness has a causal effect on turnover, directly and indirectly, in addition to other factors such as job alternatives, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. In other words, it helps explain a different part of the puzzle. The findings also suggest that on-the-job embeddedness operates differently than off-the-job embeddedness. The diagram below illustrates how these groups of factors impact turnover intention, along with the coefficients of determination, indicating the strength of the predictive relationship as calculated in this meta-analysis (Jiang et al. 2012).

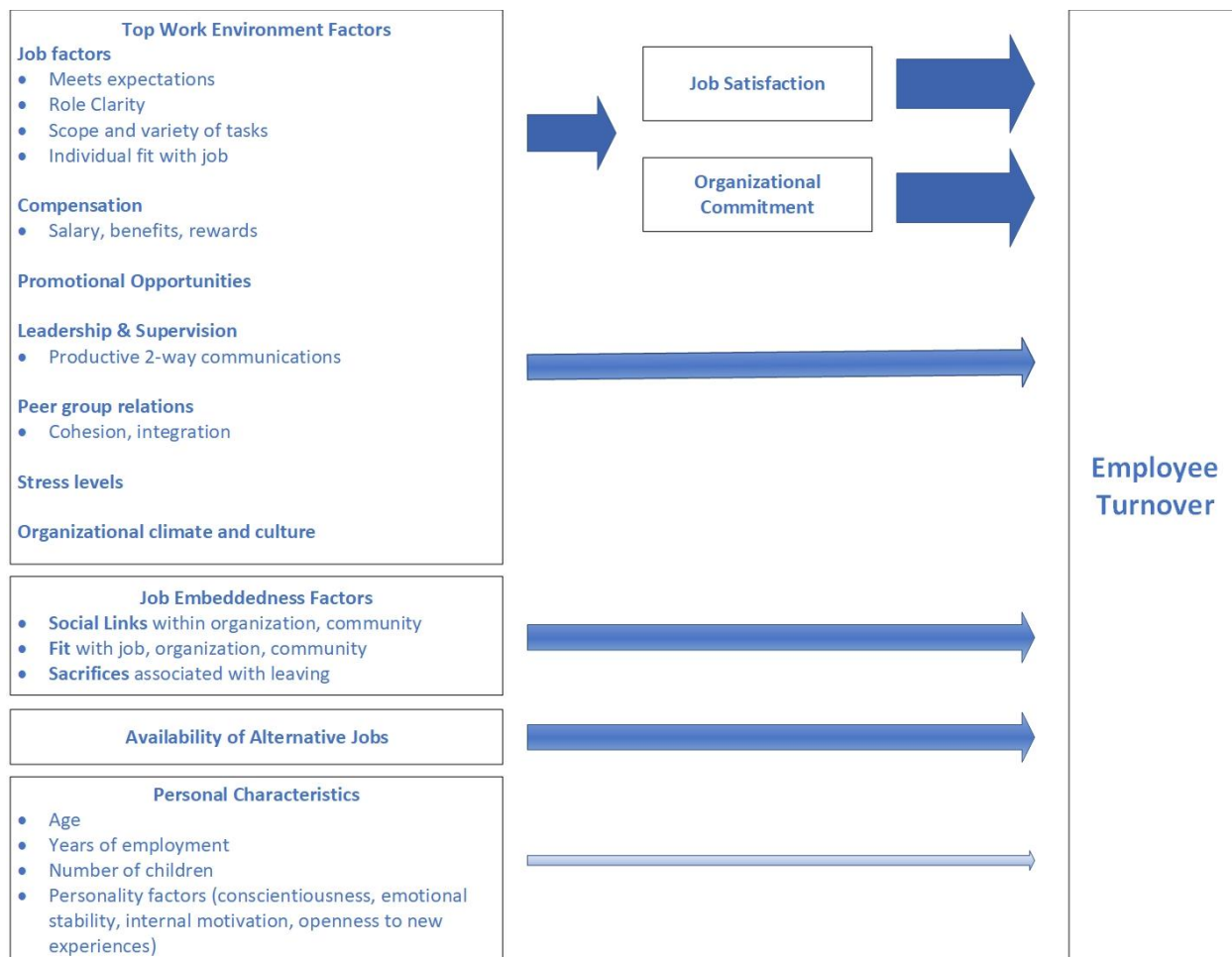
Figure 8 - Path Analyses of the Influence of Job Embeddedness on Actual Turnover



Source: Jiang et al. 2012.

The diagram below summarizes the main groups of factors that impact employee turnover. It includes the work environment factors identified by Hom et al. as having a strong or moderate predictive impact on turnover (corrected mean r of 0.15 or greater) in three meta-analyses of turnover studies. This is not an exhaustive list; there are many other work environment factors that have a smaller individual impact.

Figure 9 - Summary of the Leading Factors Predicting Employee Turnover



Employee Turnover Research with Law Enforcement Agencies

While the literature reviewed thus far has been theoretically applicable to all workplaces, there have also been numerous studies on retention in law enforcement agencies, that may have particular applicability to the BC Sheriff Service. The most relevant studies have focused on retention in police forces, primarily in the United States, although there are also some from Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

Unfortunately, there is very little employee turnover research available that is specifically about sheriffs or any court-focused agencies with roles comparable to Deputy Sheriffs in British Columbia. Moreover, the role of a sheriff in Canada varies considerably depending on the province or territory, so even if studies were available, they might not be directly applicable. The work of sheriffs in many U.S.

jurisdictions is more analogous to front-line police work. Although some literature exists on employee retention in correctional institutions, this has not been included here since the role and circumstances were deemed too dissimilar. Therefore, police forces have been selected as the most analogous role. While these organizations are not entirely comparable to the BCSS due to the differences in scope of authority and duties, there are enough similarities in training and job requirements that they may provide an additional level of insight.

A study conducted in 1996 by the BC Police Commissioner on the retention of municipal police officers in British Columbia was the study geographically closest to the BCSS. A survey of officers in 12 municipal police departments identified that the most influential factors in intentions to quit and job search behaviour were job satisfaction, organizational mobility and career growth opportunities, human resource management practices, home and work life conflicts, and sexual harassment. The report's recommendations included not exaggerating career opportunities during the recruitment stage, maintaining consistency and equity in recruitment practices, providing an accurate portrayal of police work to potential recruits, ensuring quality orientation of new officers, reviewing personnel management practices, creating guidelines for managing conflicts between work and family concerns, diversity awareness training, and conducting regular surveys to understand personnel morale (Polowek 1996).

A frequently cited guide published in 2008 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, entitled "Recruitment, Retention and Turnover in Law Enforcement", provides a summary of best practices for police forces to retain officers. Author Dwayne Orrick draws from a range of published literature, and from the experiences reported by police forces, primarily in the United States. The table on the following page lists the main factors contributing to attrition in police forces, as well as practical actions to improve retention. Orrick notes that organizations should both minimize the attrition factors and maximize the retention factors to keep more employees (Orrick 2008).

Orrick recommends that organizations track turnover statistics and use exit interviews and surveys to understand the reasons behind employee departures. He also suggests maintaining contact with departed officers, reaching out to them three to six weeks after they start their new job, and informing them that they are welcome back to the organization if they are dissatisfied with their new job (Orrick 2008).

Table 10 - Summary of Attrition and Retention Factors in Police Agencies

Attrition Factors	Retention Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● External job opportunities: a factor especially in a prosperous economy. ● Low salary: often cited as the main reason for leaving (though it is sometimes cited because it is an easy answer to give). ● Poor supervisors or leadership: “One of the greatest crises facing law enforcement agencies in the near future is the failure to develop leadership potential of officers throughout the entire organization.” ● Poor job fit: Many just do not like the work or fit within the agency. Supervisors will often hear “This job is not what I thought it was.” ● Higher ordered needs: Today’s recruits want more than just money for food on the table – they are looking for belongingness, self-esteem, self-actualization, challenges and problem-solving opportunities. ● Dysfunctional organizational cultures: Compliance, rules-based environment based on transactional leadership. ● Generational differences: Need to understand differences and adapt leadership strategies to motivate different groups. ● Lack of career growth opportunities: People cannot move up, or cannot expand their responsibilities. ● Inadequate feedback: Employees want to improve and need supervisor attention to do so. ● Inadequate recognition: Positive recognition for work well done, otherwise exceptional performance will diminish. ● Inadequate training: Individuals have a desire to improve themselves, for their career objectives, their confidence, and improved effectiveness. ● Equipment: The type of equipment employees receive will be perceived as a measure of their value to the community. Poor equipment will be interpreted as the employer having little concern for employees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess for the right candidates: Well-rounded assessments on factors that will increase likelihood of success and retention. ● Realistic job previews: Make sure candidates know what the real job is like. Do not just focus on the most exciting parts. ● Competitive salaries and benefits: Be aware of what other organizations are offering. ● Training opportunities: Bombard officers with opportunities for good quality training. ● Feedback: meaningful, timely, specific, behavioural, and job-related. Positive and negative, by the immediate supervisor. ● Recognition: By senior leaders and supervisors. Highlight good performance, creative solutions, training achievements, etc. ● Career assessments and personal development plans ● Dual career ladders: Increased salaries or ranks to recognize senior employees who do not wish to become supervisors. ● Enhanced work experience: Stretch assignments, job shadowing, rotations, cross-training. ● Committees: Get staff involved. ● Teaching: Get experienced staff to share their knowledge. ● Accountability: Have high standards, help people improve, and hold people to account when performance is low. ● Reinforce that their role is meaningful: Leaders should always find ways to remind officers they are serving a greater purpose. ● Provide a caring environment: Officers need to know that those they work with care about them on a personal level.

Source: Orrick 2008

Some of the best practices outlined by Orrick are echoed in a 2014 article published in the RCMP Gazette on effective retention of police officers. The article emphasizes the use of data to identify retention needs and to determine the essential skills and competencies of successful officers. The author suggests trying to identify employees who are at a higher risk of leaving, understanding their concerns, and considering flexible adaptations that could encourage them to stay. The article also underlines the importance of the recruitment stage in improving employee retention, especially to

ensure recruits have a realistic view of their expected work: “By acclimating employees to a more realistic view of their expected career with your agency, you are presenting an honest impression of career expectations, which may lead to greater commitment over the long term” (Scheer 2014).

Other studies have identified factors within the policing work environment that predict employee turnover. For instance, in a study conducted with Australian police officers, researchers found that increased emotional intelligence is linked to higher job satisfaction and a lower likelihood of turnover (Brunetto et al. 2012). A 2014 study carried out with police officers in the U.K. found that there is a strong relationship between role clarity and job satisfaction, which impacts turnover. Furthermore, the researchers discovered a strong relationship between job demands causing stress and intention to quit. They concluded that working conditions are indeed impacting turnover, but the causal relationship is mediated by job satisfaction and stress levels (Allisey et al. 2014).

In another 2014 study with US police officers, researchers examined how various organizational and community metrics impact turnover, while differentiating between small, medium, and large police forces. The study found that for smaller agencies, pay incentives and levels of violent crime in the surrounding community were predictors for turnover, while for medium-sized agencies, higher levels of poverty predicted greater turnover. For large agencies, levels of poverty, violent crime, and suicide rates in the community, as well as higher outdoor temperatures in the local weather patterns, were all associated with greater turnover of police officers (Smith et al. 2014).

A 2018 study analyzed turnover data from 2,200 U.S. police agencies to examine the impact of salaries on officer retention. The study found that higher levels of salary were associated with lower levels of voluntary and involuntary exits from police agencies. According to the authors, higher salaries attract applicants with better communication, problem-solving, and negotiation skills, as well as an increased ability to use discretion and build relationships in communities. Additionally, financial incentives increase officers’ feelings of being valued, which reduces turnover. The study concludes that investing in officers’ salaries, along with financial incentives and retirement benefits, can reduce turnover and save money in the long run, as “agencies are left with the option of investing in officers’ salaries at the outset of their careers or in officer replacement much later” (Schuck and Rabe-Hemp 2018).

In addition to the organizational and community factors identified by these studies, wider societal changes have also impacted the ability of law enforcement agencies to recruit and retain employees. A 2010 publication from the RAND Corporation Center on Quality Policing used the metaphor of a “leaky bucket” to describe the challenges faced by police agencies in retaining employees. The report highlighted the widening hole in the bucket as Baby Boomers retire, new generations have different employment expectations, and budget pressures mount. The supply of applicants for law enforcement agencies, or “the faucet,” is also decreasing due to a shrinking qualified applicant pool, reduced interest in law enforcement careers among new generations, increased competition with other agencies, and the need for expanded skill sets in policing, including soft skills and mental health literacy (Wilson et al. 2010). Although the authors were describing the American social context, similar factors are likely present in Canada. In the years since 2010, there have been additional social events and movements that have portrayed law enforcement officers in a negative light, which have likely further decreased the size of the interested applicant pool.

Background Literature Specific to the BC Sheriff Service

In addition to summarizing research conducted on other organizations, it is imperative to review the literature published directly on the BC Sheriff Service to comprehend the legal and organizational context, as well as the historical development of current issues. (**Note:** *descriptions of legislation and regulations are only provided as a necessary component of a thorough literature review, and should not be interpreted as a legal analysis nor the position of the Government of British Columbia.*)

Legislation, Regulations and Policy

While much of the law surrounding the establishment of the powers, duties and responsibilities for the sheriff are provincial, the *Criminal Code of Canada* provides the legal basis of Sheriff authority by designating them as Peace Officers under Section 2 (*Criminal Code* 1985). Under the *Criminal Code*, peace officers are granted a number of powers, authorities and immunities to enforce laws and maintain public order. A significant body of both federal and provincial common law can also potentially impact sheriff authorities but is outside the scope of this literature review.

The main provincial legislation that establishes the powers, duties and responsibilities of sheriffs is the *Sheriff Act*. This Act designates sheriffs as officers of all courts in British Columbia, who are responsible for maintaining the security of court facilities, which includes controlling entry, conducting searches, making arrests, and seizing weapons and contraband. In addition, sheriffs are authorized to carry out threat or risk assessments related to individuals or facilities under their protection, as well as serve and execute specific court orders (*Sheriff Act* 1996).

There are also three regulations that accompany the *Sheriff Act*: the Sheriff Act Security Regulation, the Sheriff Powers, Duties and Responsibilities Regulation, and the Fee Regulation. The Sheriff Act Security Regulation defines the areas of court facilities that are designated as restricted zones, who is authorized to enter them, and sets out parameters for conducting searches (Sheriff Act Security Regulation 2002). The Sheriff Powers, Duties and Responsibilities Regulation outlines a list of powers, duties and responsibilities in addition to those specified in the Act. These include protecting court facilities and all court users, as well as participants in certain external proceedings taking place off courthouse property. This regulation also includes a section on “Exigent Circumstances”, which states that sheriffs have a duty to provide assistance to a police officer upon request and to intervene to prevent death or serious harm to a member of the public, in situations that they encounter while carrying out their duties as a sheriff (Sheriff Powers, Duties and Responsibilities Regulation 2009). Additionally, the Sheriff Act Fee Regulation provides a short description of the fee municipalities are to pay to a sheriff for service of a document (Sheriff Act Fee Regulation 1981).

While the *Sheriff Act* and its accompanying regulations establish the duties and responsibilities of sheriffs, the service has developed its own set of internal policies to guide the execution of these responsibilities. The Sheriff Policy Manual details administrative procedures, standards of conduct and dress, incident reporting processes, emergency procedures, training requirements, parameters for use of force and arrests, and many other details about how to carry out day to day duties such as courtroom security, prisoner escorts, and jury management (BC Sheriff Service 2023).

Previous Reports on the BC Sheriff Service

Previous research on the BC Sheriff Service has been limited and sporadic, but there are several published documents that can provide insight into the history of specific issues within the service, as well as the role of sheriffs in the province.

In 2008, Simon Fraser University researcher Neil Boyd conducted a survey of sheriffs, in collaboration with union representatives. Approximately 50% of Deputy Sheriffs from the Lower Mainland, Vancouver, and Prince George areas participated, and the findings were summarized in a document titled “The Work of Deputy Sheriffs in British Columbia, 2008: Problems and Prospects.” The results indicated that the most common concern raised by surveyed employees was insufficient staffing levels, which resulted in heavy workloads, and over 90% of respondents viewed employee shortages as “unsafe”. Dissatisfaction with pay, recruitment and retention issues, management and leadership problems, and uninteresting job duties were also identified as concerns. Additionally, the survey revealed that 50% of respondents held second jobs at the time (Boyd 2008).

Insufficient staffing was again noted in 2010, when the Provincial Court released a report titled “Justice Delayed: A Report of the Provincial Court of British Columbia Concerning Judicial Resources.” While the main focus of the report was on the need to appoint more judges to address case backlogs, it also identified a lack of court administration and sheriff employees. The report highlighted that “increasingly, the work of the court, including its reform initiatives, is frustrated by the lack of registry and sheriff’s staff and, in some locations, insufficient numbers of courtrooms to hear matters.” The report elaborated on the impacts of inadequate sheriff staffing on the court system, including delays in proceedings when the sheriff is not available to open the courtroom, delays waiting for sheriffs to escort accused persons to the courtroom from correctional institutions, and delays in processing court orders. The report emphasized that delays in court proceedings can have severe consequences, such as a judicial stay of proceedings in criminal cases, adverse impacts on businesses, individuals and families, and a general erosion of public confidence in the court system and the rule of law (Provincial Court of British Columbia 2010).

A year later, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Robert Bauman also raised concerns about insufficient staffing levels, due to lack of funding to support the B.C. court system. In a speech at the Canadian Bar Association BC Branch Meeting in November 2011, Bauman outlined the dangers to the rule of law and judicial independence when courts are not funded and staffed appropriately. He noted that the Canadian constitution, which designates provinces as responsible for the administration of justice, does not specify levels of service, but by implication, “the funding of the courts must be maintained at least at the minimum service level required to protect judicial independence and give effect to the rule of law.” He noted that a lack of sheriffs had already resulted in some criminal cases being delayed, and that in some cases charges had been stayed, which let the accused walk free. Lack of court administration staff and judges was also noted as problematic. The issue limiting staffing levels at that point in time was limited government budgets for Court Services Branch (Bauman 2011).

According to a 2012 report published by the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, limited budgets over the previous decade were a significant problem for the province, creating shortages of judges and Court Services Branch staff, leading to closed courtrooms, delays and a significant backlog of court cases. Authored by Kevin Tilley, the report argued that due to extreme delays in the court system, accused people were not receiving fair treatment and society was not being well served. It addressed various aspects of the wider justice system, including the courts, corrections, mental health supports and

housing issues, and emphasized the need for increased funding and reforms. With regard to the BC Sheriff Service, the report specifically noted that a lack of Deputy Sheriffs had caused courtroom closures in 2011, and that Sheriff staffing levels in 2012 were below 2005 levels (Tilley 2012).

The staffing problems within the BC Sheriff Service garnered significant media attention in 2017, as courtroom closures and the release of accused criminals resulted from a lack of sheriff staffing. For example, a CBC News story in February covered the Government's confirmation in Question Period that seven criminal suspects had been freed in 2016 due to lack of sheriffs. A judge was quoted lamenting the situation: "Crown is ready to go. Defence is ready to go. The court is ready to go. [The accused] is in custody in this building, but he is not able to attend because there are no sheriffs to bring him to court." The judge placed blame on the lack of sheriffs on "a lack of provincial will to provide necessary resources." The Government promised to increase funding for more sheriff recruit classes to address the staffing shortfall (Dufresne and Rankin 2017).

As another example, a story published by CTV News in October 2017 provides statements from then-Attorney General David Eby acknowledging that sheriffs were being flown around the province at great expense to taxpayers to fill staffing gaps. Eby noted that turnover in the BC Sheriff Service was a problem and that many deputies leave to become police officers due to a "very significant pay disparity" between the two professions. Union representative Dean Purdy was also quoted, noting the pay gap was approximately \$36,000, and that the province spends approximately \$30,000 to train each Deputy Sheriff, only to have many of them resign within months of starting the job (Bains 2017). News reports from April 2018 indicate that the Government did increase funding for Court Services Branch, creating more sheriff positions and increasing the number of recruit classes (Weld 2018).

While previous reports focused primarily on funding problems, a 2019 report by BC Auditor General Carol Bellringer, "Managing Human Resources at the BC Sheriff Service," provided an in-depth review of internal issues in the BC Sheriff Service that were impacting its ability to effectively recruit, train, develop and retain employees. The report found that while initial training for recruits was high quality, ongoing training and development was lacking. It noted the lack of a retention strategy, and a lack of understanding about why staff were leaving. It also found that in many aspects of its business, the BC Sheriff Service did not have the business data it needed to effectively plan for its staffing needs or measure its performance or progress at meeting targets (Bellringer 2019).

The Auditor General's report had eight recommendations, which included creating a dedicated position for HR planning, improving business intelligence and data-informed staff planning, establishing specific targets and monitoring performance metrics, developing a retention plan, and improving ongoing training within the service. Responses from the Ministry of Attorney General and Court Services Branch were included at the end of the report; they accepted all the recommendations and responded with comments about how they were working toward making improvements (Bellringer 2019). In 2021, the BCSS provided a progress update to the BC Legislature's Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts, indicating substantial or partial completion of most action items (Corrado 2021).

Summary and Key Takeaways from the Literature

There is a wealth of research on employee turnover, and many varying explanatory theories and factors. Every organization is different, and not every workforce will be affected by the same factors to the same degree. However, there are several key takeaways from the published literature that can likely be applied to an analysis of turnover in the BC Sheriff Service:

1. There is an abundance of research that indicates that many of the factors that cause turnover are at least partially within the control of the employer. For example, there is a clear predictive relationship between job satisfaction and turnover. Improving elements of the job and the work environment with the aim of increasing job satisfaction will likely improve retention.
2. Employees are more likely to leave when their employment situation does not fulfill their needs, or if they perceive an imbalance between what they are putting into their job and what they are receiving in return. Employees may leave if their employment situation fails to meet their basic needs (such as safety, security, and financial stability) or higher-level needs (such as intellectual stimulation and personal growth).
3. Research in the past 20 years shows that employees who are more “embedded” in their workplaces and communities are more likely to stay. A high level of embeddedness means that in both the organization and the community, employees have many social links (relationships with coworkers, proximity to family, friends and activities they enjoy), are a good fit with the job and the surrounding community, and would have to make considerable sacrifices to leave their current job. Fostering social ties at work can be an effective strategy for keeping employees, as is enabling employees to spend time with their social network outside of work, in the geographical location where they have the most ties.
4. Since an individual’s level of “fit” with the job, organization and community is a large predictor of retention, it is important to recruit new members based on whether they are likely to fit well. This includes developing an understanding of the traits and characteristics that are likely to contribute to a good fit, and creating effective methods to evaluate candidates during the selection process. It also includes being transparent about the nature of the job at the recruitment stage, so that potential members can accurately assess whether they are a good fit, and have realistic expectations about the job.
5. The availability of external attractive job alternatives has an impact on employees’ decisions about whether to stay or leave their organization. Therefore, it is useful to be aware of what other organizations are offering and make changes where possible to remain competitive in the job market.
6. Studies on turnover in a law enforcement context have echoed many of the same themes and factors that are identified in the general literature on turnover and have applied many of the same theoretical approaches. These studies confirm that the established theories in the general literature provide a useful framework for thinking about retention and turnover in a law enforcement setting.
7. The previous reports on the BC Sheriff Service confirm that the current challenges with retention and low staffing levels are not a new problem for the organization. There have been recurring issues over the past 15 years that indicate there are longstanding systemic problems, that will likely continue to

disrupt operations and negatively impact the court system if they are not addressed in a meaningful way.

8. To address the staffing challenges that have impacted the BC Sheriff Service, it is necessary to recognize that both internal management issues and external factors contribute to the problem. Specifically, low budgets, low salaries, and competition from higher-paying law enforcement agencies are external factors that affect the ability of the BC Sheriff Service to attract and retain employees. On the other hand, internal management problems such as the lack of business data, ineffective resource planning, and retention strategies also contribute to the problem. Long-term solutions to these problems will require changes both internally and externally to the BC Sheriff Service.

Methodology

Introduction

This section provides a detailed description of the data acquisition and analysis methods used in this project, in order to facilitate replication by other researchers and to ensure transparency in the presentation of the [Research Findings](#) and [Analysis](#) chapters.

Research Question

Based on the business intelligence data regarding employee exits taken from the BC Government's human resource management system, and information provided directly from the Chief Sheriff, the following core research question was developed to guide the project:

“What are the key factors impacting recruitment and retention in the BC Sheriff Service?”

To comprehensively answer the main research question, the research team also identified sub-questions to be addressed during the research project. These include:

- 1) *What factors impacting employee recruitment and retention are occurring internally and externally to the BC Sheriff Service?*
- 2) *What factors impacting recruitment and retention are systemic or structural in nature versus which are occurring locally?*
- 3) *How do such factors impact the efficacy of the BC Sheriff Service?*
- 4) *What factors are within the scope of control of the BC Sheriff Service?*

Core Methodology

The overall methodology selected for the investigation of the research questions was the use of a mixed methods approach that comprised an initial exploratory survey with an associated ongoing data portal, followed by both focus groups and structured interviews. Mixed methods research draws on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing researchers to better explore diverse perceptions and uncover relationships that exist between complex layers of information. Mixed methods are used to gain a deeper understanding of where qualitative and quantitative data may differ or align; they provide opportunities for participants at all levels of the project to have a strong voice across the research process and can highlight different avenues of exploration that a single research method may be unable to identify (Jason and Glenwick 2015).

The use of a mixed methods approach in a single study adds complexity to the research process. It often requires more resources than a single-method study of similar scope and complexity, as well as additional training and experience in research. Moreover, there is greater complexity in the areas of data collection, analysis, synthesis, and integration (Jason and Glenwick 2015).

The research team felt that only the use of a mixed methods approach could allow for the collection of richly detailed data and information needed to identify the causal factors potentially associated with the research question. Existing literature suggests that mixed methods are suitable for exploratory research

where there is a deficient body of knowledge associated with the phenomena being researched, where no control is needed over behavioural events, and where contemporary events are being examined (Collis and Hussey 1997; Tellis 1997; Stake 1995; Yin 2003; Jason and Glenwick 2015).

Data Collection

Exploratory Survey

The study utilized an exploratory survey as the initial data collection method. The survey was designed to be a census survey of all staff employed by the BC Sheriff Service at the time of launch and required no sampling methodology. The primary objective of the survey was to provide researchers with a preliminary understanding of the causal factors that may be impacting recruitment and retention in the BCSS, as well as provide an early assessment of the potential effects of these causal factors on the organization. By gathering information from the survey, the research team was able to develop effective primary and probing questions for both the focus groups and structured interviews, thus enabling them to maximize the limited time available for data collection and minimize the impact on the service's day-to-day operations.

The survey was developed on the Business Research & Diagnostic Team's SnapSurvey software platform and published on a secure server in an access-restricted environment. The survey was entirely anonymous and lacked the ability to link data with any other data source, nor could it track IP addresses or any other potentially identifiable markers. The survey site was set up to enable staff to access it through a virtual private network or a browser like the TOR browser if they felt the need for an additional layer of security. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and no incentives were offered to increase participation.

The survey was conducted from September 7th to September 23rd, 2022. Notification to participate in the survey was sent out via BC Sheriff Service email distribution lists and contained an embedded link that directed potential respondents to the research team's secure web server. All data collected during the survey process remained strictly in the hands of the research team and was never shared with any member of the BC Sheriff Service nor with any other person or entity. The email notification to participate was sent out to all members of the service simultaneously and all staff members had an equal opportunity to respond.

The survey achieved a response rate of 42.05%, with 217 completed surveys out of a total population of 516 at the time of launch. With this response rate, the survey results have a confidence interval of +/- 5.07 at a confidence level of 95%. This means that the survey results can be generalized across the BC Sheriff Service with a high degree of confidence.

The survey was divided into three sections, each designed to collect data for different analytical purposes. The first section was a demographic breakdown that allowed for analysis of results at both a rank and geographical level. The second section included questions aimed at identifying potential causal factors for BC Sheriff Service recruitment and retention issues, as well as potential solutions. The third section consisted of three questions that were not analytically significant but were included to gauge the willingness of staff across the Service to engage and participate actively in the project.

All survey questions can be found in [Appendix 1: Survey Instrument](#) of this report.

Once completed, all data from the server was extracted and downloaded into Microsoft Excel for coding and analysis. After downloading, the survey and all related data was removed from the sever and stored on the research team’s secure drive throughout the analysis portion of the project. Only members of the research team had ongoing access to this drive. All qualitative data collected by the exploratory survey was treated as its own “focus group” for the purpose of coding and theming during the analytical phase of the project.

BC Sheriff Data Portal

One of the concerns raised by sheriffs in the past has been that the disclosure of sensitive information could potentially put them at risk of retribution or reprisal. To eliminate this risk or even the perception of it, the survey team created a secure data portal using the same software and server infrastructure used for the initial exploratory survey.

Launching shortly after the conclusion of the exploratory survey, the data portal was established as a tool to collect information that focus group participants may not feel comfortable sharing in an open setting with their peers present. The data portal ran parallel to both the focus groups and the structured interviews. The data portal was launched the week of October 10th, 2022, and remained active until March 31st, 2023, collecting a total of 59 submissions from BC Sheriff Service staff at all levels of the organization.

As with the initial exploratory survey, the data portal was developed on the Business Research & Diagnostic Team’s SnapSurvey software platform and published on a secure server. The portal was completely anonymous and allowed for the use of a virtual private network or the TOR browser for access. Use of the data portal was voluntary, and no incentives were offered to increase participation.

Unlike the exploratory survey, the link to the data portal was distributed exclusively to participants in the focus groups or structured interviews. For in-person focus groups, this was accomplished by providing each participant a flashcard with the link typed on one side or by writing the link to the portal on a whiteboard in the meeting area. For virtual focus groups or structured interviews, the link was posted in the Microsoft Teams group chat.

To make the link as easy as possible to remember, a link shortening site was used to redirect participants to the secure server, with the final web address being bit.ly/bcsheriffs.

A text version of the data portal can be found in [Appendix 2: BC Sheriffs Data Portal](#) of this report.

All qualitative data collected by the data portal was treated as its own “focus group” for the purpose of coding and theming during the analytical phase of the project.

Focus Groups

After a preliminary analysis of survey data highlighted potential causal factors related to BC Sheriff Service recruitment and retention problems, it was determined that a series of dual-moderator focus groups segmented by rank hierarchy would be needed to further explore and develop an understanding of this information.

Focus groups were ultimately selected due to their efficiency in collecting information relating to the perspectives and opinions of people involved in common situations (Collis & Hussey 2003). The use of focus groups also minimized the time needed to collect relevant qualitative information from many individuals, which reduced the research team's disruption of day-to-day sheriff and court operations. This need to minimize disruptions to daily routines was considered one of the core principles in the selection of this methodology.

Questions were deliberately left as open-ended and flexible as possible, allowing for the focus group participants to respond to each question in detail and in a manner most relevant to themselves and the circumstances they were experiencing (Patton 1987; Seidman 1991). The research team also ensured that no questions were leading in nature and that established probing techniques were used to ensure each question was answered in as much detail as possible (Berry 1999).

All focus groups were conducted by a research team consisting of three individuals. The principal researcher performed all introductions, presented the initial focus group questions for discussion, moderated the group, and asked probing questions. The assisting researcher took rough written notes, asked probing questions, and helped moderate the group. The information recorder made detailed written notes throughout the focus group and included direct quotations where possible. The use of three researchers allowed for a two-to-one confirmation of what was said in each focus group, minimizing any bias or misunderstanding held by any members of the research team.

No audio or video recordings were made due to the sensitive nature of the subjects being discussed, and participant names were never recorded in any way. No data collected through the focus group process was distributed beyond the research team, and all notes and data collected were stored on the research team's secure drive.

Participation in all focus groups was strictly voluntary, and no staff were compelled to participate. There were no incentives provided by the researchers for participation, although Deputy Sheriffs who traveled to participate were reimbursed by the BC Sheriff Service for any expenses they may have incurred. Additionally, any staff that incurred overtime in order to participate in a focus group were compensated in accordance with the provisions laid out by the BC General Employees' Union 18th Main Agreement (2022).

All focus groups across the BC Sheriff Service were separated by rank hierarchy. This was to help temper some of the potential reluctance that may exist on the part of participants to discuss sensitive issues or matters related to the research questions in front of their supervisors or managers. The research team made in-person visits to each of the services' administrative regions to conduct multiple focus groups for those in the Deputy Sheriff ranks. A further two focus groups were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams video conference for each region, one for the rank of Sergeant and one for the rank of Staff Sergeant.

The decision to switch from an in-person focus group approach for Deputy Sheriffs to a virtual focus group approach for Sergeants and Staff Sergeants was made due to logistical reasons. The number of staff in both supervisory ranks is significantly smaller than that of line-level Deputy Sheriffs, and outside of the Lower Mainland regions, there are often only one or two supervisors per courthouse. This low population density made it economically unfeasible to conduct in-person focus groups, given the overtime and travel costs involved in having all supervisors of a given rank travel to a single central location for an in-person focus group. Moreover, for the Northern and Interior regions, this issue was

further compounded by increasingly inclement winter weather, which made driving and/or flying conditions unreliable and potentially unsafe. As such, switching to a virtual focus group environment was deemed the only safe, ethical, and cost-effective way to reach the supervisory ranks within the confines of the project.

Focus groups for the two management ranks within the BC Sheriff Service, Inspectors and Superintendents, were able to be completed in-person and did not require the use of a virtual environment. In both cases, focus groups were conducted as part of the regular Sheriff Management Team (SMT) meeting cycle already in use by the BCSS. Since there is only one Superintendent per region, and often only two or three Inspectors per region, the management-level focus groups were not able to be regionally segmented, as was the case for both Deputy Sheriffs and supervisors. Inspectors were able to participate during two consecutive in-person focus groups held on November 7th, 2022, at their Surrey Leadership Conference, and all Superintendents were able to participate at a single in-person focus group held on February 8th, 2023, at their Chilliwack Sheriff Management Team meeting. In total, 35 focus groups were conducted over a five-month period from October 2022 to February 2023.

Regardless of which focus group was attended, or whether the focus group was virtual or in-person, all focus groups followed the same format:

1. Introductions to the research team conducting the focus group.
2. Overview of the research project and why it was being conducted.
3. Overview of the rules of confidentiality, research ethics and the protections built in for participants.
4. Answering or addressing any questions or concerns of participants.
5. Researchers asking the set focus group questions and asking probing questions if necessary to fully understand the participants' responses.
6. Wrap-up and summary of next steps and distribution of the bit.ly/BCSheriffs data portal link.
7. Answering any departing questions by participants.

Each focus group lasted between one hour and thirty minutes and two hours. In some instances, the discussions associated with larger focus groups may have extended slightly beyond the two-hour mark. The questions used by the research team mirrored those in the exploratory survey and were designed specifically to expand on those initial results.

All focus group questions and the dates each focus group was conducted can be found in [Appendix 3: Focus Groups by Administrative Division and Research Protocol](#).

Structured Interviews

In addition to conducting an exploratory survey and focus groups within the BC Sheriff Service, the research team also conducted structured interviews with external partner organizations. It was felt by the team that valuable insight could be gained by interviewing representatives of groups that frequently interact with the BC Sheriff Service and its members in the course of their court duties. This included members of the Court of Appeal of British Columbia, Supreme Court of British Columbia, Provincial Court of British Columbia, Court Services Branch, the BC Prosecution Service, and the BC Bar Association.

Structured interviews were also conducted with the two Deputy Chief Sheriffs, the Chief Sheriff, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Court Services Branch and two other members of the BC Sheriff Service who possessed specialized knowledge that was seen as critical by the research team.

Structured interviews were conducted in a virtual environment using the Microsoft Teams platform and were scheduled for 45 minutes. In most cases, structured interviews were able to be concluded within that time frame. The research team conducted structured interviews using the same roles as outlined at the end of this chapter. As with the focus groups, no audio or video recordings were made, and only written notes were captured by the research team's information recorder.

Since these were all scheduled interviews, the data collected was not anonymous in any way. However, significant protections remained in place to protect the information. No information was made available to anyone outside the research team, and all data collected was housed exclusively on the research team's secure server. All data collected was combined with all other data and information collected via the structured interviews and was stripped of any identifying information for analysis and comparison throughout the analytical phase of the project.

The questions used in the external structured interviews were standardized for members of the Court of Appeal of British Columbia, Supreme Court of British Columbia, Provincial Court of British Columbia, Court Services Branch, the BC Prosecution Service and the BC Bar Association. However, questions for the Assistant Deputy Minister, the Chief Sheriff, the two Deputy Chief Sheriffs, and the two BC Sheriff Service specialist positions varied significantly based on the information that was being collected.

A total of 17 structured interviews were conducted from October 18th, 2022, to February 17th, 2023. All structured interview questions except for those of the two BC Sheriff Service specialist positions can be found in [Appendix 4: Structured Interview Questions](#). The template used for the two BC Sheriff Service specialists cannot be shared, since the questions asked of each individual would make their identity readily apparent.

All qualitative data collected by the structured interviews were treated as its own "focus group" for the purpose of coding and theming during the analytical phase of the project.

Additional Data Sources

In addition to the data that was actively acquired through the initial exploratory survey, focus groups, data portal and structured interviews, the project also made extensive use of passive quantitative data available through the BC Government's PeopleSoft human resource information system, its Corporate Accounting System and the historical Work Environment Survey data provided by BC Stats.

The PeopleSoft data used in this project primarily centred on what is commonly called movement data. Movement data is generated as part of the employee relationship and changes any time an employee is hired, terminated, or otherwise changes their job within the BC Government. This data was taken directly from PeopleSoft in the form of a SQL-based query that was used to determine the number of staff hired into the BC Sheriff Service and the number of staff that either resigned from their positions, retired from the Service, or transferred to other locations within the BC Government that were outside the BC Sheriff Service. In addition, PeopleSoft data was used to identify the number of staff in temporary appointment positions, as well as the dates such positions expire. Both movement data and temporary appointment data were pulled for multiple years to identify any trends occurring within the data and to

set current issues in a broader historical context. PeopleSoft data focusing specifically on “resignations” was also used as the independent variable in an early regression model that will be discussed in the [Research Findings](#) chapter.

Data taken from the Corporate Accounting System centred exclusively on the costs associated with the issues facing the BC Sheriff Service. This included basic salary information such as employee salary costs, costs associated with sick time usage and overtime, as well as the costs of travel that were being incurred by the necessity of moving staff around the province to maintain operational readiness and to keep the Courts open and maintain access to justice for British Columbians. This data was also taken directly from the system using a SQL-based query, with multiple years of data taken to help identify longitudinal trends over a multi-year period.

The final source of supplementary data was in the form of the published reports issued by BC Stats as part of the biennial Work Environment Survey (WES) initiative that has been in place since 2006. WES reports that reflect the BC Sheriff Service’s current five region configuration were available from 2010 to 2022 and were available for the BC Sheriff Service overall, as well as for each region and even larger individual courthouses. The WES data uses a standardized survey instrument to collect and quantify ‘engagement levels’ in a number of research-identified key areas that include Job Satisfaction, Organization Satisfaction, Empowerment, Stress & Workload, Job Suitability, Vision, Mission & Goals, Teamwork, Tools & Workspace, Recognition, Professional Development, Pay & Benefits, Staffing Practices, Respectful Environment, Executive-Level Management, and Supervisory-Level Management (Armour et al 2022). As with the PeopleSoft and Corporate Accounting System Data, WES data was also used to establish longitudinal trends over a multi-year time frame. WES data was also used as the independent variables in an early regression model that will be discussed in the [Research Findings](#) chapter.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data

The primary data used in this research project was predominantly qualitative in nature, consisting of over 600 pages of data collected through the research process. The qualitative data collected can be divided into the following categories:

Focus Groups: *400+ pages of data.*

Structured Interviews: *100+ pages of data.*

Data Portal (bit.ly/bcsheriffs): *20 pages of data.*

Exploratory Survey: *100+ pages of data.*

To analyze the data, results of individual focus groups were coded and grouped together based on shared thematic elements, utilizing a conceptually ordered display as demonstrated by Miles and Huberman (1994). The notes from each focus group were imported into Microsoft Excel, and multi-level data tags were used to categorize themes based on their commonalities. This allowed for the identification of common themes across all focus groups.

Qualitative data collected from sources other than the focus groups underwent a similar process of thematic analysis. After being coded into core thematic elements, data from structured interviews, the

data portal, and the exploratory survey were treated as if they were unique focus groups and incorporated into the [Research Findings](#) chapter of the report.

To further distill the data into more manageable components, a content-analytic summary framework was developed based on the work of Miles and Huberman (1994). This framework served as a "heat map" where all thematic elements were tagged as present or absent for each focus group, interview, data portal submission, and exploratory survey response. *Figure 10* provides a simplified illustration of the final heat map, which included separate columns for all 35 focus groups, interviews, data portal submissions, and exploratory survey responses.

Figure 10 - Simplified Example of Analytical 'Heat Map'

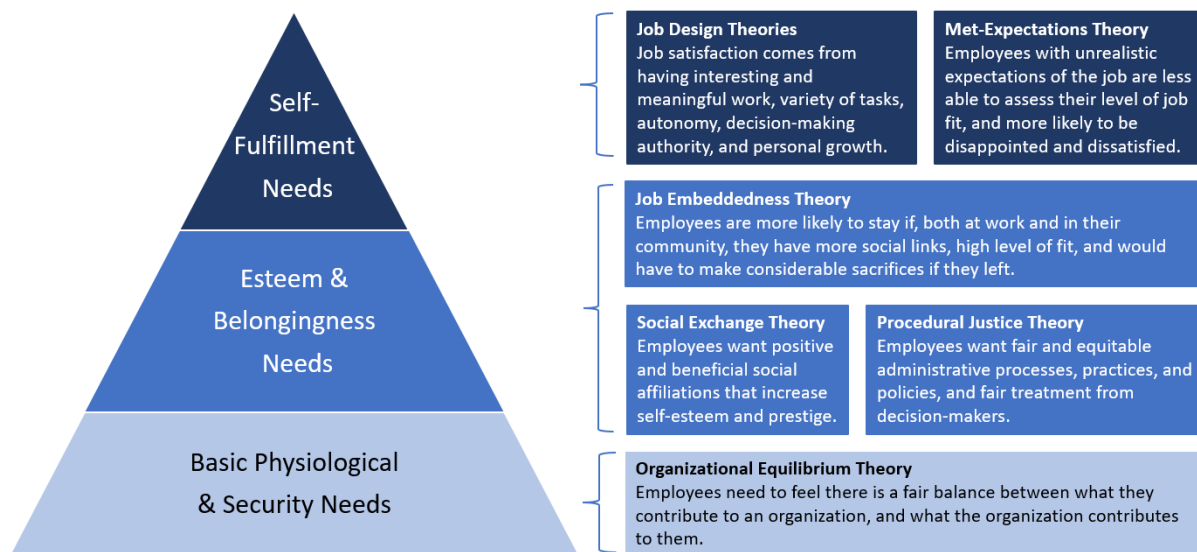
Thematic Element (Issue)	Focus Grp 1	Focus Grp 2	Interviews	Data Portal	Exploratory Survey
Element 1	Present	Present	Absent	Present	Absent
Element 2	Absent	Absent	Present	Present	Present
Element 3	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
Element 4	Present	Present	Absent	Absent	Present
Element 5	Absent	Absent	Absent	Present	Absent

This heat map enabled researchers to identify key issues necessary to address the research questions, particularly structural or systemic issues, versus those that were localized. The simplicity of the "presence/absence" indicator facilitated ease of coding due to the volume of information collected and the variability of discussion associated with each thematic element.

In the [Research Findings](#) and [Analysis](#) chapters, thematic elements or issues with higher frequency on the heat map were given more significance, with a focus on those that were universal and occurred in every focus group, interview, data portal submission, and exploratory survey. The frequency chart was used primarily to determine the presentation order of each thematic element in the [Research Findings](#) chapter.

After the initial analysis was completed, all themes were mapped against the main theoretical models identified in the [Literature Review](#), including Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Job Design Theory, Job Embeddedness Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Expectations Theory, and Procedural Justice Theory. Each theoretical model and their associated thematic elements collected via the project were then mapped against a simplified hierarchy of needs, used to reduce complexity and identify which issues had the greatest impact on the organization. This hybrid needs model was then used to develop solutions and recommendations for the identified issues and sequence them based on organizational impact. *Figure 11* summarizes this model.

Figure 11 - Analytical Framework Based on Employee Retention Theories



Quantitative Data

Although the majority of data collected for this project was qualitative in nature, a significant amount of quantitative data was also gathered. The initial exploratory survey contained purely quantitative questions, and most of the secondary data sources used, such as those from PeopleSoft, Corporate Accounting, and the Work Environment Survey, were also quantitative.

The earliest use of quantitative methods was in the form of a multiple regression analysis used by the team to test possible linkages between BCSS resignation rates and the various drivers of engagement used in the biennial Work Environment Survey conducted by BC Stats. Multiple regression analysis is employed to investigate the relationship between a dependent variable and two or more independent variables. By incorporating several predictors, multiple regression analysis allows for the identification of more complex relationships. In this project, the research team performed a Pearson correlation test, followed by a multiple regression analysis using the software 'R', in order to explore the relationship between all WES driver scores and resignation counts for each region over the past five WES cycles (2013, 2015, 2018, 2020, and 2022). Each of the WES drivers was treated as a separate independent variable, while the resignation counts served as the dependent variable. The results of this test are detailed in the [Research Findings](#) chapter.

Other than for the early phased regression analysis and a single exploratory survey question asking intent to seek alternative employment, quantitative data was primarily used throughout the project to provide an operational context for the BC Sheriff Service and to track changes over time. For example, PeopleSoft data was used to analyze recruitment, retention, and vacancy statistics, while Corporate Accounting data provided insight into salary and pay trends, including overtime hours and sick time usage. Work Environment Survey data was used to track employee engagement levels and identify areas where changes could lead to increased employee retention. The quantitative component of the exploratory survey was also used to project potential outcomes if no changes were made, such as the number of staff actively seeking employment elsewhere.

Throughout the report, quantitative data was used to develop and highlight the challenges faced by the BC Sheriff Service. The “data-driven” framework established through quantitative data helped to understand the current and historical context of the BC Sheriff Service, as well as likely impacts of changes moving forward. Quantitative data was used in conjunction with qualitative data in the [Research Findings](#) chapter to provide context and support the narratives provided by the Deputy Sheriffs, their management, executives, and clients.

Roles of the Research Team

Director, Business Research and Diagnostics: Oversee research design, methodology, and ethics for the project; provide analysis of structural and systemic issues; develop recommendations and intervention strategies. Co-facilitate focus groups and structured interviews and lead the preparation of the final research report.

SHR Research Consultants: Conduct background research, co-facilitate focus groups and structured interviews, code research findings, analyze and summarize results for the final report, assist in developing recommendations and intervention strategies.

Research Officer: Conduct background research, data recording during focus groups and structured interviews, code research findings, manage online surveys.

Research Coordinator: Manage project plan and scheduling, data recording during focus groups and structured interviews, code research findings, editing.

Research Findings

Quantitative Findings

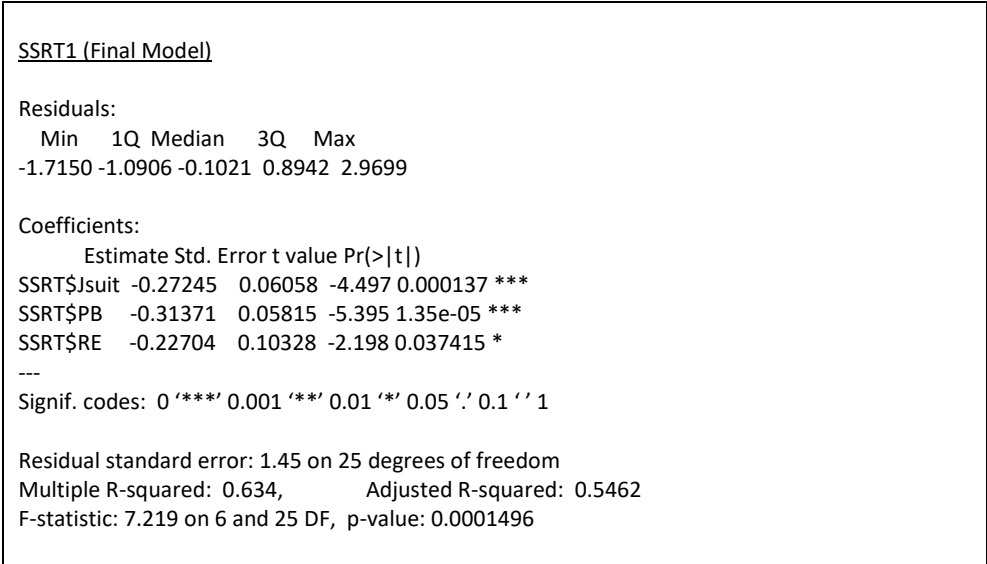
Multiple Regression Analysis on Work Environment Survey Results

The findings of the Work Environment Survey have consistently indicated low levels of engagement and satisfaction within the BCSS since the survey's inception in 2007. Although there have been fluctuations over time, including moderate improvements in the 2018 and 2020 WES cycles, the results have remained consistently low compared to the overall results of the BC Public Service. To further investigate this issue, a preliminary analysis was conducted using multiple regression analysis to examine the potential predictive relationship between WES driver results and the occurrence of resignations within the BC Sheriff Service.

As the multiple regression tests were implemented, various engagement drivers were sequentially eliminated based on p-values. In each regression model, the highest p-value driver was eliminated until a final model was obtained in which every driver has a p-value under the generally accepted value of .05.

The final model output (*Figure 12*) reveals that three WES variables can account for between 54.62% and 63.4% of the resignations in the BC Sheriff Service. The three drivers found to have a statistically significant impact on resignations were Pay & Benefits (SSRT\$PB), followed by Job Suitability (SSRT\$Jsuit), and Respectful Environment (SSRT\$RE).

Figure 12 - R Multiple Regression Output WES Variables vs Resignation Rates



The findings from the regression analysis provided a framework for the subsequent qualitative research. This preliminary analysis enabled the research team to test the initial hypotheses and predict that Pay & Benefits, Job Suitability, and Respectful Environment would emerge as prominent themes in the qualitative findings. Although the multiple regression analysis offered some initial context, the qualitative research aimed to expand upon the regression analysis findings and provide more comprehensive, detailed, and nuanced insights that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods alone.

Exploratory Survey Quantitative Results

In the fall of 2022, the Business Research & Diagnostics Team conducted an exploratory survey designed to provide researchers with a preliminary understanding of the causal factors that may be impacting recruitment and retention in the BCSS, as well as to provide an early assessment of the potential effects of these causal factors on the organization.

The first section of the survey included several quantitative demographic breakdown questions that allowed for the analysis of the results at both a rank and geographical level. This section also contained an exploratory question asking respondents if they were actively seeking alternative employment away from the BCSS (*Table 11*).

Table 11 - BCSS Members Actively Seeking Alternative Employment

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	109	50.50%
No	65	30.10%
Prefer not to say	42	19.40%

Question: Are you actively seeking alternative employment away from the BC Sheriff Service?

Out of 217 respondents, only 30% confirmed that they were not looking for alternative employment. This result was analytically significant as it demonstrated the number of employees who are actively looking to leave the organization. Since the fiscal year 2020-21, the BCSS has seen a steep increase in resignation rates. If an additional 109 employees were to leave, there would be court closures, delays in court proceedings, and significant backlogs that could impact the efficacy of the justice system.

Moreover, the results from the exploratory survey further demonstrated a need for a thorough investigation of recruitment and retention issues in the BCSS and highlighted the urgency required for developing solutions to enact organizational change.

Qualitative Findings

Disclaimer

When reading the qualitative findings and subsequent analysis, it is critical to remember that the researchers do not claim that the narrative presented in this section represents factual truth regarding the identified issues. The purpose of this research initiative was to find out why sheriffs are leaving the BCSS; it was not to independently verify the accuracy and veracity of any of the points presented during the project. However, as described in the methodology chapter, every issue that is summarized in this report was brought up multiple times in multiple focus groups, thereby meeting the general test of internal validity.

The data was collected from individuals who participated in focus groups, surveys, and interviews, each with their own opinions, conclusions, values, prejudices, perspectives, and desires. This applies to line staff, supervisors, and managers alike. Debates and discussions were common in every focus group, and achieving a complete consensus on the matters discussed was often elusive. In this section, the key findings represent the prevailing majority opinion of the participants, unless explicitly stated otherwise in the narrative.

In this section, references to sheriffs include focus group participants at all ranks in the BCSS. Position titles such as Deputy Sheriff, Sergeant, etc. are used when comments are only specific to a particular rank. References to supervisors can refer to any individuals who are in a supervisory role at any level of the BCSS, however in most cases refer to Sergeants and Staff Sergeants. Managers refer to anyone in an excluded manager position. Executives refers to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Sheriff, Deputy Chief Sheriffs, and Superintendents.

Some of the theme and sub-theme titles, as well as some of the explanatory narratives presented for each, may be perceived as provocative by the reader. In some cases, a sentence or paragraph could have been phrased in a more neutral manner. However, the titles and narratives themselves are deliberately based on the specific language used by individual participants throughout the focus group process. The authors strive to incorporate as much of the original participants' language as possible to avoid certain forms of researcher bias and to strengthen the internal validity of the project.

The research team has made every effort to isolate the central narrative of each theme. However, due to the interconnected nature of the identified themes and the non-linear structure of qualitative data, some overlap may occur. To facilitate analysis and comprehension of the findings, the research team has prioritized the most significant themes and organized them, along with their corresponding subthemes, in a logical and coherent manner.

Direct quotes from focus group participants are valuable additions to a research paper, particularly in qualitative research, and have been included throughout this chapter. These quotes constitute the actual data collected over the course of the project and serve as powerful illustrations and support for the research findings. They help clarify and strengthen the narrative by providing specific examples related to the discussed issues or themes. Moreover, incorporating direct quotes enhances the authenticity of the research, allowing readers to directly engage with participants' voices. Careful consideration was given to the selection of quotes to ensure their relevance and contribution to the overall research.

Key Themes and Issues Identified

This section aims to describe the major themes identified in the focus groups that have a negative impact on recruitment and retention. It will begin with the themes that were frequently mentioned across the organization and deemed by participants as the most significant problems to address. Within these overarching themes, there will be detailed descriptions of subthemes, providing a more comprehensive context of how employees are affected by these issues.

Most of the themes were mentioned in some capacity by all regions and ranks. Where applicable, the researchers have highlighted how specific groups of employees are differently impacted by these issues. Throughout this section, direct quotes from focus group participants have been included to emphasize the discussed matters. Additional quotes associated with these themes can be found in the [Comments from the Field](#) chapter.

Seven key themes emerged from the comprehensive analysis of focus group discussions, encompassing all ranks and regions within the BC Sheriff Service, along with findings from the exploratory survey and interviews. These themes were universally recognized as the primary obstacles hindering recruitment and retention efforts.

- **Pay and Benefits:** Dissatisfaction with pay and benefits emerged as the predominant theme in all focus groups, impacting all locations, regions, and ranks within the organization. Participants expressed concerns that unless pay levels are increased, the BCSS will continue to face staff attrition and operational limitations.
- **Placement within Court Services Branch:** Focus group participants expressed their discontent with the organization's placement within CSB, due to an imbalance in organizational structure that puts the BCSS at a disadvantage. They have perceived a lack of respect, a lack of understanding, and insufficient prioritization of sheriff issues. Sheriffs and their leadership expressed a desire for greater autonomy, decision-making authority, and a separate organizational identity.
- **Executive-Level Management:** Sheriffs at all levels expressed concerns that executives do not show enough support for employees. This includes insufficient staff coverage, inadequate safety measures, and a lack of legal assistance for employees. They also feel that leadership's failure to address these issues results in a lack of strategic vision for the organization and uncertainty among the sheriffs.
- **Duties and Role:** Dissatisfaction with job duties is negatively influencing both job satisfaction and retention rates. Many sheriffs feel underutilized, leading to feelings of boredom and frustration. There is discontent with policies that limit the authority and autonomy of Deputy Sheriffs, both in the courthouse and in the community.
- **Supervisory-Level Management:** The BCSS exhibits significant variation in supervisory styles, with some Deputy Sheriffs expressing satisfaction and others dissatisfaction with their supervision across different locations. Participants noted that the lack of consistency stems from inadequate training and development for supervisors and managers, resulting in poor communication and negative effects such as micromanagement, bullying, and unfair treatment.
- **Stress and Workload:** The BCSS is grappling with widespread staffing shortages, resulting in increased workloads and stress levels. This understaffing has far-reaching consequences, affecting job satisfaction, staff and courthouse safety, supervisory responsibilities, and the overall well-being of personnel.

- **Recruitment:** The organization is facing challenges in recruiting and retaining applicants. The BCSS is struggling to fill recruitment classes, and sheriffs expressed dissatisfaction with the current provincial recruitment model, which creates financial and regional barriers for applicants.

In addition, the following issues were raised by almost all focus groups, but were not “universal issues” like the prior seven:

- **Staffing Practices:** Sheriffs identified that the BCSS's staffing practices contribute to retention issues and low employee engagement. Employees are more likely to leave when they are unable to work near their home and family, and there is dissatisfaction with promotional competitions and prolonged temporary appointments of supervisors and managers.
- **Professional Development:** Deputy Sheriffs across the province expressed dissatisfaction with the ongoing training provided by the BCSS, citing its insufficiency and unequal distribution. They raised concerns about safety due to the lack of training, acknowledging that staffing shortages contribute to the issue, but also criticizing how the BCSS manages its ongoing training.
- **Tools and Workspace:** Focus group participants raised concerns about inadequate tools and workspaces, citing safety issues and inconveniences. Although not the main driver of employee attrition, subpar tools contribute significantly to Deputy Sheriffs feeling undervalued in terms of safety and perceiving their organization as not being a top tier law enforcement agency.

1. Pay and Benefits

Pay and Benefits was the most mentioned theme across all focus groups. It was one of the themes that was universal across all locations, regions, and ranks within the organization. Sheriffs feel strongly that this is the main root problem negatively impacting recruitment and retention, and they believe that addressing this issue needs to be the first priority before implementing any further strategies. Many participants voiced their concerns that if pay levels are not increased, the BC Sheriff Service will continue to lose more staff and will be unable to function within the next five years.

Uncompetitive Pay

In every focus group across the province, participants voiced their concerns about their pay not being competitive with other law enforcement agencies. They believe this is the main reason why the BCSS is losing so many employees. Sheriffs noted a significant and growing gap between police officers' and sheriffs' salaries, with an approximate \$40,000 difference. After a few years as a police officer, sheriffs stated that they could be making more money than senior leaders within the BCSS. They acknowledged that they should not be paid the same as police officers due to the differing levels of risk in their daily duties, but they emphasized the need for a smaller pay gap. The perception that their organization and profession are falling behind in terms of compensation has resulted in low morale and diminished self-esteem. Many participants stated that they take pride in their work but feel embarrassed to disclose their salary to friends and family. There is also a sense of embarrassment that even senior leaders within the BCSS do not earn salaries comparable to those in other law enforcement agencies.

“People think I am joking when I tell them my salary.”

Many employees who leave the BCSS transition directly to positions in police forces. Police forces actively recruit Deputy Sheriffs because they are well-trained and have already undergone detailed background checks. In numerous focus groups, participants openly admitted to being in the process of applying to a police agency, while many others expressed their intention to do so. Pay was frequently cited as the primary motivation for leaving, although some mentioned the desire for more engaging and interesting job duties. Colleagues and supervisors did not blame these sheriffs for leaving, as they recognized it as a wise financial decision. Some supervisors even admitted to no longer trying to convince employees to stay and expressed regret for not leaving the BCSS themselves years ago, as they would be in a much better financial position today.

“Within a few years, police are making more than our senior leadership. It’s completely embarrassing.”

Uncompetitive pay not only adversely affects retention and morale but also diminishes the BCSS's ability to attract new recruits. The number of applicants has significantly declined in recent years. Many potential recruits do not view the BCSS as an attractive career option due to the lower pay, openly admitting that they consider it merely a steppingstone to joining higher-paying police organizations. In multiple focus groups, sheriffs admitted that they privately discouraged their family members and friends from pursuing a career as a sheriff, knowing that it would not lead to financial success. They instead encouraged them to apply directly to a police force if they were interested in law enforcement.

Another aspect of the pay issue is that it takes five years for Deputy Sheriffs to reach the top step of their pay scale. Some believe that if there is any hope of retaining new recruits, they should progress through the steps more quickly or be hired at a higher step initially, as many new recruits do not stay long enough to reach the top of their pay scale.

Focus group participants also noted that it is not just police agencies that offer higher pay. For example, they mentioned that, in their view, Legislative Security Officers working at the BC Parliament Buildings have fewer duties and less regular contact with high-risk individuals and receive higher salaries. Canadian Border Services Officers were also frequently mentioned as receiving better pay. Participants frequently highlighted other sectors offering higher-paying jobs with less training and risk, such as sawmills, waste removal, bus driving, construction, and administrative or managerial positions in municipal government or private companies.

“I can make more money swinging a hammer somewhere.”

When asked about a reasonable annual salary, nearly every focus group settled on a figure between \$85,000 and \$90,000.

Uncompetitive Retirement Benefits

In addition to uncompetitive wages, sheriffs noted that retirement and pension eligibility for BCSS members is not on par with other law enforcement agencies. Sheriffs are required to accumulate 35 years of service or work until age 65 to qualify for a full pension, or work until 60 for a reduced pension. In comparison, BC Corrections officers, who are part of the same union component as sheriffs, can retire with a full pension at age 60, five years earlier. RCMP officers can retire with a full pension after 25 years of service or with a reduced pension after 20 years. Currently, the BCSS is unable to offer the option of earlier retirement since sheriffs are not designated as a public safety occupation by the federal

government. This is perceived as unfair by employees, as they view their work as comparable to that of police and corrections officers.

“I don’t want to be 62 years old, rolling around fighting with a convict.”

Sheriffs highlighted that their job is physically taxing and takes a toll on their bodies. They are sometimes required to intervene in physical altercations, and they can get back strain over time from wearing their body armour and heavy utility belt. Some sheriffs expressed concerns that the job may not be well-suited for them when they are in their sixties. When Deputy Sheriffs consider the long-term financial and physical impacts of choosing one career over another, the ability to retire earlier becomes an attractive benefit offered by other agencies.

Public Service Pay Classification System is Unfair

Sheriffs’ current level of pay is also perceived as unfair when compared to other jobs within the BC Public Service, primarily due to the design of the Public Service Job Evaluation Plan, which determines job classifications and pay levels. Sheriffs argued that the classification system assigns points to work types and responsibilities commonly found in administrative, financial, and management roles (such as spending authority). However, it fails to acknowledge the responsibilities associated with carrying a firearm, as well as the level of risk sheriffs face when responding to security threats, making arrests, handling hazardous drugs, interacting with potentially dangerous accused persons, dealing with bodily fluids and feces, administering naloxone, and engaging with homeless and mentally ill individuals.

Consequently, the pay sheriffs receive is comparable to that of mid-level administrative positions in other areas of the public service, despite sheriffs undertaking significantly higher levels of risk. This compensation system is perceived as unfair and results in pay that does not align with the nature of the work. This sense of unfairness leads to financial difficulties and a lack of competitiveness. Moreover, it is interpreted as a lack of respect for sheriffs, indicating that the BC Public Service does not fully appreciate the importance of their work and the risks they assume to safeguard the public.

“We’re expected to run toward gunfire in the courthouses. They don’t pay us to be first responders, but we’re expected to be first on the scene.”

Impacts of Low Pay on Quality of Life

Many focus group participants discussed the direct and indirect impacts of low pay on their quality of life. They shared their financial struggles, expressing concerns about paying bills, mortgage payments, and supporting their families, particularly due to the increased cost of living over the past decade. Single parents, in particular, face difficulties making ends meet on their sheriff salary, and some participants mentioned colleagues who regularly relied on local food banks. Many younger employees worry about their ability to have children or afford suitable housing for their families with their current salary. This concern was raised not only in the Lower Mainland but also in the Interior region and Vancouver Island.

Deputy Sheriffs working in courthouses in urban centres explained that they cannot afford to live near their workplace due to high housing costs. Consequently, they have to endure long commutes, which not only reduces the amount of time they can spend with their families but also increases their expenses for fuel and parking fees.

“The only way to get more pay is to work a second job, and then so much for work-life balance.”

Focus group participants acknowledged that being a sheriff offers a potentially better work-life balance compared to a policing job. This is attributed to the Monday-to-Friday business schedule, as opposed to the demanding 12-hour shifts and night shifts commonly found in policing. However, some sheriffs cannot afford to work only the 35 scheduled hours due to the low rate of pay. As a result, many Deputy Sheriffs explained that they work second jobs to supplement their income. Most focus groups estimated that 40% to 50% of sheriffs have a second job. The impact of this, however, is that employees end up working on evenings and weekends, leading to burnout. This negatively affects their personal well-being and their performance at work. Supervisors noted that employees with second jobs are more likely to appear tired at work, have less flexibility to take certain shifts, and tend to take more sick leave.

Additionally, many Deputy Sheriffs said that they rely on working overtime to make ends meet. While they value the extra income, excessive overtime hours contribute to overwork and burnout. Concerns were raised about the potential impact on alertness and safety when fatigued sheriffs are required to perform critical tasks such as driving or operating firearms. Excessive overtime also takes a toll on personal relationships and family dynamics.

This dependence on overtime can lead to competition for overtime shifts and foster resentment when the process of allocating overtime is perceived as unfair. Certain locations may offer more opportunities for overtime than others, which generates feelings of resentment towards local managers for depriving staff of the chance to earn more money. Additionally, there can be resentment towards the BCSS for unfair compensation practices across different locations.

“We don’t want to work 300 – 400 hours of overtime to have a living wage.”

Insufficient Scheduled Hours

The vast majority of Deputy Sheriffs support increasing the workweek from 35 to 40 hours as a way to boost their pay and make remuneration more competitive with other agencies. Many sheriffs are already working extra hours, either through overtime or second jobs. They explained that increasing regular hours would be preferable to working overtime because the hours would count toward their pensions, whereas overtime hours do not. Additionally, overtime hours and earnings do not appear on the proof of income letter required for mortgage approval. Therefore, incorporating these extra hours into the regular schedule could be beneficial. Sheriffs argued that working five additional hours per week at regular time could also reduce the amount of overtime that the organization pays out at time and a half.

Many sheriffs are frustrated with the apparent inability of the union and management to implement the 40-hour workweek. There is considerable confusion among staff members regarding whether this option is still available or if it has been permanently set aside. At one point, the 40-hour workweek was part of an agreement negotiated by the union, but the overall agreement was not ratified by the members. There is a need for clarification on whether a 40-hour workweek is still a possibility.

In addition, many focus groups noted that sheriffs do not require a full hour for lunch. Instead, they would prefer a 30-minute lunch break and an increase in the hours they are paid for. Supervisors

emphasized that this change would be beneficial from a security perspective as it would increase the number of staff on duty during a time period when many court users are moving around the building.

Lack of Compensation for Additional Duties

While many sheriffs are interested in pursuing additional training or taking on supervisor responsibilities, others believe that it is not worthwhile due to inadequate compensation. The low pay discourages them from going beyond their basic job duties. For instance, some sheriffs mentioned their lack of interest in carbine training or advanced escort training because acquiring these skills would entail greater responsibility and risk without any corresponding increase in compensation. Similarly, some employees refuse to assist with extra projects or tasks outside their core duties because they feel their current pay does not justify additional effort.

“If you work through a lunch, you can get paid more than a sergeant!”

Salary compression issues also lead many sheriffs to decline acting or permanent supervisor roles at the next rank up. This situation hinders the BCSS's ability to fill short-term job openings and results in fewer applications for full-time positions. Many believe that the added responsibilities of a higher role do not warrant the minimal increase in compensation being offered. Sergeants, in particular, noted that they bear considerably more responsibility than the Deputy Sheriffs they supervise but receive only a marginal pay increase.

Salary compression not only impedes the service's ability to fill positions on a day-to-day basis but also discourages employees from staying with the BCSS, as they see limited opportunities for long-term career growth. Advancing in rank often means less access to overtime, leading to a reduction in overall income. Many Deputy Sheriffs earn more than Sergeants when factoring in overtime. Staff Sergeants, the highest union-included rank, increasingly decline the opportunity to act as Inspectors, which are excluded management positions, due to the ineligibility for paid overtime.

Additionally, some sheriffs state that they are hesitant to assume the added responsibilities of work-related travel, as they feel their travel expenses are not adequately reimbursed. They noted that their per diem amount does not cover the cost of quality meals, and they are often booked in the cheapest hotel options, which lack kitchenettes or facilities for cooking. Consequently, many employees resort to fast food options, or end up paying out-of-pocket for higher-quality restaurant meals. This adds financial burden to their travel experience, compounded by the inconvenience of being away from their families.

Many sheriffs report working through breaks without compensation. They feel obligated to respond when needed when they are on-site and in uniform, even if they are on a break. Due to the lack of coverage during the lunch period, some sheriffs feel compelled to assist colleagues or answer phone calls. In certain courthouses, sheriffs eat lunch in areas where accused individuals are being escorted, or in public-facing office areas where they are frequently interrupted by courthouse users seeking assistance. Some sheriffs miss their breaks because they are driving an escort vehicle with inmates onboard. While there are processes in place for being paid for missed breaks, some employees encounter resistance from supervisors when claiming this time and are occasionally denied compensation. Although this issue is considered secondary to the overall problem of low pay, it contributes to employees feeling exploited and exacerbates their dissatisfaction with their pay.

Dissatisfaction with Union Representation

Across the province, sheriffs expressed dissatisfaction with the representation provided by the BCGEU. Sheriffs do not feel the union has effectively advocated for higher pay, and many reported voting against the most recent contract. Moreover, sheriffs feel that the union does not adequately represent their interests, as it appears to prioritize office and administrative workers over law enforcement professionals. They perceive a lack of inclusion in bargaining discussions and express concerns that their unique job requirements are not understood or taken seriously.

“Our current union is like going into a Costco and we are just one tiny product on the shelf. We are ignored and our voices don’t matter.”

Another significant source of discontent is the sheriffs' perceived lack of autonomy to negotiate as a distinct organization. They are grouped together with a larger pool of Correctional Officers within their union component, which they feel renders their votes inconsequential. Many sheriffs expressed a desire to either decertify or form their own union as they believe their needs are not adequately represented in the current system.

2. Placement within Court Services Branch

The current placement of the BCSS within Court Services Branch has generated significant dissatisfaction, as consistently expressed in focus groups across all regions and ranks within the organization. Sheriffs voiced concerns about the incongruity between their law enforcement and security-focused role and the procedural and administrative orientation of the Court Administration Division in CSB. They perceive decision-making within CSB as primarily prioritizing court administration matters, resulting in a lack of consideration for sheriffs.

Moreover, many sheriffs feel that their role is undervalued and lacks respect within CSB, which is exemplified in organizational hierarchy differences and the way they are treated. They have reported instances of derogatory remarks and stereotypes that undermine their professional status as law enforcement officers. Sheriffs acknowledge that the level of respectful treatment has improved in recent years under the current ADM of CSB, but they are concerned that the dynamic may worsen again depending on the attitudes of future ADMs. Sheriffs want to see the BCSS have greater autonomy, more decision-making authority, and a more distinct organizational identity.

Negative Impacts of the Organizational Structure

Sheriffs across the province feel that the BCSS is not a natural fit within CSB, as the type of work they perform differs significantly from the procedural and administrative-focused Court Administration Division. This concern was raised by focus group participants at all locations and ranks. Sheriffs emphasized that CSB decisions primarily revolve around court administration matters, and over the years there have been problems created by a lack of understanding of the needs and perspectives of the sheriffs. They said this has been a longstanding issue for the BCSS, which has improved under the current ADM, but has the potential to worsen depending on who is leading the branch.

Many sheriffs strongly advocate for placing the BCSS under the purview of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, where there is a better understanding of public safety organizations and the decision-making processes involved in law enforcement. Alternatively, they suggest that the BCSS should operate independently from CSB within the Ministry of Attorney General, allowing for greater autonomy in making security-related decisions.

“We have always been the bridesmaid and never the bride. We always fall in second and Court Administration and the Registry come first. I think we need our own identity.”

Focus group participants from management ranks noted that the structure of CSB puts the BCSS at a disadvantage. The ADM has five direct reports from Court Administration Division, but only one from the BC Sheriff Service. Consequently, over the years ADMs have tended to dedicate more time to supporting their direct reports from Court Administration Division. Similarly, there is only one Executive Director from the BCSS on the Branch Management Committee, while there are five Executive Directors representing court administration regions. Sheriff managers have stated that conversations at these branch executive meetings usually revolve around issues pertinent to court administration, leaving only a limited amount of time and attention for sheriff-related matters. As a result, sheriff managers believe that branch decisions favour Court Administration Division and CSB Headquarters over the BCSS, and that problems faced by Court Administration Division employees are resolved more quickly.

Sheriffs also noted that ADMs of CSB always come from Court Administration Division or other administrative backgrounds, and never from within the BCSS. They observe a longstanding pattern where ADMs have experience and focus that are more aligned with court administration rather than with sheriffs and lack experience and knowledge about law enforcement. Most sheriffs express a higher level of respect for the current ADM compared to previous ones, as they believe she is more open to listening and understanding the sheriff's perspective on issues. However, they believe that the skillset and experience required to effectively provide leadership to the BCSS are fundamentally different from what is required to lead an administrative-focused branch. While there may be individuals who can better balance these dual roles, they believe it is an unnatural organizational fit that hampers the BCSS's ability to manage itself effectively.

“It's not that they aren't intelligent, but they don't have the background to lead us. That's like asking the mechanic down the street to operate the hospital.”

Since the ADM role is currently designated as the Director of the BC Sheriff Service in policy, the Chief Sheriff must rely on the ADM for certain decisions. Every time a new ADM assumes office, the BCSS invests significant time and effort in explaining their role, as ADMs rarely possess prior experience in law enforcement. Sheriffs find that making progress in addressing their issues often hinges on how quickly the ADM understands the work of sheriffs, as well as the ADM's own personal attitudes towards law enforcement and use of force issues. In the past, sheriffs have encountered certain ADMs who have not been supportive of the BCSS and have impeded improvements. Sheriffs find it frustrating that their

success appears to depend so heavily on an external executive who may or may not understand or support them. The majority of sheriffs expressed confidence in the Chief Sheriff's experience and abilities, but they perceive that his decisions are frequently overridden by civilian-focused priorities and perspectives at the executive level.

From many sheriffs' perspective, civilian decision-makers have demonstrated a lack of understanding of sheriff work and a lack of sound judgment regarding security-related issues. They have noticed that individuals from CSB Headquarters and Court Administration Division often appear to be intimidated by firearms and use of force techniques, and sometimes need to be persuaded that sheriffs should be allowed to employ these tactics when necessary. Sheriffs perceive that other CSB employees tend to downplay the level of risk faced by court users and fail to grasp the extensive efforts involved in managing threats and potentially dangerous individuals behind the scenes. They believe that certain decisions, such as the location of carbines, are driven by fear and discomfort rather than by an objective

“Remove this organization from CSB. They handcuff us severely. We are saddled in CSB and have to report to clerks.”

evaluation of risk and response tactics. They find that they must invest significant time and energy in explaining and justifying their use of force decisions, even when they have executed them appropriately, to CSB Headquarters and Court Administration Division staff who may lack a full understanding of sheriffs' training and scope of authority. Sheriffs perceive that CSB prioritizes creating a welcoming courthouse environment and wishes to avoid portraying sheriffs as overly militaristic or threatening to the public. However, they believe this emphasis on appearance poses safety risks for all court user groups.

Sheriffs firmly believe that decisions regarding security should be entrusted to professionals who possess the necessary training and experience in the field, in order to ensure the safety of employees, the Judiciary, and all courthouse users. They contend that certain decisions made by CSB leadership have created liabilities and are impeding sheriffs' ability to respond effectively to emergency situations. They expressed frustration that the BCSS, staffed by trained experts in evaluating and addressing security threats, can be overruled on security matters by civilians lacking expertise in security. Despite such decisions significantly hindering sheriffs' response capabilities, sheriffs note that they will still be expected to respond and be held accountable for effectively managing threats. They perceive an imbalance wherein the BCSS bears significant responsibility and accountability but lacks sufficient authority in their field of expertise. This frustration and concern lead sheriffs to view separation from CSB as the only viable solution, with increased decision-making authority granted to the Chief Sheriff.

Sheriffs also perceive a problem with the fact that policy analysts responsible for creating policies for the BCSS do not report to the Chief Sheriff but are instead part of CSB Headquarters. They believe that many policies are influenced more by Court Administration Division and the ADM than by sheriff leadership. They express the view that having dedicated policy experts accountable to the BCSS, with a deeper understanding of their operations, would be more beneficial.

Sheriffs understand that their policies and operations also have to meet the needs of the Judiciary and other partner organizations in the justice system. However, during many focus groups, sheriffs expressed concerns that other organizations have too much influence over how sheriffs do their work. They believe that CSB does not adequately defend sheriff interests when negotiating with other partners. Sheriffs argue that establishing the BCSS as its own independent branch, with a leader who better understands sheriff issues, would enhance their standing and enable them to advocate more effectively for their own interests and security matters. Sheriffs strongly advocate for the BCSS to have the authority to make final decisions regarding safety and security.

“I’d go through the wall for our Chief Sheriff, and I think he has amazing ideas, but he is currently handcuffed and we need to let him be able to lead the organization and take us into the future.”

Sheriffs consistently expressed the perception that being part of CSB acts as an obstacle to expanding their duties and fully realizing their potential as public safety professionals. They strongly believe that if the BCSS were established as its own separate branch, they would have greater freedom to shape their role and develop a more defined professional identity. Sheriffs envision that such independence would foster a stronger sense of unity and esprit de corps among their ranks, increase the autonomy of the BCSS, and reduce the limitations imposed by CSB-controlled policies. Many sheriffs pointed to the Alberta Sheriff Service as a reference point, highlighting its separate branch structure and noting the perceived success of Alberta sheriffs in building their own distinct identity and maintaining control over their affairs.

Lack of Respect and Recognition

Sheriffs know that their work is very important to the justice system, and that it takes considerable training and experience to be good at their job. However, they feel that their role and skills are not always recognized or respected by CSB. Over the years they have perceived a general lack of respect from other areas of CSB, and there is a widespread belief that CSB leadership and Headquarters do not fully understand or appreciate the work of sheriffs, nor are they sufficiently willing to advocate for the interests of sheriffs. Many of the examples used to illustrate this problem were from the past, and many sheriffs indicated that in general the level of respect from other areas of CSB had improved in recent years. However, many sheriffs still feel resentment about the way they were treated in the past, which has created lasting damage. In addition, there were some examples of disrespect that were quite recent or ongoing.

“It feels like a caste system. It feels like we sit at the bottom of the hierarchy.”

There have been instances in the past where comments and attitudes from CSB ADMs and executives have downplayed the significance of the sheriff's role, such as referring to them as "just sheriffs" or "glorified security guards." Employees shared experiences of being told by a previous ADM that sheriffs would not receive higher pay because their positions were considered "entry level." Some executives have openly referred to the BCSS as a mere "steppingstone organization". These types

of comments are perceived as disrespectful, especially by sheriffs who have dedicated their careers to this line of work. Many sheriffs find it insulting that their executives seemingly have not recognized them as fully-fledged law enforcement professionals.

Sheriffs have also noticed the perpetuation of disrespectful stereotypes about their profession from some employees within Court Administration Division and CSB Headquarters. Examples include the notion that sheriffs possess physical strength but lack intelligence, or that they simply aspire to be police officers. Sheriffs have heard comments such as, "I didn't know that a sheriff could be this smart." Facing these attitudes is discouraging and contributes to a sense of being undervalued. It leaves many sheriffs contemplating alternative career paths where they can expect to be treated with more respect and dignity.

Sheriffs feel that they are treated as the "bottom rung in the CSB ladder," which is disheartening for many staff members. They have observed instances where court registry employees receive office upgrades, new equipment, ergonomic chairs, and safety enhancements like plexiglass, while sheriffs receive no such considerations. Sheriffs interpret this discrepancy as a sign that they are not valued as much as Court Administration Division employees. Additionally, sheriffs often find themselves assigned menial tasks in the courthouse that nobody else wants to do. For instance, during the COVID-19

pandemic, they were tasked with cleaning duties and temperature checks. Sheriffs view this as an insult, as they are highly trained professionals comparable to police officers, yet they are given responsibilities typically associated with security guards, janitors, and greeters.

Some sheriffs relayed stories of being condescended to by Court Administration Division staff at a local level. They also reported that decisions made by courthouse managers from Court Administration Division tend to override those made by sheriff managers. Although this situation has improved since the days when all sheriffs reported directly to courthouse managers, sheriffs still feel that Court Administration Division wields significantly more influence than the BCSS.

“The registry expects us to answer to them and the mentality is that ‘we have questions and you better answer to us ASAP’.”

In many focus groups, sheriff managers pointed out structural inequities that contribute to Court Administration managers appearing to hold higher ranks. Sheriff Superintendents, who are each responsible for one of the five provincial regions, are classified as Band 4 managers. On the other hand, their counterparts in Court Administration Division, the Regional Executive Directors, are classified as Band 5 managers. Court Administration Executive Directors supervise administrative managers, office workers, and clerks within courthouses, whereas Superintendents are responsible for armed law enforcement officers engaging with dangerous individuals, with operations extending across courthouses, correctional centres, police detachments, and transport duties in between.

There is significant asymmetry between the rank hierarchies of the divisions within Court Services Branch. Court Administration Regional Executive Directors report directly to the Assistant Deputy Minister, while Sheriff Superintendents report to a Deputy Chief Sheriff, which is two levels down from the ADM even though the Superintendents are the structural equivalents of Regional Executive Directors. This asymmetry situates the whole BCSS management structure lower within the organization, creating significant power imbalances at all levels between the two divisions. This structural imbalance makes staff at all levels of the BCSS feel inferior to their counterparts within the Court Administration Division.

“We are not consulted, even if a change makes zero operational sense. We are just monkeys in the blue uniform, here to make sure everyone plays nice, so it’ll happen regardless.”

In addition, Deputy Sheriffs feel that they are not adequately consulted on policy changes that affect their work and this is also perceived to be disrespectful. They believe they lack opportunities to provide feedback before top-down changes are implemented. Staff resent that their policies and procedures appear to be driven by Court Administration Division, CSB Headquarters, and the BC Prosecution Service, with the BCSS seemingly unable or unwilling to push back, even when policies create significant inconveniences or safety risks for front-line sheriffs.

For example, there were many complaints about how virtual bail processes were implemented and how they continue to impact how sheriffs do their work. Deputy Sheriffs felt that the observations and concerns of front-line sheriffs did not seem to be taken into consideration. There was also disappointment about the process of implementing the new policies and procedures regarding illicit drugs, and a perception that they were communicated top-down with little opportunity for sheriffs to raise concerns. Many sheriffs felt that the policies would not be operationally feasible, and may increase personal risk to sheriffs. There was a widespread feeling that decision-makers did not respect or value sheriffs' input, yet sheriffs would have to live with the consequences of the decisions.

Focus group participants from higher management ranks noted that in most instances the Chief Sheriff and the Sheriff Management Team do have an opportunity to provide feedback on policies drafted by CSB Headquarters, but are not the final decision makers. BCSS leaders feel they are sometimes put into a position where raising concerns with a policy means openly questioning the decisions of CSB executives who are above them in the organizational hierarchy. This power dynamic is not always conducive to open and honest communication. Reluctance to challenge decisions sometimes results in policies that are not optimal for efficient and effective operations in the BCSS. There is an awareness within the BCSS that policies have to balance legislative limitations, broader government and corporate initiatives, and the interests of other partners in the justice system. However, focus group participants have concerns that in some instances sheriff perspectives are not sufficiently considered.

Culture of Risk Aversion

Many focus group participants described how a culture of risk aversion seems to permeate the BCSS. They believe that this is driven by CSB and effectively imposed on the BCSS through decisions and policies. As a result, they perceive that their organization greatly prefers inaction over proactive efforts to mitigate threats and solve problems. Furthermore, the organization encourages its employees to avoid all situations with a potential for risk. This diminishes the effectiveness of the BCSS as an organization and makes it more challenging for individual sheriffs to carry out their duties effectively and confidently.

Sheriffs understand that creating policies to avoid all risk is a rational mindset for an administrative organization that does not regularly engage in dangerous activities. However, they find it is not an effective mindset for a law enforcement agency whose core function is to engage with dangerous individuals and risky situations. Policies that are founded in a philosophy of risk aversion and avoidance will ultimately curtail the effectiveness of the BCSS by limiting the ability of officers to proactively engage and mitigate security threats. From their perspective, a law enforcement agency needs to accept that they are in a dangerous line of business and take steps to manage risk, rather than attempting to avoid it altogether. Sheriffs argue that the most effective way to do this is to train, empower, and trust employees to manage dangerous situations, following the principles of using the minimum force required and operating within their legal scope of authority. Curtailing their options with specific policies often does not help to lessen the level of risk they face; it just limits their options for dealing with it effectively.

Deputy Sheriffs described examples of policies they believe are driven by a culture of fear and risk aversion. The most frequently mentioned situation pertains to carbines and the way they are distributed across the province. Sheriffs expressed concerns that they are not distributed evenly across courthouse locations, and that the scope of their use is too narrow and restrictive. Sheriffs believe threats can occur in any location, and in certain situations the increased accuracy and range of a long gun could be beneficial, or even necessary for protecting public safety.

Sheriffs across the province strongly believe that they do not have sufficient access to a tool that could significantly enhance their effectiveness during certain emergencies. They perceive that decisions around carbine policy are driven by irrational fear on the

“There is definitely a disconnect between our policy writers and the operational reality of our frontline staff. Policy makers have to appease a lot of different groups and have to answer to higher ups. I think it is well intentioned but policies that comes out at the other end don’t make sense for people on the front line.”

part of civilian decision-makers who dislike firearms, fail to understand their potential as effective tools, and lack trust in sheriffs' ability to use them safely and responsibly. Multiple focus groups expressed the view that this policy is unlikely to change unless an incident occurs resulting in loss of life, thereby demonstrating that access to a carbine could have saved lives.

Sheriffs also perceive that their role is becoming more and more limited, and their scope of authority is eroding, due to an increased level of risk aversion in the BCSS and Court Services Branch. An example described by focus group participants pertains to a protocol that used to be in place, wherein Deputy Sheriffs would take action to clear traffic and people from surrounding streets in the event of potential danger, such as a bomb threat. However, an internal policy change was implemented, stating that sheriffs are no longer authorized to perform this duty. Instead, they are required to call the police to block off streets. The perceived rationale behind this policy change was that the BCSS could not assume the liabilities associated with this particular task. Sheriffs feel embarrassed by the fact that the police, who they know are already stretched thin in terms of resources, have to spend hours performing this duty that the sheriffs themselves are capable of and willing to do. They have received feedback from police officers who are resentful and annoyed that the sheriffs are unable to step up and fulfill this responsibility. A more detailed discussion on how sheriffs' work is constrained by policy is included in the [Duties and Role](#) theme.

Sheriffs also described how their organization seems to be constantly on the lookout to discipline employees who overstep their authority and act too proactively. They mentioned that when they approach a dangerous situation involving someone armed with a weapon or acting violently, their primary concern is often the subsequent questioning and investigation process rather than their immediate physical safety. Instead of fully focusing on the situation and relying on their training, they find themselves preoccupied with thoughts of justifications and documentation required to defend themselves within their own organization. Every sheriff is aware of colleagues who have faced suspension or other disciplinary measures following their involvement in a physical altercation.

Direct supervisors are seen as more likely to be supportive in these situations and will acknowledge when the employee did the right thing. However, when the reports about the incident go up the chain of command, employees often find themselves called into a manager's office and asked questions about specific policies and training points in a way that makes them feel like they are being disciplined. Some feel that the main purpose of the policy manual is to find fault in whatever action an employee takes. When details reach CSB Headquarters staff, sheriffs say that some people reviewing the incident reports or conducting investigations lack understanding of the techniques used and tend to overreact to the use of force, even if the sheriff had acted according to training and policy.

The investigation process was described as very stressful and overly focused on the mistakes made by sheriffs, while providing little or no recognition for their achievements, even in situations that were effectively managed with minimal injuries. Sheriffs believe that they are expected to meet an unrealistic standard of perfection that fails to consider the unexpected nature of events,

“As soon as an incident happens, the policy book gets thrown at you and you get dragged through the coals. My staff were petrified that they were going to get in trouble and there would be investigations even though they did the right thing. I told my staff I would support them but I’m just waiting for the emails to come from HQ asking for videos so they can pick the situation apart and investigate my staff. It is stressful and it takes a lot of time and energy, and it makes my staff feel like they can’t do anything right.”

where they are forced to make split-second decisions. They desire a more supportive and empowering approach from their organization during these reviews, allowing for the benefit of the doubt and acknowledging their actions as the best possible given the circumstances.

Sheriffs are concerned that their workforce has internalized a culture of risk aversion. This is driven by a desire to minimize or eliminate potential liability for CSB. However, this approach sometimes ends up creating more liability for employees and the public. Participants explained that in certain situations, choosing not to use force is actually the more dangerous choice. Due to the likelihood of scrutiny and disciplinary action, some sheriffs are hesitant to use force even in situations where it is warranted, in

“The branch is so risk averse. They must be scared of liability. But instead, they create liability.”

line with their training, and the safest course of action. In several focus groups, examples were given of scenarios where a sheriff should have drawn their firearm to approach an armed assailant but chose not to. One Deputy Sheriff was very clear that they had personally decided never to use their service weapon, even in a life-or-death situation, because they believed that the resulting investigation and legal consequences would be extremely destructive to their personal life and finances. They felt that they would likely receive little or no support and assistance from their employer.

Sheriffs explained that this aversion to taking decisive action applies not only to the use of force but also to assisting the public in emergency situations. For example, sheriffs in remote areas who stop to assist at vehicle accidents say they receive criticism from managers for their actions and feel that their organization would rather they did not stop to help. Sheriffs working in rough neighborhoods like the Downtown Eastside regularly interact with homeless people and drug users. They have intervened several times to administer naloxone when overdoses have occurred adjacent to the courthouse. Despite knowing that morally they are doing the right thing, they say they receive little positive recognition for their efforts, and some fear they will be reprimanded for trying to save people's lives.

Focus group participants from supervisory and excluded management ranks also brought up risk aversion as a problem in the BCSS. Many feel pressure from executives to be cautious and are frustrated that the role of sheriffs is constrained to its current level. Some supervisors and managers expressed concerns about job security and how they are afraid of stepping out of line and “rocking the boat” because they could be let go. This concern is especially prevalent for those who are only in their role on a temporary assignment, as they could be demoted back to their base position at any time.

Senior ranks acknowledge that the organization has long encouraged employees to stay “in the box” and try not to get involved in any dangerous or controversial situations if they could possibly avoid them. They acknowledge that this attitude is partially responsible for young, ambitious sheriffs leaving the service, as this philosophy of inaction does not resonate with young sheriffs' motives for being in law enforcement and does not allow them to feel proud of who they are and what they can accomplish.

There is a general desire for more support and recognition from their organization when employees take action, especially when individuals act bravely to help each other or the public. Participants explained that some of the problem lies in legislation and policies that limit their ability to act, but also in the attitudes of CSB executives and judges who fear that the sheriffs may appear too imposing or militaristic to the public and are afraid of any action that may result in a negative news story.

3. Executive-Level Management

A perceived lack of support for employees within the organization is a significant concern among sheriffs. Sheriffs, ranging from front-line officers to supervisors and middle managers, feel that the organization fails to provide them with the necessary backing when they encounter challenging situations in the line of duty. This perceived lack of support manifests in various ways, such as insufficient staff coverage, inadequate safety measures, and a dearth of legal assistance when facing lawsuits related to their work. Moreover, the dissatisfaction extends to the perception that the leadership within the organization does not take effective action to address these problems, resulting in a lack of strategic vision and a sense of uncertainty among employees.

Lack of Support for Employees

Sheriffs feel their organization does not provide enough support for employees and does not have their back when they face difficult situations in the line of duty.

Sheriffs feel that they are often asked to put themselves in risky situations to serve their employer, especially in the context of staffing shortages. They feel that their employer does not value their safety and is unwilling to support them in performing their jobs properly. They acknowledge the staffing shortage but believe that their organization is unwilling to prioritize their safety by limiting their workload. Instead, sheriffs feel pressured to make it work regardless of the risks involved.

“If I get in trouble, will the organization have my back? That fear is in us constantly.”

While sheriffs feel that they are going the extra mile to support their organization during challenging times, they do not believe that CSB will reciprocate by providing the necessary support when they need it. Sheriffs specifically emphasized that the organization fails to support them in cases where they are sued for incidents that occurred while carrying out their duties. For instance, an accused individual might file a lawsuit if they feel they were not treated appropriately or claim injury due to the way a sheriff operated a transport vehicle. Sheriffs in multiple focus groups said that during their recruit training at the Justice Institute of BC, they were warned about the lack of employer support in the event of legal trouble related to work-related incidents. New recruits are advised to secure their own defense lawyer in advance and are provided with a list of lawyers experienced in handling sheriff-related issues.

“If I stop a gunman but they’re on the ground, I know the first thing I might have to do is hand in my badge and gun and call a lawyer that I will have to pay for with my own money, even though I did everything my training said to do.”

In multiple focus groups, sheriffs provided examples of several specific incidents where the BCSS was not perceived to have provided necessary legal or administrative support to employees who were involved in legal or investigative proceedings following actions taken in the performance of their job. These incidents have in effect become legends throughout the BCSS, and impact staff perceptions of the organization’s willingness to support them in a time of crisis. These stories have been repeatedly recounted as a cautionary tale, highlighting how their organization does not prioritize the well-being of its members. Many sheriffs are familiar with these accounts and feel that when it comes to defending their actions on the job, they are left to fend for themselves.

Supervisors and middle managers within the BCSS also expressed that they do not feel supported by their organization. They discussed similar scenarios as front-line sheriffs, but also emphasized that they do not feel supported by their leaders when they enforce decisions that are unpopular with the staff they supervise. They are trying to do their job of implementing directives coming from above them and are told to hold staff accountable for following policies and procedures. However, they are then criticized by their leaders if staff members express discontentment with the changes. In certain instances, staff members bypass the chain of command and directly approach leaders and CSB Headquarters positions to address issues that should be handled by local managers. Consequently, managers find themselves caught in the middle and believe they are not receiving the support they require to hold staff accountable.

“It really feels like this organization doesn’t care about sheriffs. We have to fight with in-custodies, and then we have to fight our supervisors, the 6th floor [CSB Headquarters], and everyone in between. We shouldn’t have to fight all the time. We should have support right from the top.”

Executives Are Aware of Problems but Do Not Take Action

Participants in every focus group expressed frustration that they do not see their leadership taking action to resolve issues that have been evident for a long time. They say they have repeatedly raised issues with managers and senior leaders, but it seems as if complaints and suggestions fall on deaf ears, as nothing seems to change. They note that Work Environment Survey results have never been seriously acted upon, and that previous change initiatives, such as the Sheriff 2020 Strategic Plan, did not address the real problems for frontline employees. Staff see such exercises as a "check-box" so that leaders can say they did something. There is a high level of skepticism regarding changes occurring following this research initiative or any future staff engagement initiatives. Many employees are hesitant to invest time into projects they doubt will achieve anything and are wary of feeling hopeful about change, only to be disappointed when it does not occur.

“We make all these suggestions on how we can better the service and it feels like it falls on deaf ears and no one does anything.”

Many Deputy Sheriffs are convinced that sheriff leadership knows what the problems are and could do more, but they are choosing not to. Many staff members feel that there is resistance to change at the senior leadership level. They believe that leaders seem unwilling to make the effort to push for change or that they are comfortable with the status quo because it benefits them. Some also feel that leaders do not care enough about Deputy Sheriffs to enact any changes. They argue that some senior managers purposely avoid discussing obvious problems, as if ignoring them will make them disappear. On the other hand, there are

other employees, especially in supervisory and management positions, who acknowledge that the issues requiring change are not always under the control of sheriff leaders and managers.

Some staff members feel that changes are only made when something significant occurs, such as a security incident or a serious injury. They believe that the organization is aware that issues exist but lacks a proactive approach in addressing problems. Instead, it tends to adopt a reactive stance, waiting for situations to deteriorate significantly before seeking solutions.

Focus group participants explained that sheriff managers and leaders may have the capacity to do more, but they lack the necessary leadership skills for implementing significant changes. They observed that the organization has promoted individuals based on their management skills rather than their leadership

abilities. They argue that the organization does not reward true leaders, as it tends to favor and promote followers who simply carry out orders without advocating for their employees or the organization as a whole.

Several focus group participants highlighted that managers are hesitant to initiate changes due to concerns about job security. The fear of being fired makes them unwilling to acknowledge problems in their office or push for change, as they do not want to be perceived as a nuisance. They observe that managers tend to be cautious and risk-averse, particularly if they are in a temporary assignment or acting capacity. In such cases, they lack confidence in their positions and are aware that their

“Our biggest frustration is that our briefing notes go up and they never come back down, and nothing gets done. Briefing notes should not just disappear – they should be signed ‘accepted’ or ‘rejected’ and not just disappear in a puff of smoke.”

promotional appointment could be revoked at any time. Supervisors and mid-level managers also experience frustration due to a lack of action and transparency about what is being done. They explained that they compile reports and briefing notes outlining the problems they observe, which they then submit to their managers. However, these documents often seem to disappear, and they receive no updates or feedback regarding the raised issues. Consequently, they are unaware of whether the briefing notes are escalated to senior leadership or if any action is being taken. As a result, many issues remain unresolved. Ideally, they would prefer their managers to at least provide a follow-up, informing them if making changes is not possible and providing a rationale for such decisions.

Many staff members want to hear more from their leadership about what they are doing to make improvements. They complain that communications from executives tend to focus on "fluff" topics - inconsequential issues such as a uniform change or a new badge. In contrast, any communications regarding real issues are very vague, stating that "changes are coming" or "we're looking into it," but nothing concrete happens. These communications are perceived as mere lip service. Line staff feel that they are left in the dark and do not know which issues are being addressed in the background and which are simply being ignored. The problems they raise are not solved, and the suggestions they put forward are not adopted. Moreover, they do not receive clear answers or updates. Employees would like to see leadership acknowledge the major issues raised by staff, present a plan with a timeline, outline concrete steps toward achieving the stated goals, and follow up with clear communications on the progress.

Lack of Strategic Vision

Sheriffs feel that their senior leadership is not clearly communicating a vision for the future. There are problems within the organization, changes in the sheriffs' roles, and uncertainty about the future of the service. Many employees do not see a clear path forward and do not perceive their leaders taking action to chart a course for the future.

Sheriffs receive mixed messages from the service regarding their role in the justice system and in the community. They possess Peace Officer status and undergo extensive training to perform law enforcement duties, but are then restricted from exercising these duties due to constraints on their authority. This contributes to

“The problem with the Sheriffs is that it doesn't really know what it is. On one hand they call us a law enforcement agency but then quickly roll back that notion with every possible policy and rule to neuter us.”

uncertainty surrounding the identity of sheriffs and the vision for the future. Further details regarding dissatisfaction with the role and duties of sheriffs will be discussed in the [Duties and Role](#) theme.

In several focus groups, participants observed that the leadership of the organization is not driving changes; most of the changes in the organization seem to be driven from the ground up, with determined Deputy Sheriffs pushing their supervisors to advocate for change on their behalf or filing grievances through the union. Staff members see this as a weakness in their leadership. They want to see their leaders being more proactive in driving change and building a future for the organization.

“There’s no actual definition of what we need to be. We are subject to the whimsy of the new CSB executive, who’s replaced every 5 years.”

Many employees perceive that their senior leadership is somewhat constrained in defining a vision for the service due to legislation, their position within CSB, the policy department within CSB Headquarters, and the opinions of the Judiciary. However, they believe it is imperative for their leadership to communicate a future plan for the service because the lack of vision and identity is damaging morale and causing many people to leave. Many feel that the BCSS seems to be dependent on the personality of the ADM of CSB and how they value the role of the BCSS. Sheriffs find their organizational identity shifts depending on

who is in control and how well they understand the work of sheriffs. They feel that a stronger and better-defined identity could help them weather these shifts in executive leadership with better continuity and clarity. However, they do not believe that a strong identity can be created and maintained if their Chief Sheriff and sheriff leadership team do not have more authority and autonomy from CSB.

In addition to the impact on employee morale, the lack of a clear identity also means that the BCSS is not well understood by the public, including potential recruits. The organization does not have a high profile among the general public. Many people feel that there is a misconception about the service, which leads to the recruitment of individuals who may not be a good fit for the demands of the job and, consequently, do not stay.

“Look at what we’re trained for versus what we’re expected to do. We don’t know what the purpose of the BCSS is or where our future is going.”

4. Duties and Role

Focus group participants from all areas of the BCSS agreed that while low pay was the primary reason people were leaving, dissatisfaction with the job duties was also an important factor. Many employees find that the job duties are so limited that they feel they are not being fully utilized, which leads to boredom and frustration. Sheriffs find that many of the duties they perform do not effectively utilize their training and expertise, and do not align with their personal interests and motivations.

Duties Are Boring and Unfulfilling

Although sheriffs need to be trained and ready to intervene in dangerous situations, much of their time is spent sitting on duty in a courtroom, monitoring accused persons in holding cells, and driving inmates between correctional centres and the courthouse. Sheriffs explained that this work can be monotonous, especially if employees are assigned the same tasks every day. When incidents occur where a sheriff could implement more advanced aspects of their training, they find that they are often restricted in their authority and are obliged to call the police to handle the situation.

“Sheriffs want to have a positive impact, but instead they’re signing up to atrophy for 25 years, mentally and physically.”

Many employees feel that they are not developing skills or experiencing any professional or personal growth while on the job. People recruited into the BCSS are intelligent, motivated, and energetic individuals, and many find that after a while, they want to engage in something more interesting that aligns with the high level of training they have received. This issue was raised in various locations across the province, but it is particularly significant in larger courthouses where tasks tend to be more specialized. In contrast, in smaller courthouses, sheriffs tend to perform a greater variety of tasks due to the limited number of employees.

Sheriffs also stated that they are required to do menial tasks around the courthouse that do not correspond to their level of training, like washing vehicles and moving furniture. Some sheriffs have mentioned being frequently asked by Court Administration Division employees to perform janitorial duties, like cleaning up broken bottles or knocked-over garbage cans. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they were assigned extra cleaning duties and were responsible for health screening and temperature checks at the entrance. Sheriffs understand the importance of these tasks, but they feel disheartened by consistently being assigned undesirable tasks that nobody else wants to do.

One of the problems discussed is the limited opportunities for career growth and development within the BCSS. While some Deputy Sheriffs aspire to move up into supervisory or management roles, not everyone shares the same ambition. There are only a few positions available that allow sheriffs to specialize in training or security threat assessments. However, these opportunities are scarce and difficult to obtain due to individuals holding these positions for extended periods of time.

“It is a noble motivation to come into law enforcement, but we have lost this aspect in sheriffs; we’ve completely forgotten about that and we force these guys to treat their job as just a job and a paycheck. It’s the wrong attitude.”

Many sheriffs talked about how the Alberta Sheriffs model offers employees more options for career growth and change because they have different divisions within the same organization. Employees who get bored with their role in courtroom security can apply for a position in the traffic division, legislative security division, or conservation service.

Many feel that a model like this would enable the BCSS to retain more ambitious and motivated employees who seek opportunities to be challenged and diversify their experience over time. Another suggestion was to provide more rotational opportunities in different specializations as a way to offer a greater variety of opportunities to more employees.

Another problem raised regarding duties is that many sheriffs are often recruited into the service without an accurate understanding of what the daily job truly entails. Recruitment videos and information about the BCSS tend to focus on the more exciting elements, such as high-security escorts. Sheriff Recruit Training is also action-oriented, teaching use of force techniques and the operation of firearms. Sheriffs feel that this does not provide an accurate portrayal of the job and leads to confusion and disappointment when employees begin their roles. These issues will be discussed in more detail in the [Recruitment](#) section.

Reduced Role Due to Increase in Virtual Proceedings

Many sheriffs emphasized that their duties have become more limited and mundane since the COVID-19 pandemic. With more people attending court proceedings in a virtual setting, some of the work of transporting inmates has been replaced by monitoring virtual court proceedings. Sometimes, this has meant providing security in a courtroom where only a Court Clerk was present, and all other participants were on a video screen. In other situations, sheriffs were assigned to supervise accused individuals who were attending virtual bail hearings from a police cell. Sheriffs noted that virtual bail hearings have tended to be inefficient and often delayed. While some processes have changed, in the past they would have to spend hours sitting in a police detachment, waiting for the phone call alerting them that they could join the virtual call. Many sheriffs wish to return to pre-pandemic processes, which involved more interactions with the accused and other court participants, and made sheriffs feel like they had greater purpose.

Other sheriffs are assigned to work supervising virtual bail hubs located at correctional centres. They expressed frustration that they are expected to maintain order while multiple virtual hearings are happening. They also highlighted that they do not have the same level of authority as they would in a normal courtroom because the correctional centre policies regarding the use of force are more restrictive than those that sheriffs usually follow. Several sheriffs explained that they have had to stand back and allow an angry inmate to destroy the video conferencing equipment because they were not authorized to intervene. This type of situation puts them in an awkward position, with the Judiciary expecting the sheriff to maintain order, but the sheriff not being allowed to act.

Sheriffs also expressed frustration at the way defence lawyers use the virtual bail hubs to try to contact their clients. Normally, they would contact the correctional centre to set up a conversation with an inmate, but this takes longer than asking the sheriff to coordinate the call. This adds to the workload of the sheriffs and can delay court proceedings when video conferencing stations are being used for conversations with lawyers. Some sheriffs commented that they feel like they are working in a call centre, which is not work they are interested in.

There are other aspects of virtual court proceedings that sheriffs find inefficient and illogical. There are instances of accused individuals being transported to the courthouse but then attending their hearing virtually, even when the judge and court clerk are down the hallway in the same building. Sheriffs do not understand why this is necessary. It seems to them that it would be easier and more effective to bring the accused to the courtroom in person. Video equipment is frequently damaged and takes a long time to replace, causing backlogs and delays that sheriffs have to manage.

“It’s not that we want everything to go back to in person, but some aspects of virtual bail need to change. We need to bring back a lot of the purpose of our jobs.”

Sheriffs also observed that some accused people do not seem to understand the proceedings properly when they attend virtually, especially if they have any impairments or cognitive problems. They are concerned that these individuals are not being properly served by the justice system. When they are in the courtroom in person, the accused tend to behave better due to the formal environment, paying more attention and absorbing more of the conveyed information. When sheriffs feel like they are part of a system that does not serve people properly, they feel disillusioned and have less pride in their work.

The shift in duties with increased virtual proceedings has made even experienced and long-serving sheriffs question whether they are in the right career. Many sheriffs joined the service because they had an interest in law enforcement and wanted to serve the public in a meaningful role. Some are concerned that the more meaningful and interesting aspects of their role are being phased out, and they are unclear about the future vision for the role of sheriffs.

Legislative, Regulatory and Policy Constraints on Sheriffs' Roles

In addition to duties being boring, sheriffs across the province expressed frustration regarding the limitations on their duties and authorities stemming from legislation, regulations, and internal BCSS policies. They explained how these limitations negatively impact their job satisfaction and reduce their ability to serve a meaningful public safety role in their communities. Furthermore, these constraints are directly related to retention problems. Recruits join the BCSS because they want to work in law enforcement, but they soon realize that the role of Deputy Sheriffs is so constrained that they do not feel they are truly working in law enforcement. As a result, they leave for other agencies where they have more authority and impact. Many are concerned that unless the authority of the BCSS is increased, the organization will continue to function as a mere "steppingstone" to other law enforcement careers and will not retain the talent it needs to continue functioning.

"We are well trained, but we're in a small box with a tight leash. When we crawl out of our box, our hands get slapped."

Sheriffs explained that although they are considered peace officers under the *Criminal Code of Canada*, provincial regulations and BCSS policies limit their peace officer authorities to certain prescribed circumstances. It was evident from focus group discussions that there is not always a clear understanding of a Deputy Sheriff's authority in every situation, as there seems to be room for interpretation about when they should act. Multiple focus group participants expressed confusion about why provincial regulations and policies seem to supersede the Criminal Code. Many participants recounted situations where their interpretations conflicted with how their managers interpreted their authority, and they frequently had to justify why they chose to intervene in a situation. This lack of clarity is stressful for sheriffs and makes it difficult for them to perform their jobs effectively and confidently.

"Policy is the first thing that gets used against you when an incident happens. If you try and manage and supervise based on policy, you wouldn't be able to because it doesn't work on the front line and it would make your job impossible."

Some Sergeants and Staff Sergeants also expressed frustration about the level of ambiguity in sheriff authority. They find that there are too many policies that diminish the legal authorities of sheriffs. Many of them agree with the opinions of front-line staff who say that certain policies are not practical on the ground and make it difficult for employees to do their jobs. They also say it makes their jobs as supervisors more challenging because they are supposed to assist their staff in understanding and interpreting policies. Some feel that there are too many policies and that policy changes occur too frequently to be properly understood and implemented. They observed that this makes Deputy Sheriffs fearful and uncertain about what to do.

Legislative, Regulatory and Policy Constraints within the Courthouse

In the courthouse, there are limits placed on the process of arresting and releasing people, which sheriffs find frustrating and inefficient. For example, Deputy Sheriffs are not allowed to release individuals with an endorsed warrant. An endorsed warrant states that the individual is not required to be held in custody if they agree to appear at a future court hearing. Instead, the sheriffs transport the arrested individual to the police station, where the police review the warrant and release the individual with a "Promise to Appear." Sheriffs in multiple locations shared complaints from both themselves and their local police officers, stating that this is not a good use of police time and that sheriffs should have the authority to release these individuals themselves.

"We can't do Promise to Appear because they don't want sheriffs to give evidence in court and they don't want us to speak publicly. Yet we sign documents with them and sign probation orders so what is the difference between that and the promise to appear?"

Another issue described in many locations is that sheriffs need to obtain approval from the BC Prosecution Service before arresting anyone who turns themselves in on an unendorsed warrant. Sheriffs argue that their legal training authorizes them to make this type of arrest, but an internal policy change now requires them to seek Crown Counsel approval first. This process can sometimes take hours or even days, during which the individual is asked to wait in the public lobby. If the individual decides to leave the courthouse, sheriffs cannot require them to stay as they have not yet arrested them. Sheriffs find this situation embarrassing as it creates an impression of ineffectiveness in the eyes of the public. Additionally, monitoring the individual waiting in the public space adds to their workload. Sheriffs feel that this undermines their ability to maintain courthouse security and limits their discretion in identifying potential security risks.

"If someone turns themselves in, we have to call the Mounties. We can't arrest them if they have an endorsed warrant. Even though we are officers of the court, we have almost no authority with warrants that come out of court."

Sheriffs also find it inefficient that they are not authorized to perform basic intake procedures when making an arrest. Currently, they are required to call the police to take custody of the individual, transport them to the police station for fingerprinting and photographs, and then often bring them back to the courthouse. Many sheriffs believe it would be a better use of time to allow Deputy Sheriffs to carry out these intake processes. In smaller communities, calling the police for these tasks may involve the only two police officers on duty in the entire area. Sheriffs feel embarrassed having to rely on the police for these procedures and consider it a poor utilization of public safety resources, as they believe that police resources could be better allocated to patrolling elsewhere.

Furthermore, some sheriffs are frustrated by the fact that they are not permitted to submit reports to Crown Counsel for incidents occurring in the courthouse, such as assaults or the discovery of firearms or illicit substances. Sheriffs explain that they are not the charging authority and are essentially treated as witnesses to the arrest, similar to public bystanders. The police take their statements and then take over the process. While the reasoning behind this policy is to maintain the neutrality of their role as officers of the court, some sheriffs do not believe they are truly neutral from the outset. They argue that if they are making an arrest, they are not impartial, at least not in the eyes of the public.

"We have no more power than a citizen's power to arrest. We effectively become a witness after arresting someone. That's it."

Legislative, Regulatory and Policy Constraints beyond the Courthouse

Sheriffs explained that they have the authority to act to protect courthouse users and the public while they are on duty within the courthouse and its immediate exterior area. However, if any incidents occur beyond the courthouse property, they can only act if a police officer requests their assistance or if they judge that there is an imminent threat of death or serious harm to an individual. This authority applies only while they are on duty as sheriffs.

Sheriffs described frustrating situations where security incidents or vandalism occur just a few meters away from the courthouse property. Despite being the best-equipped individuals available, with the necessary tools and training to intervene, they are required to call the police. These situations make them feel embarrassed and useless, particularly when they have to explain to a member of the public that they do not have the authority to intervene. They also feel embarrassed when speaking to the police, who are often occupied with other tasks in the community, and are aware that sheriffs possess the training and ability to handle such situations.

“We were told to lock the door if someone is getting hurt on the street outside, as opposed to going and using our training to help break the fight up. Public perception, and our morals, say we should act. But policy punishes that.”

In certain locations where the courthouse shares a building with other facilities, sheriffs have limited jurisdiction over the entire building as they only have authority on specific floors. They find it challenging to effectively monitor and secure the premises when the public has access to multiple floors. If sheriffs are called to assist with an intoxicated individual or encounter any potential security risks on a different floor, they lack the same authority to intervene unless they can justify that someone is at risk of death or serious harm. Sheriffs explained that this situation can be a "grey area," where it is not always clear whether a situation will escalate into something more dangerous or not. They emphasized that the best course of action is generally to intervene early, de-escalate the situation, and remove the security risk before it poses a threat of death or serious harm. However, doing so would leave them in a vulnerable position, as it would be more difficult to justify that the situation posed a high level of danger. Consequently, they may face disciplinary action for overstepping their authority. Sheriffs described this as a frustrating dilemma in which they must choose between increased danger to the public if they do not act and potential reprimands and discipline if they do.

Another frequently mentioned example of where sheriffs feel constrained by policy and legislation is when they encounter vehicle accidents. This issue was repeatedly mentioned in the North, Interior, and Vancouver Island regions, where there are many stretches of remote highway with limited cell phone reception and poor weather conditions. To many members of the public, a brightly marked sheriff's vehicle appears like an emergency response vehicle, and there is a general expectation that sheriffs will stop and assist. Sheriffs think it would make the BCSS look very bad in the eyes of the public if they did not stop. Indeed, sheriffs want to stop and assist because they feel it is the right thing to do, but they say they are hesitant to do so because of policy limitations and fear of reprimand.

Many sheriffs say they are not allowed to turn on their emergency red and white flashing lights at an accident scene, even if it is dark or on a blind corner where increased visibility to other drivers would be valuable in preventing further accidents. Some say that they have turned on their lights anyway because they judged it was the safest thing to do, but they were disciplined for doing so. Other focus group members explained that they are allowed to turn on their flashing lights, but only if there is an inmate in

“It’s a catch 22. In order to do the job, I cannot follow policy, but if I don’t follow policy, I get in shit.”

their vehicle. However, they are worried they might need to use their lights to protect public safety when they do not happen to be transporting an inmate, which would be the safest option but could land them in trouble for breaking policy. Sheriffs believe this is another policy that is driven by concern for legal risk avoidance but actually significantly increases the risk to employees' physical safety and legal risk to the BCSS, as the organization could be held liable if another vehicle impact occurred due to the sheriff vehicle being inadequately illuminated.

Sheriffs want more support from their organization to assist members of the public involved in accidents or emergencies when they are first at the scene. They want clear authority to act decisively to protect public safety without having to ask permission from a supervisor or second-guess whether they should or should not act. Currently, they feel as if they are treated like children, always having to ask permission and clarify whether they have the authority to act.

Many sheriffs also feel that they should have some authority to intervene when they see a dangerous driver in the course of their duties. They would like the authority to put on their lights and pull over drivers if they judge they are posing a danger to others, and issue a ticket or a warning, or at least keep the driver off the road until a police officer arrives at the scene. They noted that Conservation Officers have the authority to issue tickets to drivers, and do not understand why they should not have a similar authority. Some sheriffs would like to see a dedicated traffic division, like the Alberta Sheriff Service has developed, in which enforcing traffic rules would be a main duty. But at the very least, many sheriffs would like the ability to intervene to protect public safety if they happen to see a dangerous driving situation in the course of their duties.

There is also frustration about the time limitation on when sheriffs can act as peace officers. Deputy Sheriffs explained that they are only allowed to intervene to protect public safety when they are on duty. If they call the police while off duty, they are not supposed to mention that they are sheriffs. Sheriffs gave examples of scenarios where they have been off duty and called the police about a situation they have seen in the community. They wished they could have offered assistance in some way. They felt frustrated that they had the skills to help, even if it was just to keep bystanders away from the risk while the police were on their way.

“The public doesn’t care what the patch on the uniform says. If a driver almost kills someone, does the public not have a reasonable expectation that a provincial peace officer will intervene? Our public image is a joke and incidents like [this] don’t help. And this adverse public perception of sheriffs being a joke because they do nothing is a problem for recruiting. Why would an educated college or university graduate join us?”

There is a desire for a procedure by which a sheriff could offer their assistance to a police officer in an emergency and have a supporting role in dealing with the situation if the police want the assistance.

The time limitation on their peace officer status also creates uncertainty for sheriffs within the courthouse. There is confusion in some locations about whether sheriffs are allowed to act as peace officers while on their lunch break or just before and after their scheduled shift. They are technically not on duty during those times, and some are concerned that they would be putting themselves at legal risk if they were involved in an incident and used force to assist their colleagues.

In addition to their core duties in the court system, Deputy Sheriffs want to have a bigger role in supporting public safety in their communities during emergencies. However, currently, this is restricted by legislation and policy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many sheriffs were extremely frustrated that they were not able to do more to support police and health authorities. Other groups were being mobilized in supporting roles, such as performing quarantine checks, while sheriffs felt limited in their capacity to assist. The BCSS was approached and requested to provide support, but the response was negative, despite the fact that courts were not operating, and sheriffs had the capacity to assist. This situation left many sheriffs feeling embarrassed and humiliated as they had the skills and desire to contribute to their community during a state of emergency but were held back. Meanwhile, they watched other agencies being overworked while they were instructed to take online courses from home. Sheriffs emphasized that this made them feel like they were not trusted and were humiliated, especially when they were in contact with friends in other agencies. This issue was raised in numerous focus groups across the province, highlighting how sheriffs feel that the BCSS is a valuable resource that is not used to its full potential.

Sheriffs see opportunities to do more and believe that other law enforcement agencies could benefit from their support. Many sheriffs have contacts in the RCMP and municipal police who are overworked and unable to complete all their tasks, let alone assist the BCSS with tasks that they should be able to handle themselves. Some sheriffs report that their local police detachment has requested their assistance in the past, but BCSS limitations on their role have prevented them from being approved to help. They believe that there is potential for collaboration and partnership with other agencies, which would make their jobs more interesting and meaningful, allow them to assist their partners, and improve public services.

“The biggest issue in keeping and recruiting staff into the BCSS is our horrible organizational reputation in the community and law enforcement realm. Contrary to what our management thinks, police generally do not have a favourable impression of the BCSS. Many of my friends are police officers and they see us as the ‘can’t do’ organization. They can never count on us to assist them when it really matters.”

Sheriff Suggestions for Further Duties

Significant discussions occurred in all the focus groups regarding ideas for further duties that sheriffs could undertake to make their jobs more interesting. The suggestions summarized below are the most commonly suggested additions, from the perspective of sheriffs, supervisors, and managers. However, please note that *these suggestions should not be interpreted by the reader as being the recommendations of the research team*, which will be discussed at length in the [Recommendations](#) chapter.

Deputy Sheriffs want an expansion of their roles and duties for several reasons. They seek day-to-day duties that are more challenging and stimulating, to make their jobs more interesting. Additionally, they desire an expansion and clear articulation of their legal authorities and policies that are more workable with their operational realities. This would enable them to conduct their duties confidently without constantly fearing overstepping their authorities. They also want to broaden the scope of their roles to make a more meaningful contribution to law enforcement and public safety in their communities. Such expansion would help create a clear and visible identity that they can be proud of, making them feel more like a full-fledged law enforcement agency.

There is wide recognition that due to a shortage of staff, there are currently not enough sheriffs to fulfill their current responsibilities, let alone take on new ones. However, it is understood that an expanded role will be necessary to recruit and retain staff in the long term. Numerous suggestions were put forward by focus group participants regarding the types of work that sheriffs should undertake.

The first type of expansion suggested would involve removing some of the limitations described above that make the sheriffs reliant on the police for certain aspects of the arrest process within the courthouse. For example, allowing sheriffs to perform fingerprinting, take photographs, and collect DNA if necessary. Some also suggested granting the authority to submit reports to Crown Counsel when crimes occur within the courthouse precinct.

Other suggestions pertained to reclaiming services that sheriffs already have the authority to perform but have largely stopped doing. This includes court bailiff services and document services, which are currently being outsourced to a private contractor. Furthermore, there is a desire to see the BCSS taking on more work in protective services and expanding protection to officials beyond the Judiciary.

Many focus group participants suggested an expanded role in executing warrants of all types and, more generally, making sheriffs the "enforcement arm" of the courts. This could include conducting house checks to follow up on conditional sentence orders, probation orders, and curfew orders, as well as enforcing any kind of court order or warrant. Others suggested accompanying people to gather their belongings from their households after a domestic dispute, and performing children and family development checks in support of social workers. Sheriffs feel that if they could take on these duties of enforcing court orders, it would have the dual benefit of making their role more interesting and freeing up police officers to focus on investigating crimes. They say that this would better serve the public, as currently some warrants and court orders are not high priority for the police compared to their other duties and are not dealt with in a timely manner.

"We have so many rural communities that could benefit from the Sheriff's services. I don't understand why people aren't talking about how we could be better utilized. It would help other agencies and would be a big check box for people in our own organization looking for additional duties. The younger generation needs to be stimulated and needs to be challenged. We are losing young people so quickly."

Other suggestions for expanded duties involved building closer partnerships with police forces and allowing sheriffs to play a supporting role in law enforcement in their communities. This was especially seen as useful in smaller rural communities where police resources are limited and spread over a large geographical area. This work could involve supporting the police in providing security for community events, aiding in public evacuations in emergency situations such as wildfires or floods, or working in the detachment jail or doing patrol ride-alongs if the police need additional coverage. Some sheriffs suggested that they could provide security support at hospitals, in situations where the police are currently being called.

Many sheriffs also mentioned the possibility of taking on traffic enforcement duties. Some would like to see a traffic enforcement division similar to what the Alberta Sheriff Service has, where sheriffs patrol roads and issue tickets to unsafe drivers. Not all sheriffs are interested in this work, but many see the benefit of having diverse career options within a single force. Many sheriffs do not see a traffic division as a necessary evolution for the BCSS but at least want the authority to pull over and ticket unsafe drivers they happen to encounter in the course of their regular duties.

Focus group participants at all ranks of the organization, and in all regions, agree that sheriffs are capable of much more than the duties they are currently tasked with. They feel that expanding the role of sheriffs will increase job satisfaction and help in the recruitment and retention of more employees. However, many focus group participants understand that expanding the role of sheriffs is not a simple task and will require significant collaboration and political will. Focus group participants from senior ranks of the BCSS were aware of past initiatives to expand the role of Deputy Sheriffs that were met with opposition from external stakeholders.

5. Supervisory-Level Management

There is considerable variation in supervisory styles throughout the BC Sheriff Service. Deputy Sheriffs in some locations seem generally satisfied with the supervision they receive, while others are distinctly dissatisfied. All have either experienced or heard about problematic supervision in some locations. Focus group participants from all locations agree that there is a lack of consistency, mainly due to a lack of training and development for supervisors and managers across the organization. Poor communication from supervisors was another theme that was mentioned in all focus groups. Many locations discussed the negative effects they experienced due to supervisor behaviour, such as micromanagement, bullying, and unfair treatment. There is a widespread perception that supervisors are not held accountable for this type of behaviour.

Lack of Training for Supervisors

Focus group participants from all ranks and regions observed that there is very little training offered to supervisors or prospective supervisors to help them develop their leadership and management skills. **(Note: this issue could have been placed in the [Professional Development](#) theme, but is included here due to its close association with the impact of supervisory behaviour on employees.)**

Sheriffs explained that supervisors and managers are tested on their technical subject matter knowledge as part of the promotional panel process. However, they often lack experience in effective communication techniques and motivating individuals in a constructive manner. Many supervisors are promoted and subsequently feel abandoned, with minimal guidance to help them learn the responsibilities of their new role. While the Public Service Agency does offer some online courses for supervisors, participants find them more applicable to office settings and feel that they do not effectively teach leadership skills.

“These supervisors treat us like the inmates they used to be in charge of when they were sheriffs. They need to get better supervisory and leadership training.”

This skills gap can significantly affect a supervisor's performance. Supervisory skills directly impact employee satisfaction and retention. A good supervisor can establish positive working relationships, clearly communicate expectations, provide necessary support for their staff's success, and make them feel trusted and valued. On the other hand, a poor supervisor can leave employees struggling, feeling unsupported, or micromanage them excessively, leading to feelings of mistrust.

Participants noted that the BCSS has a thorough training program focused on preparing its internal instructors for success in their positions, but there is nothing similar for supervisors or managers. Prior to becoming an instructor, candidates go through an interview, followed by a training program at the Justice Institute of BC, and then a year of mentorship. Successful candidates have demonstrated their

commitment through a lengthy process and have developed important skills that will help them succeed in their new role. Deputy Sheriffs reported that most new instructors feel confident and ready to take on their new role by the time they finish the training process. Some suggested that this type of training model could be adapted to focus on leadership in a law enforcement context, communication skills, and the core responsibilities of supervisors and managers in the BCSS.

Many employees would like to see leadership training similar to what is offered in the Canadian Forces, where completing certain training modules is a prerequisite for promotion into a leadership position. Participants noted that there are leadership programs available at the Justice Institute of BC that are oriented toward leadership in policing, which could potentially be very valuable for sheriffs. Employees would like this training to be available to a wide range of employees, to build capacity and support succession planning throughout the organization.

Many Deputy Sheriffs emphasized that this training should include how to communicate clearly and professionally, provide positive recognition to boost morale, and support employees in problem-solving. Some find that supervisors' negative communication style can cause issues and foster resentment. These supervisors primarily focus on enforcing top-down directives without actively assisting their staff in overcoming obstacles or advocating for policy changes that would better serve the sheriffs. Certain staff members feel that when they approach their supervisors with problems, they are treated as troublemakers or dismissed with remarks such as "if you have a problem, you can file a grievance with the union" or "if you don't like it, you should resign." While Deputy Sheriffs acknowledge that supervisors have a role in enforcing policies and holding staff accountable, they also expect them to offer more support and aid in overcoming challenges.

"We have senior managers who are not incident commanders, and they are signing off on strategies and resources and they have no basic training in this area."

Deputy Sheriffs also want their supervisors and managers trained in how to provide effective leadership during emergency situations. Many lack confidence in their supervisors' ability to lead their teams effectively when faced with security threats. They explained that they are not provided training in incident command, leaving them without the skills to coordinate a response team. Several instances were cited in different courthouses where supervisors and managers exhibited ineffective leadership in tense situations.

"You expect your supervisors to build you up and to make you the best possible deputy that you can be. But sometimes there's an element that supervisors introduce, "my way or the highway, this is how I've always done it," as opposed to 'how can I build and empower my team?'"

Even though some supervisors possess better leadership skills in these situations, the absence of a comprehensive training foundation for all supervisors leaves employees uncertain about what to expect. Stories of incompetence circulate among Deputy Sheriffs throughout the service and are passed on to new members, leading to a lack of confidence in supervisors. Many employees believe that in life-or-death scenarios, they must rely on themselves and their peers' skills as their superiors may not provide effective leadership. Consequently, there is a general lack of respect for supervisors, making their day-to-day job of leading a challenging task since it is difficult to lead people who do not respect them.

The lack of a consistent training program for supervisors and managers results in varying management practices across different locations, causing frustration for staff who frequently move between courthouses. Sheriffs have noticed that some supervisors exhibit excellent leadership skills, but these

individuals succeed due to their own talents, personal initiative, or external training, rather than the organization's provided training.

"I was recently promoted, and my perspective was that they come up to you with a patch and say, 'Here you go! You're promoted!' and then leave you alone. But whoa, what do I do now? There's no official training or roadmap. So, when we do have the rare leader, they rise up in spite of all the things that hold them back in the department. Everything they accomplish is self-directed."

Employees have observed a concerning trend of promoting Deputy Sheriffs with limited experience to supervisory positions, particularly in regions like the North, where there are high turnover rates and low average service seniority. Additionally, there are many supervisors and managers on temporary assignments, taking on their authority in an acting capacity only, with limited experience in these positions. This makes the need for supervisory training even more important.

Some employees believe that the lack of self-confidence among supervisors contributes to a culture of fear and risk aversion within the organization. Insecure and uncertain supervisors are less likely to support proactive behaviour. Simultaneously, the culture of risk aversion reinforces this lack of confidence as supervisors fear reprimand from their managers and, consequently, hesitate to approve or support decisive actions.

Micromanagement

Deputy Sheriffs in some courthouses experience supervisors and managers who tend to be too directive and do not allow their employees enough independence to make their own decisions as professionals. This is frustrating for employees because it makes them feel that they are not trusted. They would have greater job satisfaction if they were given clear principles and directions to follow and then trusted to do their job according to their training.

Some Deputy Sheriffs shared that they are required to ask their supervisor for permission for many different tasks throughout the day, tasks that already fall within their scope of authority and should not require additional supervisor approval. For example, some say they are supposed to ask their Sergeant before making an arrest, even though their training states they have the authority to make this decision themselves. Others mention that they must radio their supervisor to get permission to take their scheduled coffee and lunch breaks, and also request permission prior to working through a break when they are busy escorting an individual in custody. They noted that while some of these issues may seem small and inconsequential, the accumulation of these small annoyances over time creates a high level of frustration among employees.

Sheriffs in certain locations find that supervisors are very particular about how small tasks are completed and will intervene to show Deputy Sheriffs exactly how to do things, even if the employee felt that they were achieving the same result in a slightly different way. Some supervisors seem overly focused on how employee uniforms are worn and whether boots are polished well enough, but they avoid addressing bigger problems in the workplace.

"The level of micromanagement is incredibly patronizing. It makes us feel like children. We're peace officers, and we're given guns, months of training, and a certain amount of authority, but our supervisors, who are supposed to improve us, don't have faith in us. They make us feel like kids who shouldn't have guns."

Another example of micromanagement that was mentioned in multiple locations was supervisors telling Deputy Sheriffs exactly what to write when submitting incident reports following a use of force situation. Deputy Sheriffs sometimes feel pressured by their supervisors to make slight wording changes or avoid using certain language. Some have noted that this concern may stem from fear of saying something that could cause trouble for the supervisor or the employee. However, many feel that they should provide an accurate description of what occurred from their perspective and should not be coerced by their supervisor to alter their account.

“As a qualified deputy, having gone through the training, compounded with years of life experience, I’m not given the responsibility to do my job. I have to check in over and over again, and I’m critiqued and criticized all throughout.”

Deputy Sheriffs have observed that their Sergeants, and even Staff Sergeants, face a similar level of micromanagement and scrutiny from their direct supervisors. They do not feel empowered to make their own decisions, resulting in indecision and a lack of decision-making authority. They have noticed that sometimes when they seek a decision from a Sergeant, the Sergeant appears unwilling to make a choice due to fear of criticism. As a result, they turn to the Staff Sergeant, who also hesitates to make a firm decision and contacts the Inspector. This tendency is especially prevalent when supervisors and managers are in acting positions or have not held their roles permanently for very long. Sheriffs observe a lack of support and

empowerment for decision-making throughout their chain of command, leading to delays and bottlenecks in the decision-making process, as well as feelings of fear and dissatisfaction with the working environment.

It is important to note that not all locations experience the same level of micromanagement. The extent of supervision and micromanagement varies between courthouses. Deputy Sheriffs in the Interior and Fraser regions had the most complaints regarding micromanagement, while it was mentioned to a lesser extent in the Vancouver Island region. Locations in the Northern region generally appear to be the most satisfied with their supervisors and the level of autonomy they are afforded.

“The problem is, you create an environment where officers can’t perform the way they need to. Everyone is walking on eggshells because they feel like if they screw up, they’re going to end up pinned to the wall. They’re going to be crucified.”

Lack of Communication

Employees at all ranks commented on communication problems within the BCSS that make it more difficult to perform their jobs effectively. These issues occur both at the provincial and local level.

At the provincial level, sheriffs expressed concerns about the lack of transparency and explanation when receiving directions from senior leadership or CSB. Communication regarding policy changes or directives often fails to provide a clear explanation for the reasons behind the implemented changes. This lack of clarity is frustrating for both staff and supervisors, as supervisors are unable to provide satisfactory explanations to the staff they oversee. Consequently, some managers and supervisors feel compelled to resort to saying, “just do this because I say so,” which is not well received by the staff and further contributes to their resentment of supervisors.

Focus group participants noted that there are sometimes conflicting communications sent out from senior leadership and CSB Headquarters. For instance, on one occasion, a recruitment video was produced, and an email was sent out instructing employees to be cautious about what they shared on social media. However, the very next day, another email was circulated stating that staff should share the recruiting video on their personal social media accounts. This conflicting information left staff confused about whether they should or should not share the video with their personal contacts.

“We question things because we want a purpose for the work we do. Yes, I’ll do what I’m told, but tell me the purpose. We are not given the information. There’s no transparency.”

At the local level, communications about policy and operations are sometimes hampered by the communication styles of individual managers and supervisors. Employees would like to see training and clear expectations around communication for their supervisors and leaders. They explained that some managers communicate clearly to all staff and are available to respond to questions and concerns, which gives employees a better understanding of the information and makes them feel heard. In contrast, many other supervisors and managers do not communicate clearly. For example, some employees are informed of a change in an in-person meeting, but there is no follow-up email sent, causing those who were not on shift at that time to miss the information. Employees would like to see more transparency in communication about decisions, including details about the rationale.

“They never want anything in writing. If you write your sergeant an email, he will come see you in person so there’s no written proof of the conversation or rules.”

In some courthouses, Deputy Sheriffs noted that their supervisors seem afraid or unwilling to document their instructions in writing or in an email. They believe that their supervisors do not want written proof that they may have given an employee a wrong or inappropriate answer. Some Deputy Sheriffs have noticed that their supervisors tend to give different answers to different people. They believe that this behaviour is an attempt to manipulate employees and create conflicts among them. Although this issue seems to be limited to individual supervisors, it was raised in multiple locations.

In certain locations, Deputy Sheriffs have observed that their supervisors do not respond well to questions. They seem to become defensive, interpreting inquiries about policies as attacks on their authority or a lack of respect. This type of reaction negatively impacts interpersonal relationships between staff and supervisors and hinders the proper flow of information to Deputy Sheriffs, as employees become hesitant to ask questions. Communication issues in these locations contribute to a climate of distrust towards management, which poses challenges for employees at all ranks.

Some focus group participants pointed out that strong interpersonal communication skills and the ability to build relationships are crucial qualities for supervisors, but not all supervisors possess them. Some supervisors may not fully comprehend the value of these skills in their role. Deputy Sheriffs would like to see more informal communication from their supervisors, including a greater effort to get to know them as individuals and take a genuine interest in their goals and motivations. They desire more informal recognition from their supervisors when they are performing well, rather than solely focusing on their mistakes. Some Deputy Sheriffs feel that their only direct communication with their supervisors occurs during their annual performance review, which they consider insufficient for an effective supervisory relationship. They would appreciate their supervisors and managers being more present around the courthouse, not solely focusing on identifying issues but also checking in with staff, providing positive

feedback alongside constructive comments, and generally developing a better understanding of their employees.

At larger courthouses where there are multiple supervisors, communication sharing among supervisors sometimes lacks consistency. Employees have noted the need for better alignment between supervisors and managers. In a few locations, Sergeants and acting Sergeants have complained that operational changes are communicated directly to line staff without informing them first. Instead, they receive the information informally from the staff they supervise. This undermines their authority and diminishes their credibility with the employees they oversee. To address this, they would like to see all information shared via email in addition to in-person meetings. They also recommend that managers ensure supervisors are informed of new policies first, enabling them to effectively provide direction and support to Deputy Sheriffs. Additionally, many locations have expressed the need for capturing more information in writing to enhance clarity and facilitate future reference. To achieve this, more staff members would like to see meeting minutes recorded and circulated via email or posted in a shared drive accessible to all employees.

In certain offices, staff members have observed instances of interpersonal conflicts or investigations but have received minimal communication regarding the results and conclusions. They were instructed not to discuss these issues with each other. While they understand the sensitivity of certain decisions and the need to respect human resource policies regarding confidentiality, the lack of communication leaves many tensions unresolved. Employees would appreciate more detailed briefings on investigation outcomes whenever possible. This would help alleviate anxiety and prevent the spread of rumours and speculation that often arise due to a lack of available information.

In addition to downward communication with their direct reports, employees have concerns with how their supervisors communicate upwards to managers, and how local and regional managers communicate with BCSS leadership. Many employees are convinced that supervisors and managers are not accurately transmitting information about front-line problems to senior ranks. They suspect that individuals are filtering the information they escalate, especially if it reflects poorly on their own personal performance as a supervisor or manager. As a result, senior leaders do not have an accurate understanding of problems that are occurring at a local level, and problems remain unaddressed.

Bullying and Unfair Treatment

Focus group participants in multiple locations spent considerable time describing how supervisors and managers have engaged in inappropriate or bullying behaviour. This issue was mentioned by Deputy Sheriffs in all regions except the North.

Deputy Sheriffs listed the names of former colleagues who decided to leave the BCSS mainly due to bullying and harassment problems or what they felt was a "toxic environment." Some participants shared personal stories of being bullied by supervisors, and several of them were actively seeking to leave. While not all participants had personally witnessed bullying, many had heard stories of bullying behaviour and had been warned about avoiding certain supervisors who had a reputation for engaging in bullying and harassment. The alleged behaviour included supervisors making comments that employees found inappropriate, uninvited physical contact of a sexual nature, making threats against employees' job security, and singling employees out for undue discipline. (**Note:** *The researchers confirmed with participants that the examples of bullying had already been reported to the Public Service Agency and were investigated through the proper channels.*)

In some locations, there is a fear of asking questions, challenging supervisors' opinions, or even raising concerns over safety because employees believe that they will be "blackballed" by supervisors and managers and subsequently targeted for bullying or unfair treatment. Sometimes this results in behaviours such as an employee repeatedly being singled out and criticized in front of their peers or being called into a supervisor or manager's office to be harshly criticized or yelled at. In multiple locations, there were employees who said they would never set foot inside a supervisor or manager's office without their union steward present because they had previously experienced what they felt was verbal abuse.

"Our culture is 'don't say anything, because it puts a target on your back.'"

Deputy Sheriffs in several locations also described how employees were treated unfairly by supervisors in subtle ways that are not immediately evident as bullying because they could be justified as operational or administrative requirements. In certain locations, there is an unfair or asymmetrical application of policies or management authority, resulting in the punishment of certain employees or the reward of others. This phenomenon is referred to as "weaponized administration," which is a form of bullying that can be difficult to prove because there is an element of operational need involved.

"There are people in authority who are making life a living hell. And it is fun for them."

For example, in some locations, Deputy Sheriffs observe a pattern of supervisors punishing employees who have fallen out of favour by repeatedly assigning them the least desirable tasks or positions around the courthouse. Some employees, who feel they have lost favour with supervisors, find that their requests for vacation or compensatory time off are denied, while others seem to be granted permission without any issues. Some employees have been given modified duties to accommodate

an injury or personal situation, whereas others have been told they must take leave without any offers of accommodation. Deputy Sheriffs have identified certain supervisors who appear to take pleasure in making administrative decisions that make life harder for employees. These supervisors are perceived to enjoy the power dynamic of having control over certain decisions and using them to reward or punish the employees under their supervision.

In certain locations, employees stated that there is an "old boys club" or "clique" dynamic, whereby employees who are friends with the right people in senior positions receive preferential treatment. Sometimes, the people involved have been family members or personal friends for many years outside of work. Deputy Sheriffs explained that the individuals who are friends with the right people and part of the "in crowd" are far more likely to be mentored and selected for promotions, given acting opportunities, and receive the training they request. Employees who are treated as part of the clique tend to be compliant, never ask questions or challenge authority, and spend time praising and networking with senior members of the clique. Deputy Sheriffs say that this is damaging to the BCSS because people tend to be promoted not for their talents and leadership skills but because they are "yes men" who have befriended the right people. Sheriffs argue that employees with true leadership skills are not selected for development opportunities or promotions because they are seen as troublemakers and threats to their superiors.

"I hear from officers that they aren't stressed out dealing with violent inmates or bad people in a courthouse, but they are stressed out from toxic supervisors and the politics of this job. I think that is incredibly sad and disappointing."

Employees noted that even at a time when the BCSS is short of employees, they see supervisors and managers who seem to want certain Deputy Sheriffs to quit. They have witnessed certain individuals being scrutinized and criticized to a higher degree than other Deputy Sheriffs and receiving much harsher discipline than others who did the same thing. For example, some people may face a multiple-day suspension others receive only a warning. Some will face a formal investigation after making a mistake, whereas others will be taken aside and “constructively coached” on how to do it better next time. Deputy Sheriffs say that some individuals seem to be singled out as targets and essentially investigated and picked on until they resign from the service.

Lack of Accountability for Supervisors

There is a perception among Deputy Sheriffs that supervisors are not held accountable for inappropriate conduct within the BCSS. Stronger feelings about this issue exist in locations where bullying behaviour from supervisors has occurred recently. However, it was also mentioned in other locations where staff have heard about issues their colleagues are facing in other offices. There is a perceived lack of will at the top of the organization to address toxic behaviour. In some locations, Deputy Sheriffs believe that toxic supervisors are being protected by local management, and they suspect that reports of misconduct are not reaching senior leadership.

“The organization needs to stop being afraid of dealing with toxic people.”

Focus group participants explained that some supervisors have been investigated and found to have engaged in inappropriate conduct. However, they are still in their positions of authority and seem to have received little discipline, apart from a short-term suspension in some cases. Another observed pattern is that problematic supervisors and managers are transferred from one location to another. Deputy Sheriffs feel that this is not an effective solution since the individuals tend to create a toxic situation at their new location as well. Some Deputy Sheriffs strongly believe that certain

supervisors should have been demoted or fired due to the extent of the damage they have caused to interpersonal relationships and morale.

There are also supervisors and managers who share the opinion that certain individuals in supervisory positions are not being held accountable. They noted, however, that sometimes the employer is restricted in how much they can communicate about disciplinary measures. As a result, actions have been taken in some instances, but other employees are not informed due to the obligation to protect the confidentiality of the disciplined individual. Additionally, for union-included supervisors (Sergeants and Staff Sergeants), the options for disciplinary measures must follow union processes.

Some supervisors and managers feel that employees are sometimes too quick to make accusations of bullying and harassment against them. They receive direction from leadership to enforce policies, but when they hold people accountable, employees feel they are being treated unfairly and singled out. Some supervisors and managers find themselves in a difficult position, caught between front-line staff and senior leadership. They are expected to hold people accountable while ensuring their satisfaction and happiness with their job, which is not always possible.

6. Stress and Workload

The BCSS is currently facing significant operational challenges due to widespread staffing shortages. Sheriffs are grappling with the detrimental effects of these shortages on their workloads and overall operations. With limited resources and high attrition rates, sheriffs are struggling to meet the demands of their workload, often working below capacity and experiencing heightened levels of stress. The consequences of understaffing are far-reaching, impacting job satisfaction, safety, supervisory responsibilities, and the well-being of personnel.

Staffing Shortages Impacting Workloads and Operations

Focus group participants voiced their concerns regarding staffing shortages negatively impacting the workloads and operations of the BCSS. Sheriffs noted that staff shortages are widespread throughout the province, and employees are struggling to meet the demands of their current workload.

“Staffing shortages have gotten so bad that the wheels have come off the bus and we are driving down the road at 100 miles an hour waiting for the impact.”

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the focus groups is that staff shortages are forcing sheriffs to operate below capacity. Employees reported that they are "running on fumes" and that some offices are operating at only 50% capacity due to high attrition rates and sheriffs using the Short-Term Illness and Injury Plan (STIIP) or going on long-term disability. Due to the lack of staff, there is an increased workload for existing sheriffs, and they work longer hours and take on more responsibilities to cover shortfalls. Many sheriffs emphasized that this has led to widespread burnout, high levels of stress, and a decline in overall job satisfaction. Moreover, focus group participants noted that shortages have become so critical that sheriffs are working overtime to keep courthouses operational, including borrowing staff from other offices or even flying in sheriffs on overtime from other cities or regions. Due to the current staffing issues, sheriffs stated that it can be challenging for them to take time off for medical appointments, family events, or vacations, further exacerbating feelings of frustration and burnout.

“We have so few staff that now my inspectors are having to sit in courtrooms and do deputy sheriff work. It impacts us operationally and it also means that the inspector work is not getting done.”

Focus group participants highlighted the significant impact of personnel shortages across the rank hierarchy within the organization, ranging from Deputy Sheriffs to Superintendents. As a result, individuals at all levels have been required to work below their rank to address staffing gaps. This situation has had detrimental effects on various aspects of operations, mentoring, and supervisory responsibilities within the organization. Supervisors expressed that managing scheduling gaps and accounting for the large number of vacancies has significantly increased their workload and stress levels. In numerous offices,

supervisors have had to assume line staff roles to ensure the continuity of court operations, resulting in disrupted work distribution, heightened workloads, and challenges for managers in planning and supervising their staff effectively. In certain courthouses, supervisors reported critical staff shortages that necessitated the presence of all personnel, including Deputy Sheriffs, Sergeants, Staff Sergeants, and Inspectors, in courtrooms to maintain operations, leaving little or no time for supervisory responsibilities or strategic planning.

In addition, sheriffs indicated that the issues with stress and workload are discouraging Deputy Sheriffs from pursuing supervisory roles and promotions. Sheriffs reported that they are not incentivized to pursue supervisory positions because the current salary is not enough to compensate for the additional workload and stress. Supervisors and managers highlighted that they are expected to work extended hours, through lunch, and attend calls during their off-hours, yet they are not always compensated for overtime. The lack of overtime access at higher ranks also discourages sheriffs from pursuing Inspector roles, which further exacerbates staffing shortages. Supervisors noted that the high attrition rates for younger sheriffs and the lack of salary incentives have led to a shortage of applicants who are able to competently fill gaps in the supervisory ranks, negatively impacting operations, and workloads.

Another issue that emerged from the focus groups is that the shortage of personnel is impacting staff and operational safety, creating an even more stressful work environment. Many employees indicated that they are currently overworked, doing double shifts, working extensive overtime, covering staffing gaps, and are physically and mentally exhausted, which could compromise their judgment and decision-making skills during a critical incident. In some instances, the lack of staff has resulted in court proceedings not starting on time because a sheriff was not immediately available to escort the accused to the courtroom. In a number of offices, sheriffs stated that the staffing shortages are so severe that they are unable to safely staff jails and courthouses and are scrambling for coverage, leading to delays in response times for emergency calls and critical situations. Sheriffs in offices with shortages also reported that they are required to work alone in potentially dangerous situations, dealing with potentially aggressive individuals, running escorts, and guarding prisoners. Supervisors and managers also recognized the issues with safety and expressed frustration that they are unable to adequately address the issue due to the lack of staff and the pressures to keep courthouses operational.

“My biggest worry day to day is that someone is going to get hurt because we are being forced to cut corners because we don’t have the staff. We aren’t staffed to operate safely and it is something I worry about every day.”

“Sheriffs are often in very dangerous situations. One officer in custody of 4 people, while trying to call dispatch, while trying to watch court cameras, while trying to stay on the road, and it’s not even snowing yet.”

Sheriffs reported facing increased risk as staffing shortages can require them to work alone when conducting escorts. One sheriff may have to run a solo vehicle escort for multiple violent offenders. These risks can further escalate when a sheriff conducting a solo escort is driving long distances through remote areas. In addition, sheriffs are required to conduct regular cell checks and make frequent calls to dispatch while transporting inmates, raising concerns about distracted driving. Sheriffs have emphasized the need for two sheriffs in the vehicle, one to drive safely and the other to provide backup and assist with conducting the required check-ins. Furthermore, sheriffs have noted that two sheriffs should be allocated for all flight escorts to ensure the safety of the public and allow for breaks on long-haul flights. Some sheriffs also

expressed concerns regarding the impact of staffing shortages on the level of security provided for high-risk escorts. It was noted that there have been instances where a high-security escort has been downgraded at the local level, resulting in a lack of support.

Increased Stress, Burnout, and Sick Leave Usage

Focus group participants emphasized that staffing shortages not only affect workloads and operations but also have significant implications for the personal well-being of employees. Participants reported increased stress, burnout, and sick leave usage due to the excessive workload and multitasking required to cover staffing shortfalls. Many sheriffs also reported the need to work overtime to maintain operations or provide additional income for their families, resulting in burnout and negatively impacting personal well-being, time spent with family, and work performance. The combination of heavy workloads and overtime has led to a decrease in morale, with many employees expressing feelings of chronic fatigue and stress. Participants also noted that heavy workloads and burnout can decrease job performance and impact sheriffs' ability to drive safely, remember essential safety equipment, or operate firearms.

“As an organization, we have a real “can do attitude” and we make it work. That is a short-sprint attitude and is not sustainable. We can’t do this long term and it is having very negative impacts on staff in terms of burnout and issues with mental health.”

Repeated exposure to high-pressure and challenging situations involving individuals in crisis can also contribute to chronic stress and fatigue. Sheriffs noted that they often deal with difficult situations, such as physically violent and verbally abusive inmates or members of the public. Participants also noted that law enforcement agencies face increasing demands due to the prevalence of mental health and substance use issues in the community, as well as an increase in public scrutiny and criticism.

Sheriffs expressed frustration with the lack of flexibility in scheduling, which prevents them from taking time off for medical appointments, important family events, or annual leave. This creates additional stress and a feeling that there is “no give and take” within the organization, making employees feel unsupported and undervalued. To offset this situation, sheriffs noted that they use STIIP to access leave in instances of limited notice or to address stress and mental health issues, further exacerbating staffing shortages. This puts additional pressure on employees who are covering for staffing shortfalls and contributes to a sense of being overwhelmed.

“At an office level, it is stressful and difficult, and people are getting burnt out and sick and we are demoralized because we don’t feel recognized by our organization. There is nothing to be positive about and it feels like there is no light at the end of the tunnel.”

Sheriffs emphasized that there is a need for urgent organizational change to address the issues of stress, burnout, and increased sick leave usage within the BCSS. Employees are frustrated with the organization, as they feel it promotes the job of a sheriff as allowing for a better work-life balance than a policing job, while the current realities are not conducive to a healthy work-life balance and are negatively impacting the personal well-being of employees. Additionally, many sheriffs feel that the organizational culture does not prioritize mental health concerns, and supervisors are not providing adequate support to staff. However, supervisors at all levels of the management and leadership structure expressed that they are also experiencing unmanageable

workloads, increased stress, and feelings of burnout. Many supervisors and managers reported that their workloads are unsustainable and that they are sacrificing their health and well-being to keep the organization operational, including working additional unpaid hours, filling in for line-staff positions, and responding to work emails on weekends.

7. Recruitment

Focus group participants observed that the BC Sheriff Service is struggling to fill recruitment classes and retain successful applicants, which negatively impacts the quantity and quality of new recruits. Sheriffs expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency in the recruitment process and noted that recruitment materials often emphasize the thrilling aspects of the job while downplaying the less exciting realities. This approach leads to misconceptions about the role of a sheriff. Concerns were also raised about regional and local barriers to recruitment, including the time-consuming application process, the lack of support and resources for recruitment efforts, and the financial barriers associated with the current provincial model, such as costs for tests and travel. Many sheriffs suggested transitioning to a regional hiring model to improve retention rates, accessibility, and job satisfaction.

Lower Quality and Quantity of New Recruits

Focus group participants noted that low pay levels and competition from other law enforcement agencies are adversely affecting both the quantity and quality of new recruits. Sheriffs highlighted that a shift in attitudes towards law enforcement has resulted in a smaller pool of applicants in the labour market, intensifying competition and challenges in recruitment. While there are enough recruitment classes available to meet the organization's staffing needs, the BCSS is currently unable to fill those classes due to a shortage of applicants. Recent classes have been only half full or less. Moreover, the organization is grappling with the issue of retaining successful applicants, as sheriffs reported instances of applicants leaving before completing their Sheriff Recruit Training (SRT) or shortly after finishing it. Participants emphasized the significant cost involved in training each recruit, estimated at approximately \$47,000. Sheriffs further underscored the concerning trend of losing more staff than they can currently recruit, which is gradually undermining both operations and morale.

“We are having to accept applicants that would not have passed in previous years because our business is going to crumble if we don’t hire enough people.”

Furthermore, some participants expressed concerns about the quality of newer recruits. Sheriffs noted that due to staffing concerns, lower-quality candidates have been accepted and pushed through the recruitment process to offset shortages. Some participants stated that they feel the organization is currently "scraping the bottom of the barrel" to fill positions and pushing through candidates who have repeatedly failed firearms training or accepting recruits who were rejected from previous recruitment intakes. Overall, participants highlighted an urgent need for improved incentives and recruitment processes to attract quality applicants and retain trained personnel.

“Alberta has far better marketing and recruitment resources. BC Corrections also has a better system and we need to match that to improve recruitment.”

Employees from various locations highlighted that the organization's inability to offer competitive pay for new recruits is further compounded by the current lack of support and resources for recruitment efforts. Participants in the focus groups noted that the recruitment team is significantly understaffed and burdened with handling both recruitment and training responsibilities, leading to unsustainable workloads and limited capacity to devote sufficient attention to recruitment activities alone. Sheriffs emphasized the need for a dedicated recruitment unit and stressed the importance of increased resources and dedicated support to effectively address staffing shortages and hiring delays. Comparisons were made to other law enforcement agencies, such as the RCMP and BC

Corrections, which have more robust recruitment systems and resources. Participants also pointed out missed opportunities to engage potential candidates and effectively market the organization throughout the province due to resource limitations. They emphasized the organization's need to enhance public awareness through paid advertising campaigns, updated recruitment materials, and a strong presence at job fairs and career days.

Misleading Advertising of the Job

Another significant concern raised in numerous focus groups is the lack of transparency in the recruitment process. Sheriffs expressed their dissatisfaction with the current recruitment model, which they believe fails to provide an accurate portrayal of the job and tends to attract candidates who may be more suited for a career in policing. Participants observed that recruitment materials and videos often highlight the more thrilling aspects of the work, such as operating carbines or conducting high-security escorts, while downplaying the less exciting realities, such as spending extended periods of time in courtrooms. Sheriffs noted that marketing efforts utilize flashy videos featuring firearms, car chases, and lights and sirens, which poorly represent the day-to-day reality of being a sheriff. Consequently, new recruits often hold misconceptions about the role of a sheriff, assuming it closely resembles that of a police officer, and become disillusioned when they discover that the job is not as action-oriented and lacks as many opportunities for specialized duties that were initially believed to exist. Participants strongly emphasized the importance of accurately marketing the job and differentiating it from other law enforcement roles to attract suitable candidates committed to a long-term career with the organization. Focus group participants also highlighted the lack of regional recruiting materials, with participants from northern areas noting that the specialized duties depicted in the videos are not often available in their locations. Sheriffs suggested a need for more targeted recruitment strategies and marketing materials that accurately represent the realities of working as a sheriff in different regions of the province.

“For an example of lack of transparency, look at our recruitment video.”

“In SRT, they crank up the new recruits and get them all excited for duties we don’t do regularly, and then they get out and they’re just stuck in a courtroom.”

In addition to a desire for accurate and transparent marketing practices, focus group participants emphasized the need for greater transparency in the Sheriff Recruit Training (SRT) program. While many participants praised the program for its thoroughness and high-quality training, they also highlighted a misalignment between the training provided at the Justice Institute of BC and the true nature of the job. While firearms and use of force techniques are crucial elements of training new recruits, it is noted that SRT can create unrealistic expectations by emphasizing exciting and action-packed scenarios. Focus group participants highlighted that these scenarios are rare and do not align with the day-to-day realities of working as a sheriff, as the role can involve monotony due to extended periods of time spent in court or hours of driving to transport inmates. Participants suggested shifting the focus from exciting but infrequent specialized duties to emphasizing the core responsibilities of a sheriff from the beginning. Sheriffs noted that this approach may better manage expectations and prevent recruits from assuming they will be involved in law enforcement activities similar to the police. Additionally, it was emphasized that SRT should be more transparent about the potential need to relocate for work. Many focus group participants stated that the recruitment process did not adequately inform them about the extent to which they would be required to travel or relocate for potential postings.

Process Creates Unnecessary Barriers for Applicants

At the organizational level, many sheriffs highlighted the recruitment and application process as a significant factor contributing to understaffing and hiring delays. Sheriffs emphasized the need to streamline the process and reduce the time it takes to onboard new applicants. Currently, the BCSS employs a rigorous selection process for Deputy Sheriffs, which typically spans a period of 6 to 8 months from the initial job posting to on-the-job hiring. This process encompasses several stages, including document submission, a security screening questionnaire, physical abilities testing, competency-based interviews, past work performance checks, enhanced security screening, voice stress analysis, and medical testing. After successfully completing these stages, applicants then undergo a 14-week Sheriff Recruit Training program. As armed peace officers, sheriffs acknowledge the necessity of a thorough application and screening process to ensure the suitability of candidates. However, sheriffs state that the current onboarding timeline is excessively long, resulting in significant delays in finding replacements and placing an additional burden on existing staff members. Sheriffs note the importance of analyzing the current process and identifying areas that could be streamlined to allow for more efficient onboarding.

“There are so many people that want to work for the service, and who would be great, but maybe don’t have the qualifications or the process is too complicated, so they don’t bother applying.”

In addition to the lengthy timelines, focus group participants voiced concerns about the current recruitment requirements. Many sheriffs compared the BCSS's requirements to those of other law enforcement agencies and questioned the necessity of certain qualifications. For instance, participants mentioned that the BCSS's requirement of a typing test is not necessary for other law enforcement agencies. Some sheriffs also emphasized that behavioral competencies should not be used for interviewing new recruits, as qualified applicants could be screened out due to their unfamiliarity with the marking criteria associated with the competency-based interview process. Considering the lower requirements and more streamlined application processes of agencies like the RCMP, focus group participants suggested that the organization should consider adjusting its requirements and timelines, where possible, to remain competitive and address staffing shortages.

“No bridging program – there are a lot of police who are interested in coming to sheriffs, find the hours and lifestyle appealing, but have to go through all the training.”

Sheriffs also raised the issue that the current recruitment process is a barrier for potential law enforcement applicants as it lacks a bridging program for municipal police or RCMP officers. Participants stated that police and RCMP officers have shown interest in joining the BCSS due to the more favorable work hours, but they were discouraged by the requirement to go through the entire application and recruitment training process. A potential opportunity for expanding recruitment would be to establish a more streamlined process specifically designed for police and RCMP officers to join the BCSS. However, it is important to note that a few participants expressed concerns about recruiting police officers as sheriffs, citing worries about potential preferential treatment and a perceived lack of opportunities for internal promotions among the current staff should ex-police staff become more common throughout the BCSS.

Focus group participants at all levels of the BCSS consistently raised concerns about the current centralized provincial recruitment model, highlighting its failure to effectively address staffing shortages and promote the retention of new recruits. Participants emphasized the need to transition to a regional hiring model to improve retention rates, enhance business operations, and increase overall job satisfaction. One of the primary challenges identified was the organization's inability to guarantee recruits a job in their home community or preferred location. This aspect makes the BCSS less appealing compared to competing agencies such as municipal police forces, where work locations are clearly established from the beginning. Participants pointed out that although the RCMP often requires relocation, the higher pay compensates for it, and even the RCMP is adapting its practices to facilitate officers working closer to their home communities. Additionally, participants highlighted the presence of local residents who would be interested in working for the service but are deterred by the lack of guarantee to secure a position in or near their home community. Sheriffs emphasized the importance of hiring from specific regions to ensure applicant retention within those areas. This approach would enhance job satisfaction and foster stronger commitment to the organization while allowing individuals to establish roots in their preferred communities.

“We have seen remote offices like Fort St. John turnover multiple times in the last few years. Recruiting and retaining people in those regions is essential.”

Many newer sheriffs expressed frustration and stress related to the recruitment and placement process, particularly for those with family and friends in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island regions who are required to relocate to the North or Interior, and vice versa. Supervisors and managers also voiced their concerns about this process, noting its significant impact on hard-to-recruit areas like Terrace or Fort St. John. They observed that recruits frequently assigned to the North from the Lower Mainland struggle to adapt and subsequently transfer out or resign.

“I was paying \$1,800 just to get past recruitment.”

In addition to highlighting the benefits of a regional recruitment model for improving job satisfaction and addressing staffing shortages in hard-to-recruit areas, focus group participants also emphasized that such a model may help alleviate some of the financial barriers associated with the current provincial model. Participants pointed out that certain requirements, such as Occupational First Aid Level 1 (OFA1), Class 4 unrestricted driver's license, typing test, physical abilities test, and medical examinations, need to be paid for out of the applicant's own pocket. Sheriffs noted that some recruits have to bear the costs of travel to complete the Sheriff Officer Physical Abilities Test (SOPAT), which can only be conducted in specific locations. Participants stressed the need for a more accessible physical abilities test that would reduce costs and travel requirements, particularly from remote locations.

The financial burden is further compounded for recruits located outside the Lower Mainland who have to travel to Vancouver for Sheriff Recruit Training. Participants stated that it can be challenging for applicants with families to uproot their lives, and although there are some discounts and reimbursements for travel and accommodation, recruits from remote areas often have to spend a few thousand dollars to complete the recruitment process. The financial strain, coupled with the perception that other law enforcement agencies offer better benefits and more comprehensive coverage of training costs, hinders recruitment efforts.

“For staff in the north or remote regions, it costs them about 4 grand out of pocket to travel to the lower mainland for all the tests and travel.”

Finally, focus group participants suggested the need for additional financial incentives for hard-to-recruit areas, highlighting that the absence of sufficient northern wage supplementation contributes to high turnover. It was also suggested that the organization consider financial incentives for locations that experience disproportionately high levels of crime, substance use, and mental illness, as working in these locations creates additional stress and safety concerns for staff.

8. Staffing Practices

In addition to shortcomings in the recruitment phase, Deputy Sheriffs observed that some retention problems and employee engagement issues are caused by the way the BC Sheriff Service manages its existing employees. Sheriffs noted that employees are more likely to quit when the BCSS is unable to offer them a posting that is geographically near their home and family. There is also widespread dissatisfaction with the way promotional competitions are conducted, using the system of behavioural competency interviewing. Additionally, focus group participants noted that there is a tendency to promote supervisors and managers on a temporary basis for extended periods of time, which has negative impacts on the organization.

Employees Posted Far from Their Homes and Families

Not all employees are posted to positions within commuting distance of their homes and families. For example, there are Deputy Sheriffs who have a home in the Lower Mainland but are posted to a courthouse location in Prince George or Nelson. This possibility not only discourages potential recruits, as discussed in the [Recruitment](#) theme, it also causes some employees to resign from the BCSS.

In certain cases, family members remain in their home communities due to work or school commitments, while the Deputy Sheriff rents accommodation near the courthouse where they work. This places a burden on personal finances and relationships. Employees living away from home often face higher living expenses, as they must pay rent or a mortgage for their family's home, as well as rent and food in the community where they work. Additionally, they must bear travel expenses to visit their family regularly. This situation becomes particularly frustrating when they are aware of unfilled positions in the courthouse closest to their home.

“I’ll take \$70,000 a year and live at home, but if you have to live far away from your family, the remuneration isn’t worth it.”

Even Deputy Sheriffs without spouses or children described the difficulty of moving away from friends, recreational activities, and familiar community amenities. For some, the cultural and lifestyle changes involved in moving from a large urban centre to a small or remote community, or vice versa, are hard to adapt to. Many employees from the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island struggle with the cold winters experienced in the North and Interior regions. Some find it challenging to adjust to their new locations and are not willing to wait until they become eligible to apply for a transfer, leading them to resign.

The BCSS has an internal lateral transfer process that allows employees to apply for transfers to courthouses in different locations. However, newly hired Deputy Sheriffs are not eligible to apply for the first two years. Even after the two-year period, there is no guarantee that their transfer requests will be approved, as applications are prioritized based on employee seniority. Furthermore, to vacate their current positions, a new backfill must be arranged to maintain baseline staffing levels at their current courthouse. Some Deputy Sheriffs explained that they were waiting for a transfer and had already set a

"pull the pin date," meaning that if they are not transferred to their home community by a certain date, they will resign from the BCSS.

"The 'pull the pin date' is very real. If we don't get to where we want to be by the time we want to be, we quit."

Some sheriffs believe that the lateral transfer process is too rigid and does not allow for transfers that would make logical sense. Deputy Sheriffs described situations where two employees would like to switch locations so each can work in a courthouse closer to their home, but they are not permitted to do so. Others complained that the lateral transfer process lacks transparency, as some transfer requests are denied while similar requests are accommodated outside the regular process. This is perceived as favouritism. Some have also noted that it is unfair that new recruits are given priority over existing employees when it comes to transferring to their desired location. In certain cases, positions are filled by new recruits despite requests from more senior employees to work at those courthouses.

In focus groups held in the Lower Mainland, complaints about job locations were less about having to move away from family members and more about long commutes that reduce the time employees can spend with their families and increase personal fuel and parking expenses. This is particularly true for employees posted at downtown locations such as Vancouver Law Courts, 222 Main Street, and Richmond, where high local housing costs often force employees to commute long distances from more affordable outlying areas. This issue also affects employees in the Lower Mainland Float Pool, who may work in different courthouses each day depending on staffing needs.

"The slogan is, 'Join our family so you can spend more time with yours,' but we end up being separated from our families anyway. For no reason!"

In contrast, Deputy Sheriffs in Surrey, Abbotsford, and Chilliwack who live near the courthouses where they work expressed that their short commutes are among the main reasons they continue working for the BCSS. They believe that if more Deputy Sheriffs could remain in their home communities and have shorter commutes that allow for more time with their families, there would likely be fewer resignations.

Dissatisfaction with the Behavioural Competency Interview Process

There were numerous complaints about the behavioural competency method of interviewing. Deputy Sheriffs do not believe that this is an effective way of selecting the best candidates for the job. They argue that this method focuses on the ability of the candidate to tell a good story about a past event, which does not necessarily equate to an ability to be a good supervisor and leader on the ground. They believe that greater importance should be given to past work performance, assessments from colleagues, and leadership potential. Many participants at the Sergeant and Staff Sergeant level, including some who have served as panel members for promotional interviews, echoed this feedback, asserting that the competency-based system does not enable them to identify the most qualified candidate.

Deputy Sheriffs voiced concerns that the competency-based system does not require successful candidates to possess a deep understanding of the job or a broad range of experience. As a result, individuals with limited years of service and expertise are being promoted to supervisory positions. Many feel that these individuals often lack sufficient experience to provide meaningful training or mentorship to employees, and they are not respected by the Deputy Sheriffs they supervise, many of

whom have greater seniority and experience. Meanwhile, there are seasoned Deputy Sheriffs who are highly regarded by their colleagues for their experience and knowledge but have not succeeded in promotional interviews due to their lack of eloquence in an interview setting. Consequently, these senior Deputy Sheriffs are frequently called upon to train and mentor their newly appointed supervisors. This is viewed as unfair, disrespectful, and a failure of the competency-based interview system.

An additional consequence of promoting individuals with limited experience is that supervisors are ill-prepared to handle emergency situations. Many Deputy Sheriffs believe that this poses safety risks, as supervisors must possess the knowledge and experience necessary to lead responses to critical incidents. The situation is further exacerbated by the lack of training provided to supervisors and managers in the BCSS, as discussed in the theme of [Supervisory-Level Management](#), particularly the lack of incident command training. This training is crucial for teaching officers how to effectively lead others and make sound tactical decisions during critical incidents. Deputy Sheriffs have observed that other law enforcement agencies rarely promote individuals with such limited experience, recognizing that inexperienced decision-makers could endanger lives.

“The competencies that we use in competitions don’t translate well to day-to-day operational decisions or life and death situations. I think those life and death decisions require experience, and if a situation does arise, we need someone in the chain of command to make that decision. If we don’t have someone with enough experience in that role, this organization and this province is going to wear it if an incident occurs. Someone is going to be asking the question, ‘why did someone with 2 years of experience have control of the chain of command?’”

Furthermore, many Deputy Sheriffs feel that the scoring in the competency-based interview style is entirely subjective and allows the interview panel to manipulate scores in favour of their preferred candidate. Deputy Sheriffs believe that the outcomes of many competitions are predetermined, as they have observed that employees who have established friendships with influential managers are far more likely to be promoted. These employees also receive additional training and mentoring to enhance their

“The solid guy doesn’t get the job, the guy who kisses ass for 6 months does.”

competitiveness, including coaching in interview skills. Focus group participants at the Sergeant and Staff Sergeant ranks also commented on how favouritism appears to determine the outcomes of certain competitions. Many would like to see panel members recuse themselves from promotional decisions when their personal friends are competing for a position, while others suggest that the entire panel process should be conducted by an external organization.

Some Deputy Sheriffs discussed the process of becoming an instructor within the BCSS and highlighted that it was more effective in selecting competent candidates compared to the promotional process. They would like to see elements of that process incorporated into promotions, such as training prerequisites in addition to an interview. Other participants suggested exploring the practices employed by other law enforcement agencies to determine if there are any lessons that could be learned from their promotional processes.

Competency Hunting

Deputy Sheriffs have reported another negative impact of competency-based interviewing: candidates will go to great lengths to create situations in the workplace that they can then talk about during their interviews. This behaviour is referred to as "competency hunting" and can lead to employees sabotaging

their coworkers or direct reports to have an example to discuss with the panel. According to Deputy Sheriffs, one of the most problematic competencies candidates are asked to demonstrate is "Holding People Accountable." Supervisors and colleagues will look for small errors that others are making, and then instead of quietly coaching the individual on how to do it better, they report it, push to have it investigated, and generally try to amplify the issue so that they have more to talk about in their interview.

Competency hunting has definitively negative effects on workplace culture and morale. It fosters feelings of distrust, division, and fear among employees. Competency hunting also instills an us-versus-them mentality between employees and supervisors because employees are afraid their supervisor is going to resort to disciplinary processes instead of providing guidance and coaching. Additionally, it impedes professional growth and development, as employees hesitate to seek assistance, fearing that their supervisor might exploit their knowledge gaps to "hold them accountable" for mistakes.

Furthermore, competency hunting hampers communication within the workplace. Employees shared how they avoid interactions with supervisors or coworkers who are planning to compete on a promotional panel, knowing that these individuals are actively seeking scenarios to exploit. This avoidance makes it more challenging for employees to perform their jobs effectively and can even pose potential safety risks when operational details are not fully understood, yet employees are hesitant to admit their uncertainty. Consequently, stress levels increase, teamwork suffers, and overall job performance declines.

"As soon as you hear there is a staff sergeant or sergeant job about to become available, the personalities change in the office and it becomes a completely predatory environment. People will absolutely sewer you in a heartbeat to get a competency."

"All we do is investigate our own brothers and sisters, so that we can build competencies. Instead of being a good supervisor, all they do is look for things you do wrong, so they can build up their own competencies and go up the ranks. They eat their own."

Deputy Sheriffs expressed their desire for changes in the competition processes to mitigate the negative effects of competency hunting. Sheriffs noted that competency hunting is always present in the organization, but it becomes particularly acute when supervisory panels are underway. Many sheriffs proposed focusing on more positive behaviors, such as building morale and teamwork, instead. Some suggested replacing questions that ask candidates to recount past scenarios with hypothetical scenarios to assess their responses.

Negative Impacts of Temporary Assignments

Focus group participants discussed the significant number of supervisors and managers in the BCSS who hold temporary positions, highlighting the negative impacts this has on the organization. Employees perceive it as unfair when individuals are given temporary promotions without a competitive process, viewing it as another instance of favouritism. Furthermore, they express dissatisfaction when positions remain unfilled for extended periods, suspecting that management is delaying the hiring process until their preferred candidate becomes available or eligible for the position.

In some cases, Deputy Sheriffs believe that senior managers prefer to have their direct reports appointed on a temporary basis because it makes them easier to control. They believe that there is a preference to appoint individuals who will unquestioningly follow instructions, rather than promoting confident and empowered leaders to supervisory and middle management positions. These leaders are more likely to ask questions, advocate for changes, and support their employees.

“You put someone who has been bullied and harassed their entire career into an acting position, and they will do as little as possible to rock the boat because they’re an injured dog, scared of being bullied and harassed.”

Acting supervisors are often perceived as less likely to provide effective and decisive leadership to the staff they oversee. They tend to avoid making mistakes or attracting attention to themselves, as they are aware that their temporary appointment could be revoked, leading to the loss of their promotional status. Consequently, they are more inclined to ignore or evade decision-making situations and defer such responsibilities to their superiors. As a result, numerous issues remain unaddressed, causing frustration among front-line staff who seek clear solutions and guidance. As mentioned in the [Supervisory-Level Management](#) theme, the lack of training, experience, and confidence among supervisors can also give rise to safety risks and impede their ability to respond effectively to emergencies.

Acting supervisors are also less likely to have difficult conversations with employees who are not meeting performance standards, as they do not feel they have the same level of authority and respect. They are aware that they could soon be back at the same rank as the problematic individual, and having a performance conversation could make it awkward to have a peer-to-peer working relationship in the future. They are also less likely to have built up the skills and experience needed to have these conversations effectively.

There are also negative impacts of having senior managers in temporary positions, notably a lack of long-term thinking and strategic decision-making. Like acting supervisors, acting senior managers will be less likely to lead decisively or make tough decisions, as they fear they will be removed from their positions if they make mistakes or challenge the accepted status quo. Since they have only been appointed temporarily, they are unlikely to take ownership of long-term issues that require strategic planning and complex solutions. In many ranks of the organization, focus group participants noted that strategic and proactive decision-making is lacking in the BCSS. Part of the problem is that temporarily appointed senior managers do not feel empowered or secure in making difficult but necessary changes. The default is inaction or incremental changes, which are safer and less controversial but do not effectively solve large problems or set the organization on a strategic path toward success.

9. Professional Development

Professional development was a theme mentioned in almost every focus group across the province. Deputy Sheriffs reported that their initial Sheriff Recruit Training at the Justice Institute of BC was of very high quality, but ongoing training in the BCSS is insufficient and not provided in an equitable manner. Deputy Sheriffs are aware that the lack of training is related to staffing shortages, but they see shortcomings in how the BCSS manages training in general. They also noted that the lack of training creates safety concerns. (**Note:** *Additional findings related to a lack of training for supervisors and managers are described under the [Supervisory-Level Management](#) theme.*)

Lack of Ongoing Training

Deputy Sheriffs noted that there are not enough ongoing opportunities for professional development after the initial training course at the Justice Institute of BC. This issue was raised by Deputy Sheriffs in all regions, although it is particularly problematic in the North and Interior regions. While general BC Public Service courses are available online for all employees through the PSA Learning Centre, Sheriffs have observed that these courses are often not applicable to their day-to-day jobs.

“The lack of ongoing training raises safety issues. You’re only as good as your weakest person. And this office is weak. We’re stunted and don’t feel like we can do what we need to do.”

In certain locations, Deputy Sheriffs emphasized that there is a lack of cross-training in basic job requirements, such as recertification in First Aid training, access to specific computer systems, records management, and jury management. This lack of training makes it more challenging for them to perform their duties and for supervisors to assign work effectively, as not everyone is trained to handle all tasks. Some Deputy Sheriffs who possess the necessary training in these areas expressed a willingness to train and mentor their peers, but they are either prohibited from doing so or do not have the time due to staffing shortages. This issue was raised multiple times on Vancouver Island. In other locations, like the Northern region, Sheriffs reported that cross-training on basic tasks is conducted well. However, accessing training that requires special instructors or multiple days away from the office is very difficult. Deputy Sheriffs across the BCSS expressed difficulties in obtaining training for more advanced skills. They often request training courses such as advanced escorts and the carbine operator course, but there are very few available spots. Courses offered in regions outside of the Lower Mainland are frequently cancelled, and some employees have to wait for years to access the training they are interested in.

Sheriffs find it frustrating that they are required to set learning goals for their annual MyPerformance reviews, but their requests for training, included in these goals, are rarely taken into consideration. Some wonder why they continue to request training year after year when it seems like a pointless exercise. A number of Deputy Sheriffs reported that their managers instructed them to remove all training requests from their MyPerformance learning goals. Supervisors acknowledged that the lack of training opportunities also puts them in a difficult situation as they are unable to adequately support their staff's professional development and help them achieve their goals.

“People with the training get flown out here when we need support, but they don’t fly us out there to train.”

Deputy Sheriffs described situations where the lack of trained staff has resulted in operational inefficiencies. When high-risk trials occur outside of the Vancouver and Fraser regions, there is a need for Deputy Sheriffs with skills in advanced escorts and operating carbines. However, accessing this training for employees outside of the Lower Mainland proves to be difficult. In some cases, Deputy Sheriffs with this specialized training have to be temporarily transferred from Vancouver to other regions to fulfill these duties, incurring greater expenses due to travel, accommodation, and overtime costs. This situation has created resentment among local Deputy Sheriffs, who feel they are being treated as second-class employees and are being hindered from expanding their skillset and engaging in more interesting work. Many believe that carbine and advanced escort training should be mandatory requirements for all Deputy Sheriffs.

Deputy Sheriffs in various focus groups voiced their concerns that there is not enough ongoing firearms training. They stated that training with their service pistol has been condensed to two days, once a year. Sheriffs who wish to practice on their own time must pay for their own access to a shooting range, and often have to pay for their own ammunition due to delays in ordering practice ammunition through the BCSS. Carbine operators are not permitted to take a carbine to a range, thereby lacking opportunities for additional practice. Deputy Sheriffs are concerned that many officers are not receiving adequate

“If something happens 3 years after training, we won’t remember – we need refreshers.”

practice using firearms, potentially impacting their confidence in emergency situations. They emphasized that the use of firearms is a perishable skill, and they would like to be more confident that they and their colleagues are prepared. They noted that the infrequent training presents a potential safety risk, but also a potential legal risk if an investigation were to find that inadequate training was to blame for an ineffective response.

Sheriffs also highlighted that physical use of force training is not frequent enough, and they would like to have more opportunities to practice their skills. Many sheriffs expressed the desire for ongoing physical fitness training and the need for greater incentives and facilities to maintain their fitness levels. Deputy Sheriffs would also appreciate incident response drills, where they can participate in mock security scenarios with their coworkers in the courthouses they work in, to enhance confidence and foster teamwork.

Sheriffs noted that in addition to improving performance, relevant training opportunities would improve job satisfaction and employee morale. Many participants emphasized that one of the reasons people leave the BCSS is due to the perceived lack of personal growth and limited opportunities for skill development. They believe that training initiatives would increase their sense of empowerment and engagement.

“We are so hungry for opportunities to better ourselves!”

Focus group participants noted that there are relevant training opportunities at the Justice Institute of BC that could be leveraged for Deputy Sheriffs, including use of force training and leadership in law enforcement. Sheriffs would like to see a greater effort in providing regional training options and utilizing regional instructors. Furthermore, many Sheriffs expressed interest in collaborative training opportunities with local police agencies.

Unequal Access to Training

Many focus group participants reported that there is unequal access to training opportunities within the BCSS, depending on which courthouse and region they work in. Deputy Sheriffs, Sergeants and Staff Sergeants in the North, Interior and Vancouver Island regions complained that they have far fewer opportunities for training than their colleagues in the Lower Mainland, which makes them feel like they are not valued. They noted that this makes postings in their regions less attractive and is part of the reason why employees tend not to stay in remote communities. It also means that there is an inconsistent level of capabilities across the province.

Many Deputy Sheriffs expressed the need for clearer processes in accessing training and greater transparency in how employees are selected for training opportunities. Experienced employees feel it is unfair when new employees are given training opportunities while their repeated requests for training have gone unaddressed.

“I’ve been waiting 16 years to get the advanced escort training. And I still haven’t. They give it to fresh recruits who leave in 3 months anyway.”

Focus group participants explained that in small courthouses in remote areas, the lack of training is directly linked to staff shortages. Operational requirements often lead to course cancellations as Deputy Sheriffs are needed on the frontline, and there is no one available to fill in for them during their training. In larger courthouses, there are typically more employees, making it easier to provide coverage during training periods. Additionally, the increased costs of travel and accommodation for Deputy Sheriffs from outer regions to the Lower Mainland, where many training courses are held, contribute to the training accessibility issue. Employees

would like to see more training courses offered in the North and the Interior regions to reduce logistical barriers. Some Sheriffs suggested planning training opportunities on weekends or during periods when the courts are not in session to address operational challenges.

In certain courthouses, Deputy Sheriffs noted that access to training appears to depend on personal connections with managers. They have observed certain employees being handpicked for training courses while others are not given the opportunity to participate, even if they have expressed their interest in specific courses in their learning goals. They have witnessed training opportunities being used as rewards for employees who have gained favour with supervisors and managers while withholding training opportunities is perceived as a form of punishment for those who have fallen out of favour. This issue is related to the broader concern of "weaponized administration," which is a form of unfair treatment discussed in more detail within the context of the [Supervisory-Level Management](#) theme.

“Unless you’re in the Boy’s Club, you can’t participate in any advanced training. Opportunities are extremely scarce.”

Block 2 Training Not Conducted in Posting Location

During the final phase of Sheriff Recruit Training, known as Block 2, new Deputy Sheriffs undergo on-the-job training at a courthouse to learn from experienced employees and transition into the workforce. However, Deputy Sheriffs have noted that Block 2 training does not necessarily take place at the courthouse where they will be assigned. This arrangement fails to provide new sheriffs with an accurate understanding of their future roles and responsibilities, as operational realities and local policies vary between courthouses. Upon being assigned to their permanent locations, new Deputy Sheriffs often find themselves in need of additional training to familiarize themselves with local policies and procedures. Some Deputy Sheriffs reported not receiving any additional training upon their arrival and struggling to learn local protocols on their own. They believe that having Block 2 training conducted at their specific work locations would have been more effective and efficient.

“I wouldn’t say our trainers on the coast are bad, but if they ask me where I’m going and I say Kelowna, they aren’t going to put as much effort in knowing we are leaving.”

Sheriffs stated that the quality of Block 2 training would likely improve if supervisors were aware that they were training individuals who would remain in their assigned locations. Recruits have reported that trainers do not invest as much effort in training those who will be posted to other locations in the Interior or the North. Trainers and supervisors are less inclined to invest time in building relationships and mentoring individuals during the Block 2 period if they know they will not be staying in their jurisdiction.

Sheriffs also highlighted that relocating Block 2 training to local courthouses may result in cost savings for some Deputy Sheriff recruits by reducing the duration of their stay and the expenses associated with living in Vancouver. It would also minimize the time they spend away from home for training, making the job more appealing to potential recruits, particularly those with family responsibilities.

10. Tools and Workspace

Many comments from focus group participants highlighted concerns regarding inadequate tools and workspaces, which create safety issues and inconveniences. Although tools and workspaces were not specifically mentioned as a primary reason for employees leaving the BCSS, they were identified as significant contributing factors. Insufficient and low-quality tools give Deputy Sheriffs the impression that their safety is not valued by their employer, leading them to question the seriousness of their organization as a law enforcement agency.

Unsuitable Radios and Communication Infrastructure

The most frequently mentioned issue related to tools and equipment was dissatisfaction with the radios Deputy Sheriffs use to communicate with each other and with their central dispatch office. Sheriffs across the province have serious concerns about their radios, which they feel are not suitable for their operational environment. Sheriffs see their radios as one of their most important pieces of safety equipment, especially as they are increasingly required to work on their own due to staffing shortages. Sheriffs believe that the radio system they have is not meant for law enforcement; it was designed for workplaces with lower operational requirements.

Sheriffs explained that their radios are not always operational in the areas where they work. The devices do not make use of standard VHF and UHF radio frequencies and have intermittent coverage in various areas of the province.

“One out of six radios in the same room will receive a call. In an emergency, not everyone will get the same call. It’s incredibly delayed and unsafe.”

In addition to remote locations, Deputy Sheriffs reported poor radio reception within certain courthouses. In some locations, they believe that the thick concrete walls are interfering with the signal, but in other courthouses without this type of construction, they suspect that multiple devices close to each other create some form of interference. When Deputy Sheriffs are near each other in the same room, sometimes only one will receive emergency code calls that are broadcast to all staff, whereas the other radios will remain silent.

Deputy Sheriffs also noted that their devices are not easy or quick to use compared to other models of radios. They take time to unlock and activate, and often must be rebooted before they work properly due to software or connectivity glitches. They are difficult to operate without looking at the device, which sheriffs note is a safety concern if they are trying to make a radio call while driving or while engaged physically with an assailant. Deputy Sheriffs feel that the current radio devices are much less safe and reliable than their previous radios, which had manual switches that could easily be operated without looking.

This lack of access to operationally suitable communication makes sheriffs feel unsafe as they are unsure if they will be able to quickly call for backup in an emergency, and they are not certain if their colleagues' radios will receive the call. This creates anxiety and resentment as they are not provided

with the right tools to protect their safety. In multiple focus groups, Deputy Sheriffs mentioned that they might not even bother with their radios if they were being attacked or needed assistance.

Deputy Sheriffs said they heavily rely on their personal cell phones for work communications. This does not help them in areas without cell reception, but it is a more convenient and reliable tool when in cell service areas. There is resentment among some sheriffs that they pay for personal cell phone plans while primarily using them for work purposes. Some Deputy Sheriffs have even refused to use their personal phones for work in order to make a point. However, this stance has not been well-received by their supervisors, and sheriffs believe that it may have potentially cost them career opportunities.

“I was trying to key my radio, during a fight, alone. Ended up grabbing my personal cellphone after all.”

In addition to the problems with the radio devices, Deputy Sheriffs reported issues with the software used by their central dispatch office. The dispatch officers use a custom-built tool based on Microsoft Access, which often experiences technical glitches. Although multiple people are supposed to be able to use the system simultaneously, it only works reliably with one user at a time. Sheriffs described the tool as a "makeshift solution" that was not procured in a professional manner and was adopted primarily because it was inexpensive.

“Our radios are a complete joke and it causes huge anxiety for our Deputies who are now having to go hours without communication or access to support. It is a whole devaluation of our Deputies who live in remote locations.”

The unreliable communication system leaves sheriffs feeling like they are working for a second-class law enforcement agency. Sheriffs noted that police forces, ambulance services, and the BC Conservation Service all have more functional and reliable radio systems that offer a much greater reception range throughout the province. Sheriffs often question why their organization cannot invest in better quality communication infrastructure. In many cases, they conclude that employee safety is not a core concern for the organization and that the BCSS is perceived as a "mickey mouse" agency that is "cheap" and unable to competently procure functional equipment.

Distribution of Carbines

Another tools-related issue that was consistently mentioned in almost all focus groups was the way that carbines are distributed provincially. Sheriffs explained that during unplanned incidents such as an active shooter situation, the increased range and accuracy of these firearms could provide a crucial advantage. Asymmetric distribution of carbines across the province leads to feelings of resentment as they perceive some regions are undervalued compared other regions. They feel deprived of a potentially useful tool and argue that a shooting situation could occur anywhere. They pointed out that more people in rural areas own long guns compared to large urban centers.

The example of carbine-related policies was frequently brought up in focus groups to illustrate how Deputy Sheriffs believe their organization is mismanaging its resources and favouring some regions over others. They feel it shows a lack of trust sheriffs' ability to use the tools they are trained on and is an example of their organization making decisions based on fear of potential legal liabilities.

(Note: Certain details related to carbine policies have not been described in this report, but have been communicated directly to the Deputy Attorney General, Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Sheriff.)

Difficulties Obtaining Equipment and Uniforms

Deputy Sheriffs in multiple locations commented on the difficulties they face in obtaining the uniforms and equipment they need. This is sometimes due to managers not approving the expense and other times because the process is time-consuming. Easier access to uniforms and safety equipment is desired by the sheriffs, as it would make them feel more respected and supported.

“Extra safety equipment only comes AFTER horrible situations. Everything Sheriffs do is reactive, not proactive.”

Concerns have been raised regarding the availability of safety equipment in case of emergencies. Deputy Sheriffs noted that they are limited in the amount of naloxone spray doses available to address overdoses, which are a regular occurrence in some locations. Other concerns pertain to the quality of equipment. Deputy Sheriffs in several locations expressed that the first aid equipment is not reliable and was procured because it was the cheapest option.

Staff members were also concerned about the ability to order replacement safety vests before their expiry date. Despite requesting replacement vests several months prior to their expiration, some Deputy Sheriffs did not receive them until several months after the expiry date. Several sheriffs have taken pictures of the expiry dates clearly marked on their vests and sent them to their spouses with instructions to take legal action against the government in the event of injury or death due to inadequate safety equipment.

Deputy Sheriffs also noted that it is difficult to obtain modified equipment that is more ergonomic. For example, some sheriffs have obtained prescriptions from doctors for shoulder straps or suspenders to help distribute the weight of their utility belts. However, they had to persistently request this from the organization, and there was a delay of several months in placing the order. Sheriffs have also encountered challenges in getting approval to use their own equipment, as it may look different from the regular uniform. They are frustrated by the lack of approval to clip equipment onto the webbing of their safety vests, which would distribute the weight of their tools better and prevent back pain. Opposition from the organization to this is based on the appearance being deemed too “tactical.” Sheriffs find it frustrating that access to ergonomic equipment is typically only granted after they have developed chronic pain problems, whereas having such equipment earlier might have prevented the pain in the first place.

“In this office, the idea of giving someone something as simple as a shirt (required for your job, by the way) is regarded as asking for gold, despite the fact that we’re entitled by policy to this kit and clothing. We should be given these without reprisal or questioning. I basically had to put forward the union contract to change anything.”

Deputy Sheriffs would also appreciate a streamlined process for obtaining replacements for standard uniform pieces such as shirts, pants, and boots. Ordering boots, in particular, has proven problematic, with lengthy delivery times of six to twelve months, no opportunity to try them on prior to ordering, and an apparent lack of return options if they do not fit properly. Many sheriffs feel that they have to fight for new items when their clothing wears out and face questioning from supervisors about the necessity for replacements. Some have had to seek support from their union stewards to obtain approval for new items they are entitled to. There appears to be inconsistency in how uniform orders are managed between courthouses, as some employees mentioned obtaining needed uniform pieces from colleagues in other locations where a variety of extra items are kept in storage.

Lack of Security Gates

The most frequently mentioned facilities issue is the lack of a security gate at the entrance of some courthouses. Deputy Sheriffs argued that this significantly increases the risk of individuals entering courtrooms with weapons. There have been multiple instances where sheriffs had to intervene to prevent members of the public from harming others with knives or other weapons, incidents that could have been detected earlier with a search gate in place. The current procedure in these locations requires sheriffs to approach individuals for a search after they have entered the building, which may cause embarrassment or a confrontational situation. In contrast, when everyone is required to pass through a screening gate and have their bags scanned, it is seen as a standard procedure applicable to all.

Sheriffs find it inconsistent that some courthouses have search gates while others with similar case volumes do not. In certain locations, search gate equipment is stored and only brought out for high-risk trials, as regular use is avoided to prevent the courthouse from appearing unwelcoming.

Senior ranks acknowledged that facilities decisions regarding security measures are not always under the control of the BCSS. While it is understood that public access to the courts is a critical component of the administration of justice, sheriffs are frustrated that they bear the responsibility of maintaining security without being able to implement measures that would enhance it. Sheriffs argue that screening does not restrict access to the courts, and compared it to airport security measures, which are widely accepted by the public.

“We need a search gate because our process is currently backwards. We let everyone in and then have to chase them down and seize weapons after the fact. This will change as soon as someone brings a gun in and shoots at a judge.”

Inadequate Building Design and Amenities

Deputy Sheriffs raised concerns about the lack of functional and suitable facilities in certain courthouses, particularly in smaller locations. They find it frustrating that their concerns are often not addressed, and little is done to make necessary changes or repairs.

One common issue is the presence of building design flaws that pose safety concerns. For instance, in some smaller courthouses, there are no separate entrances for the accused, requiring sheriffs to exercise extra vigilance as they bring them through the public lobby. In certain locations, the accused are led through the same area where sheriffs take their meal breaks, leaving employees feeling that they are never truly off-duty during their breaks. Another problem in many small courthouses is the lack of electronic key card technology for doors, causing sheriffs to struggle with finding the correct key and feeling vulnerable while escorting accused individuals, especially when working alone. Additionally, not all courthouses provide an appropriate space for an accused person to meet privately and securely with their legal counsel.

Deputy Sheriffs also mentioned issues with the amenities available in the workplace, acknowledging that they are less critical than safety concerns but still affecting employee morale. Some large courthouses lack sufficient changerooms and locker space, forcing sheriffs to change into their uniforms in the hallway. Others expressed the need for a designated space to prepare their meals and access to a water fountain. Some courthouses have limited natural light or are in a state of disrepair, which can contribute to a depressing work environment.

Sheriffs also expressed a desire for access to exercise equipment in the workplace, citing other organizations that offer this as a benefit to employees. They believe that staying physically fit is beneficial for their job, but exercising outside the vicinity of the courthouse is not always feasible due to weather conditions or safety concerns in certain neighbourhoods. While some courthouses have limited equipment donated or purchased by individual employees, it is not universally available.

“The ministry of health has a huge gym, but not a single courthouse has a good gym – we are expected to be fit and ready, but we have no budget for training and upkeep. They don’t even let us go to the other ministry gyms anymore. Corrections even has a gym.”

Analysis

The [Qualitative Findings](#) section presents the data collected from surveys and focus groups, with the goal of summarizing and conveying the statements made by BCSS employees. Although the findings have been grouped into themes and subthemes, little analysis has been conducted by the researchers. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the significance of the findings for both employees and the organization.

Firstly, it will discuss how the qualitative findings are related to previous data sources. Secondly, it will explore how the work environment is influencing individuals and their decisions regarding whether to stay or leave the organization. This analysis will incorporate general theories of employee retention as presented in the [Literature Review](#) chapter. Finally, the chapter will examine the causal relationships among the identified issues and analyze their impact on the organization as a whole.

The objective of this analysis is to explain why the findings matter to individuals and why they are having a significant impact on the organization. Ultimately, it aims to provide answers to the initial research questions.

Building on Previous Findings

The qualitative findings from the exploratory survey and the 35 focus groups validate, explain, and expand upon the findings of existing data sources, such as the Work Environment Survey (WES) results and the preliminary regression analysis conducted at the beginning of this initiative.

The results of the Work Environment Survey have consistently shown low levels of engagement and satisfaction since its inception in 2007. Although there have been some fluctuations over time, with moderate improvements in the 2018 and 2020 WES cycles, the results have consistently remained low compared to the overall BC Public Service results, as indicated by the driver percentile placements. The qualitative information gathered through this research initiative provides a detailed explanation as to why employees have rated the work environment so poorly. Additionally, the survey and focus group findings shed light on organizational aspects that are not directly captured in the Work Environment Survey, such as policy decisions, business processes, recruitment practices, organizational structure, and the issue of role clarity and sheriff identity.

The qualitative findings also confirm and provide explanations for the results of the quantitative analysis conducted by the researchers prior to initiating the qualitative survey and focus groups. In a multiple regression analysis measuring the predictive relationships between WES driver results and resignations, the researchers discovered that Pay & Benefits, Job Suitability, and Respectful Environment had a statistically significant impact. The qualitative findings further reveal that pay is indeed the most influential explanatory variable affecting employee resignations, with retirement benefits being a secondary factor. Job suitability was extensively discussed in the survey and focus groups, with Deputy Sheriffs often expressing dissatisfaction due to their limited duties and authorities, which they find uninteresting or lacking in meaning. The issue of respect emerged in various ways, with sheriffs citing disrespectful behaviour in the workplace, organizational processes that make them feel uncared for, and an overall sense that their role is not respected by Court Services Branch.

One of the key findings highlighted by the qualitative data, which was unexpected based solely on the pre-existing quantitative data analysis, is the extent to which internal work environment factors, beyond pay and benefits, contribute to attrition. Many employees are deeply dissatisfied with their work and how they are treated, in addition to compensation concerns. Prior to engaging in the qualitative data collection process, the researchers anticipated that the work environment would not be positive enough to persuade individuals to stay when offered alternative employment, but likely not detrimental enough to drive people away from the BCSS. However, the research revealed that a larger number of individuals than expected actively choose to leave due to these negative work environment factors.

In summary, the findings of the qualitative research initiative complement existing data sources, providing a deeper understanding and additional contextual elements that were not previously measured.

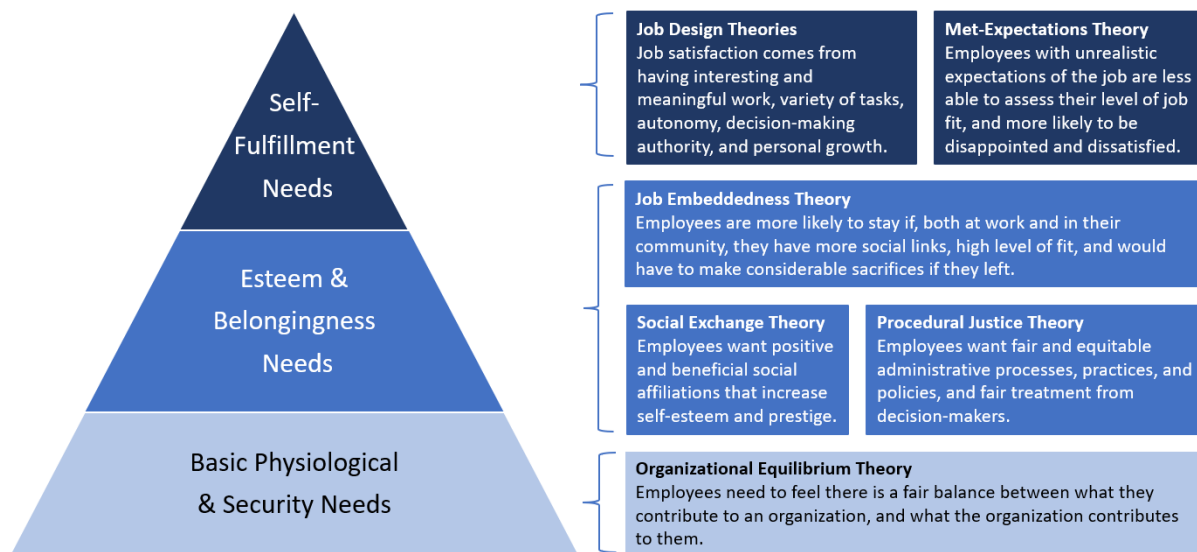
Individual Psychological Factors Impacting Retention: A Needs Perspective

This research initiative aimed to understand the reasons why employees are leaving the BC Sheriff Service. As indicated in the literature on employee retention, individuals make decisions to leave organizations based on their personal circumstances. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the research findings from the perspective of individuals and how they are affected by the work environment. This section refers to prominent theories on employee retention, which were introduced in the [Literature Review](#) chapter. Including a literature review offers a theoretical framework to organize and conceptualize the significance of the research findings.

In simplified terms, the research findings demonstrate that individuals are leaving their employment with the BCSS because their needs are not being met, or at least not sufficiently met to persuade them to stay. Needs-based theory, founded on the ideas of Maslow, provides a useful framework to analyze the retention of BCSS employees. Although originating from the 1940s, Maslow's hierarchy of needs remains a simple yet accurate model for understanding human behaviour and motivation.

Additionally, there are several other theories that provide complementary perspectives, such as the theory of organizational equilibrium, social exchange, procedural justice, job embeddedness, job design, and met-expectations theory. While these theories do not perfectly align with the levels of Maslow's hierarchy, they have overlapping concepts and connections to the research findings. The following analysis will examine how the organization fails to meet human needs at different levels of the hierarchy while integrating theories specific to employee retention.

Figure 13 - Analytical Framework Based on Employee Retention Theories



In general, Maslow's theory suggests that basic needs must be addressed before higher-level needs, although he acknowledged that an individual can be affected by different levels of needs simultaneously (Maslow 1987). For example, an individual may have some basic physiological and security needs that are not satisfied, but as long as their basic needs are met overall, they may also be feeling deficiencies in esteem and belonging. It is also important to note that within the context of a large organization, there are employees who have unmet needs at different levels of Maslow's hierarchy. Some individuals may choose to leave because their safety and security needs are not fulfilled, while others may leave due to a lack of self-fulfillment.

The research findings reveal that the BCSS fails to meet employee human needs across all levels of Maslow's hierarchy. As discussed in the [Research Findings](#) chapter, employee experiences vary depending on rank and location, and while some examples may be more prevalent than others, the issues highlighted here were widespread and present in multiple locations.

Physiological and Security Needs

The primary reason people seek employment is to earn the necessary income for shelter, food, and other essentials that provide security and a good quality of life. If a job fails to meet this fundamental need, and there are other opportunities available that offer better financial security, it is only natural for individuals to resign. Many Deputy Sheriffs find their pay insufficient to meet their financial security needs, particularly when supporting a family and dealing with high housing costs. Some are only able to meet their financial needs by working second jobs or working significant amounts of overtime, which negatively impacts their quality of life.

In addition to financial security, many Deputy Sheriffs are concerned that their job and their employer is putting their physical safety at risk. As discussed in the [Research Findings](#) chapter, examples include the lack of suitable radios, difficulties in obtaining up-to-date safety equipment or ergonomic modifications, requirements to work alone while escorting dangerous individuals, policies that promote distracted

driving, restrictions on the use of flashing vehicle lights, and limited ongoing firearms training. Sheriffs worry about their physical safety as they age, as the BCSS does not offer an early retirement option like police forces or corrections. Some are concerned about the risk of injury on the job before reaching the retirement age of 65. Sheriffs also express concerns about security-related decisions made by civilian executives and policy writers without the necessary expertise, feeling that some organizational policies prioritize a welcoming environment over security, which can make their jobs more dangerous.

Furthermore, some Deputy Sheriffs find that their job poses a risk to their psychological safety and mental health. They are experiencing significant stress and symptoms of burnout, largely due to the additional hours they are required to work to compensate for employee shortages or to meet their financial obligations. Many have faced stressful internal investigations where they felt unsupported, or some believe that they have been sabotaged by a colleague who was “competency hunting.” Moreover, certain employees have endured stress and anxiety due to bullying and harassment, unfair treatment (“weaponized administration”), or ongoing interpersonal conflicts that contribute to a tense and toxic work environment.

Addressing concerns related to basic human needs of safety and security should be a top priority for any employer. As Maslow outlined in his hierarchy of needs, basic needs (or “lower order” needs) must be mostly fulfilled before individuals can consider higher-order needs (Maslow, 1943). In the context of a law enforcement agency, where inherent risks are acknowledged as part of the job, it may not be possible to eliminate all threats to employee safety, and employees do not expect this. However, they do expect their employer to provide adequate compensation to afford a decent quality of life, offer tools and training to enhance their physical safety, and foster a respectful and supportive workplace environment to maintain their psychological security.

Employees also desire compensation that reflects the value of their individual contributions. While this extends beyond meeting basic security needs, it is closely tied to the issue of compensation and aligns with the theory of organizational equilibrium. This theory suggests that employees need to perceive a balance between what they contribute to their organization and what the organization contributes to them in order to be satisfied in their job (Barnard 1938). Deputy Sheriffs believe that they are not fairly compensated for their level of skill, training, and the risks they face on the job.

Belonging and Esteem

After satisfying basic needs, individuals seek to fulfill their need for belonging, social affiliation, and esteem. They desire connections with their colleagues and responsibilities that are meaningful to them, fostering a sense of fit. The experiences of employees within the BCSS align with this mid-level of human needs identified by Maslow, as well as with social exchange theory, which suggests that individuals assess whether their relationships and social affiliations benefit them and meet accepted norms of respectful behavior (Homans 1958; Blau 1964; Emerson 1976). There are also overlaps with job embeddedness theory, which emphasizes the importance of social links and fit with the job and community for promoting employee retention (Mitchell et al. 2001).

One of the most widespread findings regarding belonging is the sentiment that sheriffs do not fit within Court Services Branch. They do not feel that the branch represents them and have perceived a lack of understanding and respect from other divisions within the branch. While the level of respect seems to have improved in recent years, there is a lasting sentiment within the culture of the BCSS that they are at the bottom of the branch hierarchy. Sheriffs still find they are assigned tasks that nobody else wants,

and are not treated as full law enforcement professionals. Sheriffs feel that they cannot achieve success within CSB and view the branch as a barrier to meeting their needs and forming a strong sheriff identity. Additionally, sheriffs feel that they do not belong in their current union. They find that the BCGEU does not effectively represent them as it is more oriented toward administrative-type professions. They also do not feel a sense of belonging in their union component, as they are outnumbered by Correctional Officers whose concerns tend to take precedence due to their larger number of votes.

In certain locations, Deputy Sheriffs expressed feeling connected to and supported by their peers, experiencing a strong sense of belonging within their local team of colleagues. However, there are also instances where divisions between groups of staff in the workplace have led to feelings of exclusion from the "in crowd" or the "old boys' club." In some locations, Deputy Sheriffs have encountered situations where their supervisors and managers have damaged relationships and morale by acting disrespectfully or inappropriately. Certain employees have been targeted and treated unfairly by supervisors or organizational systems. These types of situations not only diminish feelings of belonging but also decrease satisfaction with procedural justice in the workplace. According to procedural justice theories, employees who perceive unfair treatment towards themselves or their colleagues are predicted to experience lower job satisfaction and have a higher likelihood of leaving the organization (Greenberg 1990).

In addition to established employees, there are indications that the BCSS could do more to make new recruits feel welcomed, build social connections and trust with their new coworkers, and ensure that their need for belonging and affiliation is being met. BCSS attrition data shows that the largest number of resignations comes from sheriffs with very few years of service. The sheer number of recruits who leave after a short time makes it difficult for more established employees to build relationships with them. Deputy Sheriffs in some focus groups admitted that they did not make much effort to get to know new employees anymore or invest time in mentoring them because they felt it would be a wasted effort since they likely would not stay long. While this attitude is understandable, it is unfortunate because it increases the likelihood that new employees will not feel welcomed as part of the team, which, in turn, makes it more likely that they will leave. As outlined in job embeddedness theory, social links and feelings of job fit are important factors in increasing employee retention (Mitchell et al. 2001).

There are organizational staffing practices that are also reducing the likelihood that new recruits will become socially embedded in their workplaces and communities and feel that they belong. Firstly, many new recruits are posted away from their home communities, far away from their family and personal relationships, which likely play a significant part in fulfilling their human need for belonging and affiliation. This makes adapting to their new job more challenging and may lead them to question whether they belong in their new job and community. Secondly, many new recruits in the Lower Mainland are placed on the Float Pool right after they graduate. This means they are moving from courthouse to courthouse every day, depending on staffing needs. They stay for a short time at each location and do not have the opportunity to get to know anyone well or build social connections. Employees who work permanently at those locations are less inclined to try to get to know them because they are not permanent team members and might not work there again for weeks.

An additional missed opportunity to build relationships with new recruits has been Block 2 training, which is the final stage of Sheriff Recruit Training. Until a very recent operational change, many new recruits did not undergo their on-the-job training at the courthouse where they were to be posted. This means they experienced two social transitions, first during their training period and then when starting their permanent job. If they went through Block 2 training at their assigned location, their mentor or

trainer could take on a dual role of teaching them the job and facilitating connections and relationship building with other staff members. Hopefully the recent change to move Block 2 training to the permanent posting location will improve relationship building and feelings of belonging.

In addition to the issue of belonging, there is evidence of organizational barriers to meeting employees' need for esteem. For instance, the BCSS has a cultural tendency to emphasize employees' mistakes while placing less focus on recognizing their good work. The default approach often leans towards disciplinary measures rather than adopting a coaching and employee growth approach. This undermines employee confidence and self-esteem and diminishes overall morale. This issue may be partly attributed to a lack of training for supervisors on effective leadership and empowerment of staff. However, it also appears to be systemically and culturally reinforced throughout the chain of command, with supervisors and managers themselves expressing a fear of making mistakes. The internal investigation process further reinforces this focus on mistakes, as employees feel that it excessively scrutinizes their errors while neglecting to acknowledge their successes. Moreover, the prevalence of "competency hunting" behaviours, where panel candidates actively search for opportunities to point out mistakes to showcase how they have held people accountable, exacerbates the emphasis on errors.

Another significant barrier to confidence, esteem, and belonging is the prevalent belief among Deputy Sheriffs that their organization will not stand by them if something goes wrong. Employees fear that if they are involved in a use of force incident, their own organization will turn against them, subjecting them to prolonged investigations. Similarly, if they face lawsuits from external parties following an incident, they worry that they will lack support from their employer, leading to personal and financial hardships as they bear the burden of legal expenses and confront legal challenges alone. Instances of such situations have occurred within the BCSS, and the resulting fear significantly diminishes the sense of belonging among Deputy Sheriffs while undermining their confidence to act decisively on the job. This fear fosters a sense that they must fend for themselves, rather than being supported by the robust infrastructure of a large organization that should protect and defend its valued members.

Another issue affecting esteem, dignity, and job fit in the BCSS is dissatisfaction with job duties and the limited scope of authority that Deputy Sheriffs are allowed to exercise. Many Deputy Sheriffs feel undervalued by their organization, perceiving a lack of trust in their ability to perform their duties and exercise discretion with their tools. They also feel disempowered by constricting policies and overly controlling supervisors. Many employees perceive their work as monotonous and devoid of meaning, leading to a lack of pride in their achievements. Deputy Sheriffs experience a sense of frustration as they believe they are unable to make a meaningful contribution to public safety in their communities. They feel embarrassed when they have to rely on the police for handling minor tasks that they are trained for but are not permitted to carry out themselves.

In addition to self-respect, the perception of external respect also has an impact on employee esteem. Employees who believe that the BCSS is not highly respected or lacks prestige compared to other agencies due to factors such as limited authorities, a perceived lack of contribution to public safety, or inadequate tools, are less likely to feel pride in themselves. They may also perceive their affiliation with the organization as not beneficial for their social status or image. This aligns with theories and studies highlighting how organizational prestige can affect job satisfaction and retention (Mignonac et al. 2006; Rho et al. 2015; Bright 2020).

While not as fundamental as physiological and security needs, the human needs for belonging, social affiliation, and esteem exert a powerful influence on individuals' well-being, job satisfaction, and

ultimately their decisions about whether to remain with an organization. While employers may not have complete control over interpersonal interactions among employees and the formation of friendships, they can influence policies, processes, training, and opportunities that increase the likelihood of fostering strong and respectful interpersonal connections, building trust in coworkers and supervisors, and enhancing individual confidence and esteem.

Self-Fulfillment Needs

The highest level of human need is self-fulfillment or self-actualization, representing the desire to reach one's full potential. This need stems from a personal aspiration for growth rather than a sense of lacking (Maslow 1943). Deputy Sheriffs in focus groups across the province extensively discussed how their job and organization hinder their ability to fulfill their potential, leaving them feeling stagnant and constrained in their careers. These findings not only align with needs theory but also resonate with the principles of job design theories, which posit that greater autonomy and engaging in challenging, varied, and meaningful tasks contribute to increased job satisfaction (Herzberg 1966; Hackman & Oldham 1980).

Currently, sheriff self-fulfillment is hampered by the repetitive nature of their duties and the lack of task variation experienced in their daily work. Core responsibilities like attending court hearings and transporting inmates to correctional centres are generally unchallenging and fail to utilize the full range of skills possessed by sheriffs. While some career paths within the BCSS offer opportunities for growth and the development of new skills, such as supervisory roles, training positions, and intelligence positions, accessing them is not always easy or guaranteed. Furthermore, many of these roles often get redirected to front-line duties due to staffing shortages. There is a strong desire for additional and more diverse duties, as well as increased options for varied career paths.

There is also a strong desire for more training opportunities that would enable sheriffs to expand their skill sets and enhance their personal growth. The lack of access to training and unequal distribution of training opportunities not only hinders personal satisfaction but also limits employees' ability to engage in more interesting job duties that require specific training.

Self-fulfillment is further constrained by policies and executive decisions that restrict the authority and limit the role of Deputy Sheriffs as peace officers. Deputy Sheriffs strongly believe in their capacity to undertake a larger role with increased responsibilities and autonomy. They possess the skills and desire to make a greater impact in their communities and utilize their training to a fuller extent. Deputy Sheriffs express the need for executive-level management to exhibit stronger leadership in envisioning a future that provides sheriffs with a broader and more purposeful role. They seek an organization that supports its members in reaching their full potential. However, when contemplating their future and personal growth, many Deputy Sheriffs perceive the BCSS as lacking sufficient opportunities to fulfill their potential. Consequently, they begin to explore other employment options that align better with their need for individual development.

It is important to acknowledge that self-fulfillment is a subjective concept, varying from person to person. What may be fulfilling and challenging for one individual may not be the same for another. To address this, organizations like the BCSS can offer a range of role types and career paths to cater to different interests and ambitions. However, it is also crucial to consider whether the organization is recruiting individuals whose aspirations, interests, and expectations align with the job duties and available career paths.

Many sheriffs have expressed that BCSS recruitment materials, such as action-oriented videos, can be misleading as they create an impression of a more exciting and challenging job than what it truly entails. This type of recruitment approach may attract candidates who are unlikely to find fulfillment within the current scope of duties and authorities of BC Sheriffs, ultimately leading to higher attrition rates. This finding aligns with Maslow's concept of self-actualization, the job fit component of job embeddedness theory, and met-expectations theory, which suggests that individuals with unrealistic expectations about a job are more likely to experience lower job satisfaction when those expectations go unmet (Porter and Steers 1973).

Regardless of whether the BCSS decides to expand the role and authority of sheriffs, a key factor in retaining more employees would be improving the alignment between recruits' expectations and the realities of the job. This would contribute to a better match between individuals and the organization, increasing the likelihood of job satisfaction and retention.

There are numerous examples from the research findings that demonstrate how the organization is failing to meet the needs of its employees. These aspects of the work environment are increasing the likelihood that individual employees will choose to leave the BCSS in search of better employment opportunities that have the potential to meet their needs more effectively. While the BCSS does not exist solely for the purpose of meeting employee needs, it cannot serve its purpose in the justice system unless it has a sufficient number of employees. Therefore, it is in its strategic interest to understand what employees need from their employment experience and strive to meet those needs where possible.

The following table summarizes research findings that align with the levels of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs.

Table 12 - Research Findings Categorized According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Level of Need	Description	Examples from the Research Findings
Physiological & Security Needs	Financial Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient pay to cover housing costs, living costs.
	Physical Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement to work alone with potentially dangerous individuals; • Radios not suitable for sheriffs' operational parameters; • Requirement to perform tasks while driving (distracted driving concern); • Concerns with out-of-date or low-quality safety equipment; • Difficulty accessing ergonomic equipment to relieve or prevent muscle strain; • Policies that restrict use of safety equipment, ex. flashing lights; • Concerns around age and physical ability (cannot retire with full pension until 65); • Security-related decisions made by "civilian" decision-makers; • Prioritization of welcoming environment / access to justice, over security; • Choosing not to use force even when the safest option, due to fear of investigation; • Lack of training in incident command; • Limited opportunities to practice with firearms, practice use of force techniques; • Asymmetrical distribution of carbines.
	Psychological Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress, burnout due to overwork; • Undermined by peers or supervisors engaging in "competency hunting"; • Unfair treatment from supervisors/managers, "weaponized administration"; • Stress from internal investigation/discipline processes; • Anxiety due to bullying and harassment; • Toxic workplace due to interpersonal conflicts.
Belonging & Esteem Needs	Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling of not belonging in CSB; • Feeling of not belonging in BCGEU and bargaining component; • Exclusion from "in crowd" or "old boy's club"; • Disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour that conflicts with employees' personal values; • Lack of support from organization when employees face legal troubles.
	Social Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited opportunities to build relationships with colleagues due to high turnover; • Limited orientation / social connections with new recruits; • Posting people to communities far from family, friends.
	Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural tendency to focus on mistakes; • Discipline over coaching and mentorship; • Micromanagement from supervisors; • Undermined by peers or supervisors engaging in "competency hunting"; • Feeling that job is not meaningfully contributing to community; • Embarrassment at lack of authority, having to call police; • Feeling that organization does not trust sheriffs to use tools, perform more complex tasks; • Embarrassment about BCSS reputation.
Self-Fulfillment Needs	Self-actualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of challenging job duties; • Repetitive tasks; • Training and skills that are not used on the job; • Feeling stagnant; • Lack of growth career path opportunities; • Lack of training opportunities; • Limited authority and role means sheriffs are not employed to their full potential.

Organizational Factors Impacting Recruitment and Retention

In addition to understanding individual decisions to leave, it is necessary to approach the problem of retention from an organizational perspective, which considers the impact on employee experiences while also taking into account a broader range of contextual factors. The [Research Findings](#) indicate that a combination of factors contributes to employee resignations from the BC Sheriff Service. The primary factor is low salary levels compared to external competitors and the cost of living. However, other important contributing factors include the placement of the BCSS within Court Services Branch, job duties, leadership, and organizational support systems. These issues not only lead to employee dissatisfaction and resignations but also diminish the organization's effectiveness.

The diagram on the following page presents the main issues that impact the BCSS's ability to maintain its staffing levels. Each of these factors has been described in detail in the [Research Findings](#). The descriptions provided below explain how these issues interrelate and impact recruitment and retention.

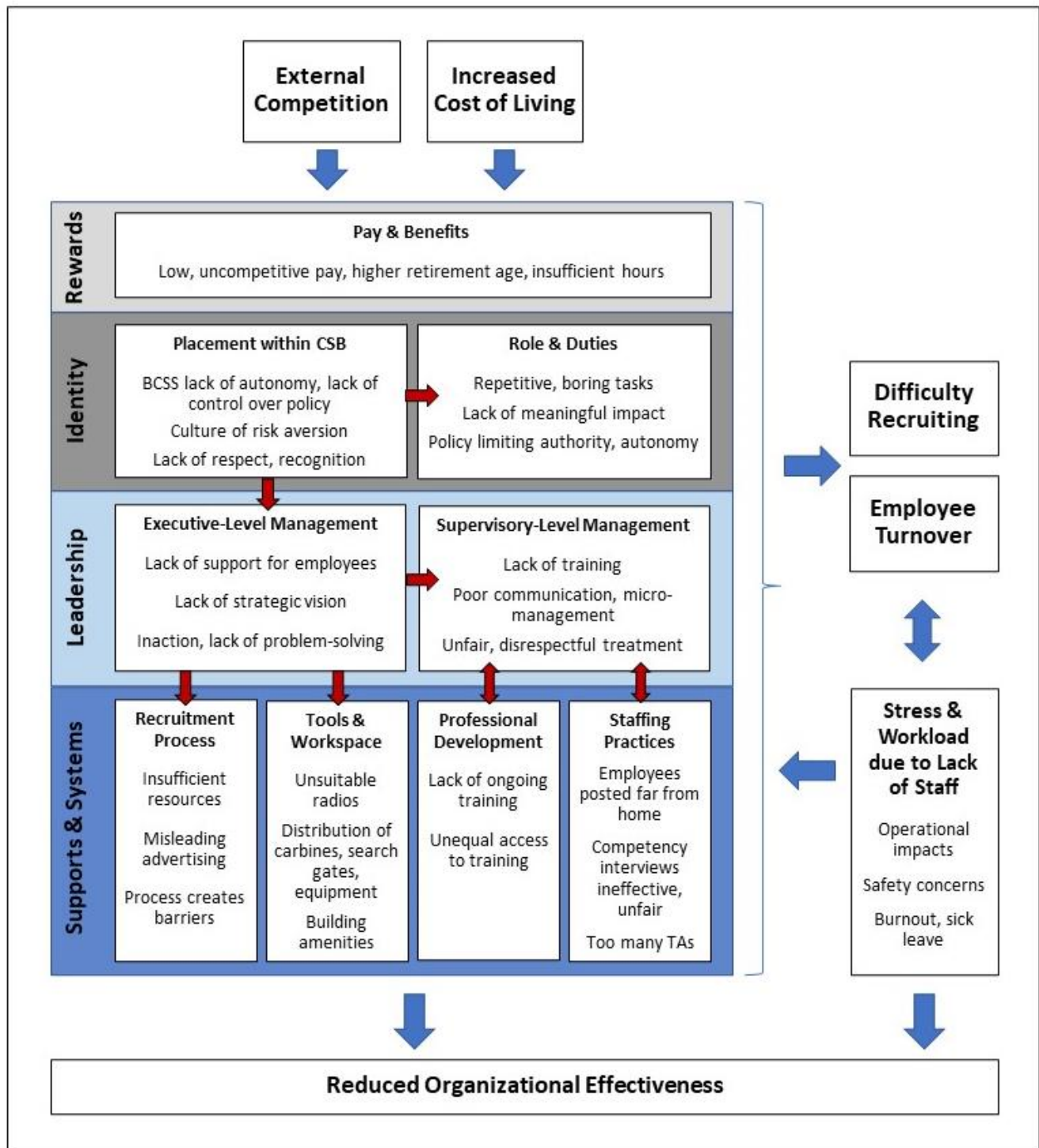
External Factors

The ability to recruit and retain employees is strongly influenced by the level of competition in the external labour market and prevailing economic trends.

External Competition: The BCSS is facing a significant retention problem, primarily due to other law enforcement agencies actively recruiting from the same labor pool. These agencies offer substantially higher pay and the opportunity for earlier retirement. The BCSS lacks significant advantages over the competition. The pay gap is substantial, with a difference of approximately \$40,000 per year compared to competitors. While the BCSS could once claim to provide a more family-friendly schedule and better work-life balance compared to working as a police officer, this is no longer the reality for many Deputy Sheriffs. Financially, they rely on overtime or second jobs to make ends meet.

Cost of Living: Even if the BCSS were not competing with other law enforcement agencies, many employees would likely seek opportunities with higher pay to keep up with inflation and the rising cost of living, particularly in large urban centers. This impact is especially felt by younger employees with young families or those aspiring to start a family, as they are less likely to own a home. Rent and housing prices, along with food and various household expenses, continue to increase. The BCSS faces the challenge of retaining employees during a time of escalating living costs, and unfortunately, it is not keeping pace. For most individuals, the primary purpose of employment is to support a good quality of life. If one's job cannot provide the financial resources and time needed to enjoy a decent quality of life, then it may not be worthwhile.

Figure 14 - Overview of Factors Impacting Employee Recruitment and Retention



Rewards

Rewards are often the main reason why employees choose to join and stay with an employer. Rewards can come in different forms, but the most influential is monetary compensation, followed by additional benefits that are provided by the employer. For most employees, these factors hold greater influence than any other organizational factors.

Pay: As outlined in the [Research Findings](#) chapter, low salaries have a detrimental impact on the quality of life for employees to the extent that some feel compelled to resign. Many individuals depend heavily on overtime work to meet their financial obligations, or they find themselves needing a second job. Employees express dissatisfaction with the perceived unfairness of their compensation, particularly considering that they are armed law enforcement officers exposed to physical safety risks. They are dissatisfied with the BC Public Service systems used to determine pay levels, as these systems fail to adequately account for the responsibilities and risks shouldered by sheriffs. Deputy Sheriffs have indicated that a fair base salary range would fall between \$85,000 and \$90,000 per year.

Benefits: In the case of the BC Sheriff Service, the primary employment benefit of concern is the age at which employees become eligible for full pension benefits. Deputy Sheriffs are required to work until the age of 65 to access full retirement benefits, which is longer than the requirements for police officers, correctional officers, and several other public safety occupations. Sheriffs express concerns about their ability to engage in physically demanding aspects of their job as they age.

Identity

Sheriffs lack a clear and meaningful identity, both as a service and as individual sheriffs. There is a lack of autonomy and empowerment to make effective decisions, and a limited ability to chart a clear vision for the future due to their organizational placement within Court Services Branch and the policies that limit Deputy Sheriff authority.

Placement within CSB: The BCSS's placement within the reporting structure of Court Services Branch presents challenges across all ranks of the service. Sheriffs perceive a misalignment between their work and the rest of the branch, which primarily focuses on administrative aspects of running the court system. Over time, there has been a pattern of sheriff issues being inadequately understood and prioritized, and a history of disrespectful attitudes toward sheriffs. Levels of respect and productive collaboration have improved in recent years, especially under the current ADM. However, the damaging effects of past treatment continue to impede trust, and there is evidence that disrespectful attitudes and behaviours still exist in certain areas. In addition, Sheriffs have concerns that the level of respect may worsen again depending on the attitudes of future ADMs. Sheriffs feel undervalued and believe they occupy the lowest rung of the social hierarchy within the branch. This perception is further reinforced by disparities in classification structures, where Regional Executive Directors receive higher pay classifications than Superintendents, who serve as their regional sheriff counterparts. These combined issues have contributed to feelings of resentment toward CSB, creating a sense of being hindered by their placement within the branch.

Additionally, placement within CSB presents challenges as decisions and policies related to court security are made by individuals who lack deep expertise in law enforcement, tend to be risk-averse, and are unfamiliar with the working reality of front-line Sheriffs. Sheriffs find it problematic that the CSB ADM is designated as the Director of Sheriff Services, despite this role never having been occupied by

anyone with a background as a sheriff. Furthermore, the department responsible for writing policies for the BCSS is located within CSB Headquarters, with no reporting relationship to the Chief Sheriff. There are opportunities for BCSS leaders to provide input on policy decisions and to express concerns, but power dynamics and reporting relationships can hinder direct communication. Historically, the degree of sheriff influence over policy has varied depending on the attitude and approach of the ADM. Sheriffs acknowledge that policy decisions are often complex and must consider a variety of factors and stakeholders, but they perceive that their interests are rarely prioritized. Final decisions on many critical matters rest with Court Services Branch, limiting the BCSS's decision-making authority in fulfilling its role of providing security to the courts and managing its operations.

Consequently, BCSS leadership lacks the necessary autonomy and authority to make effective decisions independently. This situation also affects supervisors and managers who are expected to implement and enforce policies that may not align with operational realities and are challenging to explain satisfactorily to staff. These policies make it harder for sheriffs to perform their jobs safely and effectively, resulting in reduced employee satisfaction with supervisors and managers who are enforcing them.

Role and Duties: Deputy Sheriffs are dissatisfied with the repetitive and monotonous nature of many of their core duties. They feel frustrated due to the limited scope of their authority, which hampers their autonomy, restricts their ability to make a significant impact in their communities, and diminishes the overall fulfillment they derive from their job. Additionally, some deputies find their responsibilities restricted because they lack access to specialized training for certain tasks, such as operating carbines or participating in advanced escorts. Moreover, the geographical location of their postings significantly influences their day-to-day work, given the disparities between large urban courthouses and smaller, more remote communities.

Job duties are often constrained by policies established by CSB, which are heavily influenced by a culture of risk aversion. Although these policies are designed with the intention of creating positive outcomes, they often lead to increased frustration among sheriffs and limit the array of options available to them for managing incidents in a safe and effective manner. The interpretations of the sheriffs' role as defined by legislation and regulations appear to be cautious, and the legal boundaries defining their scope of authority are not always clearly delineated. It seems plausible that sheriffs could potentially assume a more expansive role within the existing legislative framework.

Another significant constraint on the role and duties of Deputy Sheriffs is the shortage of personnel. The BCSS is currently facing challenges in assigning a sufficient number of sheriffs to effectively fulfill their existing core duties. As a result, it would not be feasible to undertake a wider range of responsibilities that require additional employees until the issue of staffing shortages is adequately addressed.

Leadership

This aspect of the work environment holds significant importance for employees, as leaders serve as sources of support, guidance, and problem-solving. When employees perceive a lack of support and fair treatment from their leaders, and when problems go unaddressed, they often become disillusioned and lose faith in the organization's potential for improvement. It is crucial for leaders to prioritize creating a supportive and fair environment, actively addressing concerns, and providing effective solutions to foster employee engagement and maintain a positive outlook within the organization.

Executive-Level Management: Executives within the BCSS, including the Chief Sheriff, Deputy Chiefs, and Superintendents, are limited by their lack of decision-making autonomy. This limitation makes it difficult for them to proactively solve certain organizational problems. From the perspective of their employees, this lack of autonomy can create the perception that they do not care about employees, do not provide support, and are unwilling to make changes. Furthermore, this lack of authority hampers their ability to effectively create and communicate a strong vision for the future of the BCSS.

Not all organizational shortcomings can be attributed to CSB, however. There are many problems that fall within the scope of control of the BCSS or could be resolved through collaboration with other organizations under the leadership of the BCSS executive team. For example, BCSS leadership has the ability to change recruitment processes and prioritize more resources for recruitment efforts. While certain workspace issues may be influenced by the opinions of CSB and the Judiciary, decisions about uniforms and equipment primarily fall within the BCSS's scope of control. Additionally, the BCSS executive could enhance communication and support for Deputy Sheriffs who become involved in court cases or inquiries following work-related incidents.

BCSS executives are also partially responsible for perpetuating certain organizational systems and cultures that suppress quality leadership behaviours and make employees feel unsupported. The organization lacks sufficient leadership training opportunities, and there is minimal focus on defining and developing leadership skills. Promotional competitions do not prioritize leadership qualities; panels often prioritize the competency of “holding people accountable,” which tends to reward candidates who criticize and undermine their colleagues rather than those who foster morale and assist their colleagues in succeeding. Moreover, the organization's cultural emphasis on compliance and discipline instills fear in employees, which discourages proactivity, admitting mistakes, acknowledging problems, and raising questions or concerns. Individuals fear being labeled as troublemakers or as incompetent. This cultural influence significantly affects the behaviour of managers and supervisors throughout the BCSS.

It should be noted that individual leaders within the BCSS are not necessarily responsible for creating these cultures and systems, which have existed for many years and predate most incumbents. However, effecting cultural and systemic change will require concerted effort and leadership from executive-level management. Executives are responsible for setting the tone of the organization, establishing expectations for managers and supervisors, and aligning systems with organizational goals.

Furthermore, it should be recognized that it is challenging for executives to focus on strategic vision, leadership development, and cultural and systemic change when they are preoccupied with managing day-to-day operations. Over the past several years, executives have been consumed with managing the constantly shifting changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, a critical lack of staff has compelled executives to make daily prioritization decisions regarding the allocation of insufficient resources. These preoccupations have diminished the ability of executives, managers, and supervisors to demonstrate proactive leadership and address long-term systemic problems. Unfortunately, this leads to increased employee dissatisfaction and further resignations.

Supervisory-Level Management: Supervisors in the BCSS, including Sergeants, Staff Sergeants, and, to some extent, Inspectors, face similar repercussions and suppression of leadership qualities discussed earlier due to the organization's position in CSB, its culture, and systems. This constitutes a sizable group of employees, and while some demonstrate experience, competence, and strong supervisory and leadership skills, there is inconsistency observed between locations and individual supervisors. Systemic training or mentoring for effective supervision and what defines success is noticeably lacking. A common

complaint regarding supervisors is their inadequate communication skills, both in conveying policy and operational matters and in interpersonal communication. Micromanagement and an emphasis on identifying mistakes without providing positive recognition are behaviours seemingly encouraged by the organizational culture. Furthermore, there are indications of favouritism and instances where supervisors have engaged in bullying or other inappropriate conduct. All these behaviours can significantly impact the day-to-day experience of Deputy Sheriffs.

Supervisors are affected by the lack of professional development opportunities, but they also play a role in decisions related to access to professional development for those they supervise. They are impacted by staffing practices, as they are the result of the promotional panel process or a temporary assignment decision. Additionally, they have an impact on how staffing practices are conducted through their involvement in promotional panels, administrative decisions, and performance reviews.

Supports and Systems

Every organization has supporting mechanisms that are necessary to ensure that employees can perform their jobs effectively and that business operations can be conducted in an organized and rational manner. When these support systems are not functioning optimally, they can diminish the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. Furthermore, such inefficiencies can negatively impact employee satisfaction, potentially leading to increased turnover rates.

Professional Development: Employees are dissatisfied with the limited opportunities for ongoing professional development. The lack of such opportunities creates a sense of stagnation and hinders personal growth. Moreover, it adversely affects employee and team performance, as well as their preparedness for situations requiring the use of force.

Access to training is often restricted by geographical location, with certain courses only available in the Lower Mainland. Furthermore, staffing shortages pose additional challenges, particularly in smaller locations where there are no extra personnel to cover absences for training sessions. In some instances, there is a lack of transparency regarding the allocation of training courses, and it appears that access is influenced by supervisor and manager favouritism. Additionally, executives wield authority in prioritizing training, as well as implementing policies and programs dictating who has access and for what purposes.

Staffing Practices: There are a variety of staffing practices that sheriffs find problematic. The geographical location of postings is an issue for many employees. Individuals who are assigned to work away from their home communities express dissatisfaction with this requirement. Additionally, there is low satisfaction with how the lateral transfer process is managed, as it is perceived as inflexible and lacking in transparency.

Furthermore, there are wide-ranging concerns about the competency-based interview model for promotions. It is perceived as subjective, which raises concerns about unfair treatment from supervisors and managers. There is evidence indicating that this model fails to assess relevant skills and qualities, leading to the selection of candidates who may not be the best fit for promotions. Consequently, this generates concerns about the competence of supervisors and managers and contributes to a lack of respect towards them. Additionally, this model creates an incentive for peers and supervisors to undermine each other by fabricating scenarios for interviews, resulting in a breakdown of trust and a decrease in respect for supervisors.

Lastly, another staffing practice that is causing issues is the excessive use of temporary assignments. This can undermine the confidence and effectiveness of supervisors and managers.

Tools & Workspace: Inadequate tools and workspaces are sources of dissatisfaction for employees. The biggest factor in this category is the lack of access to suitable radios and communication systems for the operational needs of the BCSS. This issue is linked to dissatisfaction with executives who have not effectively resolved communication problems, and employees perceive a lack of value placed on their safety.

Furthermore, the distribution of carbines is also a source of dissatisfaction, along with the absence of security gates at some courthouses. These issues are linked to dissatisfaction with being in Court Services Branch, and the BCSS's lack of autonomy over security-related decisions.

It is important to acknowledge that some of these decisions are predicated on the constitutional principle of open access to court proceedings. However, what frustrates employees is the inconsistency across the court system. Some courthouses have security gates while others do not, even when locations seem to have similar types of proceedings with comparable levels of risk. Sheriffs have not been provided with a clear logical explanation for the disparity in security equipment, adding to their frustration.

Recruitment Process: External competition and employee dissatisfaction have led to an increase in resignations, and the BCSS's recruitment efforts are struggling to fill the vacancies. The number of applicants is declining, and recent recruitment classes at the Justice Institute of BC have been running half-full or even canceled entirely. The low salary offered by the BCSS is not attractive compared to other agencies, which hinders recruitment efforts. There has been insufficient staff resources assigned to recruitment work, and marketing has not been sufficient nor effective.

Furthermore, the recruitment process is inefficient, lengthy, and burdensome. The highly centralized provincial competition model, and the absence of regional and local recruitment efforts, have created barriers for recruits in the North and Interior regions. The practice of posting new recruits far away from their home communities has deterred potential recruits who are unwilling to relocate, and has created dissatisfaction among employees who join but are posted far from their homes. Changes are currently being made to increase local recruitment efforts in the future, which will hopefully improve this situation.

Some organizations are able to manage high attrition rates and incorporate them into their business model by increasing recruitment levels accordingly. This approach typically involves dedicating extensive resources to recruitment, having a large pool of interested and qualified applicants, and implementing a streamlined application and onboarding process. However, the BCSS currently does not meet any of these criteria. Due to the significant security screening and staff training required, it is unrealistic for the BCSS to solely rely on increasing its recruitment rate to counter the growing attrition rate. Nevertheless, it would be beneficial if the recruitment process could fill more vacancies at a faster rate.

Stress and Workload Due to Lack of Staff

Employee turnover and insufficient recruitment to fill vacancies have resulted in an organization that is under considerable stress. It is unable to fulfill its mandate properly because it does not have enough front-line Deputy Sheriffs. This creates safety concerns as Deputy Sheriffs are required to perform more

tasks by themselves and have fewer colleagues available to provide backup if required. It also means that supervisors and managers are stepping in to perform Deputy Sheriff work on top of trying to complete their core duties, which increases their workload. The increase in workload across the organization has a negative impact on individuals, leading to an increase in stress, burnout, and sick leave usage. This reduces job satisfaction and leads to more resignations.

Stress and workload also have a negative impact on all the other organizational factors listed above. With so many supervisors and managers focused on filling gaps on the front line, less time and effort is spent on fixing ongoing systemic problems, resolving employee concerns about equipment, building training programs, conducting recruitment activities, and having meaningful coaching conversations with individual employees. Increased workload can also impact interpersonal relationships, as it reduces the time people have available to get to know new colleagues and build morale. In this way, stress and workload due to a lack of staff exacerbate the negative impact on job satisfaction that all these other factors are having, which, in turn, leads to more resignations.

Reduced Organizational Effectiveness

The combined effect of external economic factors, internal organizational issues, problems with employee turnover, and difficulty in recruiting, along with the added stress and workload caused by the resulting staff shortage, is that the BC Sheriff Service is less effective in conducting its business and fulfilling its mandate. Consequently, this leads to a reduced ability to support the BC Courts, which, in turn, has an impact on the province's justice system as a whole. Concerns regarding organizational effectiveness were the driving factors in pursuing this research initiative, as the BC Sheriff Service plays a crucial role in the justice system.

Summary

Even if employees were extremely satisfied with every other aspect of their job and organization, the BCSS would still face significant retention challenges due to uncompetitive pay and benefits compared to other agencies. The allure of being able to afford a home and support a family comfortably, having more time to spend with loved ones without the need for overtime or a second job, and the possibility of early retirement would likely be highly appealing, even to Deputy Sheriffs who enjoy their job and work environment.

In reality, employees are generally not satisfied with the non-pay aspects of their jobs and organization. Employee engagement is lacking, and there is profound dissatisfaction with various factors related to identity, leadership, and organizational support systems. Even if the BCSS could offer competitive pay and benefits, they would still experience employee attrition due to dissatisfaction with their work environment, job duties, and the organization as a whole.

Given that there are weaknesses at all sides of this equation, stabilizing the BCSS workforce will likely require changes in three main areas simultaneously:

- Rewards: Enhancing pay and retirement benefits to become more competitive in recruitment and retention, while also meeting the cost of living requirements.
- Work environment: Fostering a stronger organizational identity, providing more engaging job roles, improving leadership, and implementing effective systems to support employees.

- Recruitment: Enhancing and streamlining the recruitment process to efficiently fill vacancies and address staffing shortages.

Conclusions

This research initiative aimed to identify the key factors impacting recruitment and retention in the BC Sheriff Service. Four questions were posed to guide the research. The research team has summarized their conclusions for each of these questions below:

1) What factors impacting employee recruitment and retention are occurring internally and externally to the BC Sheriff Service?

The researchers have concluded that the main external factors impacting both recruitment and retention are the presence of competing agencies and the increasing cost of living. Internally, the main factors limiting recruitment include low and uncompetitive pay, inadequate allocation of resources for recruitment efforts, and issues with the structure and management of the recruitment process.

The most impactful internal factors impacting retention are low and uncompetitive pay and benefits, the BCSS's placement within CSB, and dissatisfaction with the limited role and duties of Deputy Sheriffs. Additionally, dissatisfaction with leadership at the executive and supervisory levels, as well as with the organizational supports and systems, namely tools and workspace, professional development, and staffing practices, also contribute to the challenges in retaining employees.

The research findings indicate that increasing pay is the most crucial requirement for improving retention. Any other changes will likely have limited effect without higher compensation. Additionally, the researchers conclude that increasing the autonomy of BCSS leadership is necessary for effective problem-solving and implementing sustainable changes. Greater organizational autonomy and independence are also needed to establish a distinct identity for the BCSS, offering more fulfilling duties and roles for its employees.

To understand why these external and organizational factors lead to employee turnover, it is important to consider the human needs and motivations of individual employees and how the organization may be falling short in meeting them. Maslow's hierarchy of human needs and other employee retention theories in the academic literature can provide valuable insights into the impact of the work environment on BCSS employees. These theories can also assist in identifying effective solutions and strategies while prioritizing interventions.

To retain more employees, the BCSS needs to address employees' needs at all levels and understand how to promote job embeddedness, ensuring that employees feel connected and committed to their work. By considering and implementing these theories and strategies, the BCSS can improve its employee retention rates and create a more satisfying work environment.

2) What factors impacting recruitment and retention are systemic or structural in nature versus which are occurring locally?

The major factors identified are systemic in nature, impacting employees in all regions and ranks of the organization to some degree: pay and benefits, position in CSB, role and duties, executive-level

management, supervisory-level management, stress and workload, and recruitment process issues. Issues relating to staffing practices, professional development, tools, and workspace were brought up in most, but not all, regions and ranks.

For each of the themes, there is some level of variation present depending on the region. For example, candidates in the Lower Mainland face fewer barriers when completing steps in the application process. Employees in the Lower Mainland have better access to ongoing training, and more opportunities for certain advanced duties, but are more affected by low salary levels due to higher costs of living. Additionally, there were some locations where the overall theme was present, but the specific cause of the problem was localized; for instance, distress associated with the behaviour of a specific supervisor or the interpersonal dynamic that had developed within a particular courthouse.

Overall, the same major issues are present across the province. This implies that most intervention strategies to address these issues can be designed and implemented at a provincial level. However, due to regional variations, any solutions should be analyzed to consider how their impact might differ in the Lower Mainland versus the North, Interior, and Vancouver Island. Problems caused by individual behaviour should be addressed at the local level, whereas process or policy issues that result in patterns of behaviour should be mitigated with systemic changes.

3) How do such factors impact the efficacy of the BC Sheriff Service?

These factors have considerable impacts on the efficacy of the BCSS. As detailed in the diagram and descriptions above, the internal organizational factors directly impact the BCSS by placing limitations on decision-making, reducing operational effectiveness, and decreasing employee engagement. Indirectly, they also contribute to a lack of staff due to resignations, which further hampers the organization's ability to function.

There is widespread concern among all ranks and locations of the BCSS that the organization is losing its ability to fulfill its mandate due to a lack of staff. The attrition statistics are not improving; in fact, they are worsening, with new resignations occurring every week. Addressing the factors discussed in this report will be critical to giving the organization a chance to stabilize its employee population, regain its ability to properly serve its important role in the Courts of British Columbia, improve its organizational health, and rebuild its resiliency.

4) What factors are within the scope of control of the BC Sheriff Service?

While external competition and economic factors cannot be addressed, there are numerous factors that fall at least partially within the scope of control of the BCSS. Additionally, there are others that will need to be addressed through partnerships with other branches and agencies within the BC Public Service.

- Pay levels are beyond the direct control of the BCSS. Implementing changes in this area will require significant and sustained effort from executives, involving complex processes, business case approvals, and negotiations with the Public Service Agency, Treasury Board Staff, Treasury Board, and the union.
- Improving pension benefits through a reduction in the retirement age would necessitate the federal government designating BC Sheriffs as a public safety occupation. CSB has made two unsuccessful attempts to have BC Sheriffs included in this designation; however, a potential third attempt, in collaboration with Legal Services Branch, could be considered.

- Any organizational structure change, such as establishing an independent branch separate from CSB, requires the approval of the Deputy Attorney General and cannot be unilaterally decided upon by BCSS leadership.
- The role and duties of Deputy Sheriffs are constrained by the Criminal Code of Canada, provincial legislation and regulation, and internal policies. While internal policies fall within the BCSS's jurisdiction in collaboration with CSB, further analysis is necessary to determine the extent to which the role of sheriffs can be expanded without legislative or regulatory changes.
- Issues concerning executive-level management and supervisory-level management largely fall within the BCSS's control, provided that their decisions align with existing public service policy and union agreements.
- The BCSS leadership has some control over tools and workspaces within existing policy and budget limitations. Decisions regarding radios, communications and dispatch software, safety vests and equipment, and the uniform ordering and distribution process can be made by the BCSS leadership. However, decisions pertaining to firearms, security gates, and uniform presentation would likely require discussion and approval from the Judiciary.
- Professional development is primarily within the BCSS's jurisdiction, except for some mandatory courses applicable to all BC Public Servants.
- Many aspects of staffing practices lie within the BCSS's scope of control although some policies and processes are imposed by the Public Service Agency, and others are governed by union agreements.
- The recruitment process is largely under the control of the BCSS, with certain limitations imposed by the Public Service Agency and the union. External advertising approvals from the Government Communications and Public Engagement office are also required.
- Stress and workload resulting from understaffing are not directly controlled by the BCSS. These issues depend on the number of staff choosing to leave and the ability to recruit new staff. Improvements in this area rely on successfully enhancing recruitment and retention through changes identified in this report.

In conclusion, while BCSS leadership faces various constraints, there are opportunities to effect change, and certain factors lie almost entirely within their scope of authority. Implementing specific measures can significantly improve employee experiences, enhance retention, and facilitate more effective recruitment. The following chapter presents [Recommendations](#) for action based on the [Research Findings](#) of this initiative.

Recommendations

To address the issues identified during the research initiative and improve employee recruitment and retention, the researchers recommend a series of actions and changes. These recommendations are based specifically on conclusions derived from the research findings, and reflect the issues identified by members of the BCSS. It should be noted that at the time of this report's release, none of these recommendations have been reviewed nor accepted by Government.

Other than the priority actions listed below, the recommendations on the following pages are organized thematically to align with the [Research Findings](#) and are not necessarily in order of importance or urgency. Further work will be necessary to prioritize and tailor the intervention strategies to ensure a logical and sustainable implementation. A phased approach to change is likely necessary.

The goal of these recommendations is to effectively address the psychological and organizational issues identified and described in the [Research Findings](#) chapter, discussed in greater depth in the [Analysis](#) chapter. It is important to note that not every recommendation is specifically targeted at every issue identified in the research findings. In many cases, a single recommendation may address multiple issues.

All proposed changes should align with the overarching goals of enhancing the competitiveness of the BC Sheriff Service as an employer, fostering a supportive, respectful, and fulfilling environment for employees, and improving the organization's effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness, and resilience.

Priority Actions

The researchers conclude that the recommended actions outlined below are critical to the organization's success and should be prioritized. Moreover, without addressing these actions, it is unlikely that the BCSS will make progress in improving employee retention, due to their significant impact on employees. Further details and in-depth discussion of each of these actions will be provided in the comprehensive list of recommendations categorized by theme.

Pay and Benefits: *Increase employee pay using any available methods and processes within the constraints of the BC Public Service compensation system. Deputy Sheriff focus group participants identified that an annual salary of \$85,000 to \$90,000 is necessary to improve retention.*

Placement in Court Services Branch: *Establish the BC Sheriff Service as its own branch within the Ministry of Attorney General, separate from Court Services Branch. Designate the Chief Sheriff as the Director of Sheriff Services, reporting directly to the Deputy Attorney General.*

Duties and Role: *Expand the duties and authorities of Deputy Sheriffs, with the aim of making it a more interesting and fulfilling professional career, with a greater level of impact in the community.*

Supervisory-Level Management: *Implement a BCSS-specific leadership and supervisory training program, to develop high quality, confident leaders across the organization.*

Tools and Workspace: *Conduct a thorough assessment of the existing radio and communication infrastructure employed by the BC Sheriff Service, including within courthouses, during urban and remote transportation, communication with dispatch, and inter-agency communication.*

Pay and Benefits

Uncompetitive Pay

Recommendation: *Increase employee pay using any available methods and processes within the constraints of the BC Public Service compensation system. Deputy Sheriff focus group participants identified that an annual salary of \$85,000 to \$90,000 is necessary to improve retention.*

Increasing pay is the most important and urgent step required to retain more employees, and it is likely to enhance the BCSS's ability to attract new recruits. While salaries do not need to match those offered by police agencies, the pay gap needs to be narrowed to make the BCSS a viable employment option for both current employees and prospective recruits, considering the rising cost of living. Higher pay will also reduce the need for employees to seek second jobs, thereby improving their work-life balance. Without such an increase, it is probable that the BCSS will continue to lose more staff each year than it can recruit and train, resulting in an unabated decline in operational effectiveness.

Uncompetitive Retirement Benefits

Recommendation: *Apply to the federal government to include sheriffs in the list of roles designated as public safety occupations in the federal Income Tax Act, alongside correctional officers and police officers.*

Employees in designated public safety occupations can retire with a pension five years earlier than other occupations. Having this option would address employee concerns about being required to engage in physical or violent situations when they feel they are too old to do so safely. Furthermore, obtaining this designation would make the BCSS a more attractive employer and bring it in line with other law enforcement agencies.

Public Service Pay Classification System

Recommendation: *Engage with the Public Service Agency to review elements of the Public Service Job Evaluation Plan (PSJEP) and determine possible modifications to make it more applicable to law enforcement jobs.*

The PSJEP was designed to establish consistent and appropriate pay levels across the BC Public Service based on the responsibilities of each role. However, there are concerns that it lacks the necessary criteria to properly account for the level of risk and responsibility inherent in the duties of Deputy Sheriffs and other law enforcement officers, particularly with regards to carrying firearms and assuming personal liability. Ensuring a fair and accurate evaluation of their role would address employee concerns regarding equitable compensation.

Insufficient Scheduled Hours

Recommendation: *Work with the union and Public Service Agency to increase sheriffs' weekly scheduled hours.*

Increasing the regular weekly hours worked would raise employee salaries, addressing concerns regarding low pay. The majority of Deputy Sheriffs already work additional hours, either through overtime for the BCSS or by taking on second jobs. There is widespread employee support for transitioning to a 40-hour workweek instead of the current 35 hours. This change may also benefit the organization by reducing the need for overtime pay. Moreover, additional scheduled hours could enable the organization to expand the range of duties assigned to staff or allocate additional time for ongoing professional development.

Lack of Compensation for Additional Duties

Recommendation: *Review the pay associated with each rank in the BCSS and identify areas where salary compression exists. Work with the Public Service Agency to ensure there are sufficient pay gaps between supervisors and subordinates throughout the rank hierarchy.*

Currently, there are concerns that employees are not interested in promotional opportunities because they do not believe their salary increase will be worth the increase in responsibilities and stress. The BCSS should ensure that sufficient compensation incentives are in place for taking on additional responsibilities associated with a promotional advancement. This will make promotions and acting opportunities more appealing to staff members, contributing to succession planning for leadership positions and improving organizational performance by attracting high-quality candidates for supervisory and management roles. Furthermore, it will encourage more employees to remain with the BCSS for longer periods, as they will perceive greater opportunities for rewarding career growth within the organization.

Recommendation: *Ensure that sheriffs who work through unpaid breaks are properly compensated for their hours worked. Review current procedures and ensure that employees and supervisors have a clear understanding of when and how compensation will be provided.*

There have been employee complaints regarding difficulties in obtaining approval for payment when they work through a break for operational reasons. Inconsistencies have been observed in the approval process, with some supervisors requiring employees to seek approval prior to working through their break, which is not always feasible. To address this issue, it is crucial to enhance clarity surrounding compensation procedures, thereby reducing confusion and inconsistency.

Ideally, approvals should be easily obtainable, and employees should be trusted to accurately report their hours worked unless there is evidence to suggest otherwise. Implementing such measures would create a sense of support and recognition among employees, fostering a positive relationship between them and the organization. Additionally, this would alleviate the perception that the organization seeks to save money at the expense of its employees.

Placement within Court Services Branch

Negative Impacts of the Organizational Structure

Recommendation: *Establish the BC Sheriff Service as its own branch within the Ministry of Attorney General, separate from Court Services Branch. Designate the Chief Sheriff as the Director of Sheriff Services, reporting directly to the Deputy Attorney General.*

This recommendation would also require the following:

- Ensure that the new branch has sufficient administrative and business infrastructure to meet operational requirements.
- Ensure that the new branch has its own authority and resources to create internal policies.
- Review and decide upon the best organizational placement of the Office of Professional Standards (OPS). Clarify OPS's purpose, scope of authority, and procedures for interacting with the BCSS.

The BCSS performs a very different function than the administrative component of running the courts. There are widespread and strong feelings within the BCSS that they do not fit within Court Services Branch, and there is resentment about the way CSB is perceived to prioritize Court Administration Division issues over BCSS issues. If the BCSS were independent from CSB, it would increase their ability to make effective and autonomous decisions, develop their own identity, and have a clearer vision for the role of sheriffs. It would also raise the profile of the organization and allow for more direct representation vis-à-vis other partners in the justice system. This will also bring the BC Sheriff Service into alignment with other law enforcement groups in the BC Public Service – such as the BC Coroners Service, BC Corrections, and Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch – which are all separate branches with control over their own operations and policy decisions.

Creating a separate branch would come with its own challenges, but these would be offset by the considerable potential for improvements in operations and morale, which could greatly assist with employee retention. There is a widespread belief among BCSS employees that their organization cannot successfully solve its many problems or fulfill its potential if it remains in CSB.

Lack of Respect and Recognition

Recommendation: *Review the classification levels of BCSS managers and aim to align them with the classification levels in Court Administration Division in terms of pay and status.*

Currently, BCSS senior managers are classified at a lower level compared to their counterparts in Court Administration Division. For instance, BCSS Superintendents, who are responsible for overseeing an entire region, are classified as Band 4 managers, while Regional Executive Directors in Court Administration Division hold the Band 5 manager classification. Considering that sheriff managers make crucial security-related decisions that directly impact the safety of all courthouse users, it is imperative to grant them equal status to their counterparts in Court Administration Division. This would allow them to work as equals rather than subordinates. Such a change would improve the ability of BCSS managers to raise and address security concerns effectively, while also ensuring they can represent the interests of Deputy Sheriffs and are treated as respected professionals in the workplace.

Culture of Risk Aversion

Recommendation: *Develop a strategy to shift the organizational culture away from risk aversion and towards a confident and empowered approach to managing risk.*

This strategy would likely involve the following:

- Review policies and assess how they impact the ability of Deputy Sheriffs to manage risks effectively and safely.
- Where possible, adopt a principles-based approach instead of prescriptive rules and methods that may not apply in all situations.
- Review how employees are treated following a use of force incident and how this affects their confidence and willingness to approach risks in their daily work.
- Provide training in how to supervise professionals, focusing on coaching conversations and empowering employees.
- Clarify the scope of decision-making at each rank. Unless major errors are detected, supervisors at all levels should support the decisions made by their subordinates within their scope of authority.
- Clarify the authority of Deputy Sheriffs when they are outside of the courthouse and review the organization's overall approach to managing risk beyond the courthouse environment.

Managing risk is a core function of the BC Sheriff Service, as Deputy Sheriffs are engaged in potentially dangerous activities as a necessary part of their role. In this context, acknowledging and proactively mitigating risk is often the safest approach, leading to better outcomes for employees, the organization, court users, and the public. Managing risk is very different from risk avoidance, which aims to eliminate any exposure to risk. Current policy and decision-making tend to adopt a risk avoidance approach. This does not align with the BCSS's core purpose and the realities faced by employees on the ground. The culture of risk avoidance does not remove the risks that employees encounter; instead, it can limit sheriffs' options for addressing risks effectively, making their work more difficult and stressful. Embracing a more confident and empowered approach to risk would better align with the mission of the BCSS and enhance employee satisfaction by providing a higher level of autonomy and a clearer sense of purpose in their roles.

Executive-Level Management

Lack of Support for Employees

Recommendation: *Provide a more supportive experience for employees who are involved in use of force incidents.*

This will require the following:

- Ensure that any feedback regarding the sheriff's performance during the incident is balanced, offering positive reinforcement for good decisions, performance, and outcomes.
- Whenever possible, adopt a coaching approach to address mistakes and improve employee performance, reserving disciplinary responses for serious breaches of conduct.

- Review the internal investigation process, considering how employees are treated and made to feel. Adjust communication and approach, if necessary, to make the process less intimidating and stressful.
- Work with Legal Services Branch to develop and communicate clear procedures for providing legal representation for sheriffs involved in court proceedings or inquiries following use of force or other incidents occurring in the course of their duties.

Deputy Sheriffs are trained to use force appropriately, and it is expected that they use it when necessary. Currently, there are negative consequences for using force, even when it is used effectively and in accordance with training. Consequently, Deputy Sheriffs hesitate to perform their jobs properly, fearing disciplinary action for their involvement in an incident and feeling resentful that their organization and its leadership appear to punish employees who put themselves at risk to fulfill their duties. Use-of-force incidents must be taken seriously, but they can be reviewed in a manner that minimizes negative impacts on employees. If employees have greater confidence that their leaders will actively support and defend them when facing external accusations, it will increase their satisfaction with executives and reduce their concerns about potential financial and personal hardships resulting from lawsuits related to their job.

Recommendation: *Review the process through which an employee can raise concerns, especially safety concerns.*

This recommendation will require the following:

- Ensure there is a clear process in place for concerns to be submitted in written form, reviewed and evaluated, and addressed or escalated accordingly.
- Provide responses and follow-up communications to employees who raise concerns.
- Provide training to supervisors and managers on how to effectively communicate to make employees feel heard.
- Ensure that employees can raise concerns without fear of reprisal.

Currently, there are concerns that employees do not feel comfortable raising safety concerns, as they may face repercussions. Employees who do raise concerns often feel that they are not taken seriously and are left with the impression that their safety is not a priority. Reviewing and clarifying the reporting process, and increasing follow up communication when concerns are raised, will make employees more confident that their concerns are being taken seriously.

In some instances, problems are taken seriously by managers and executives, but front-line staff are unaware of the actions being taken because there is no follow-up communication provided. By increasing transparency regarding the steps being taken to resolve problems, employees would have more confidence that their leaders were actively working to address their concerns. It is important for individuals to feel valued and heard, even if the response explains why the problem cannot be resolved or why a suggestion will not work.

Executives Are Aware of Problems but Do Not Take Action

Recommendation: *Clearly establish the expectation for managers to identify and solve problems, and provide necessary support for them to escalate unresolved issues.*

There are indications that the culture within the BC Sheriff Service tends to discourage the acknowledgement or reporting of problems. Deputy Sheriffs expressed that by raising concerns they risk being labeled as a troublemaker and treated poorly by supervisors. Additionally, supervisors and managers have conveyed fears of facing consequences for admitting the existence of problems within their areas, resulting in some issues not being escalated to the appropriate level. It is important to note that executives cannot address problems they are unaware of. To ensure proactive problem-solving within the organization, individuals should feel confident and supported in communicating observations of problems, as well as motivated and empowered to seek solutions.

Lack of Strategic Vision

Recommendation: *Develop a 5-to-10-year strategic plan that outlines the direction of the BCSS and establishes a vision for its role in the BC justice system, as well as the role of Deputy Sheriffs.*

Currently, sheriffs are uncertain about the overall direction of their organization and their role in the justice system, particularly due to the changes their role has undergone since the transition to virtual court proceedings. Sheriffs would like to see their executives demonstrate more proactive leadership in charting a course for the future. They seek to understand the goals for the future of their organization and their role. Articulating a vision for the future would also help establish a clear sheriff identity and cultivate feelings of pride, purpose, and meaning.

Duties and Role

Duties Are Boring and Unfulfilling

Recommendation: *Expand the duties and authorities of Deputy Sheriffs, with the aim of making it a more interesting and fulfilling professional career, with a greater level of impact in the community.*

This will require the following:

- Engage with Legal Services Branch to conduct a comprehensive legal review of all applicable legislation, regulations, and common law to clearly define the legal scope of authority for Deputy Sheriffs.
- Review areas where it might be possible to expand the scope of authority within their current core duties, removing limitations that sheriffs currently find frustrating and inefficient. For example, granting the authority to issue a Promise to Appear and release an accused person with an endorsed warrant, thereby reducing reliance on police officers.
- Determine where sheriffs can expand their role by taking on new types of work within their scope of authority.
- Review the BCSS policy manual and ensure alignment with any updated legal opinions.
- Clearly communicate any shifts in employee duties and authorities to the employees, eliminating ambiguity regarding their roles and authority whenever possible.

Many sheriffs feel that their job duties are too limited, leading to boredom and frustration. Despite being highly trained and capable, they believe they are not fully allowed to act as peace officers or serve meaningful roles due to restrictions placed on their authority. This limitation reduces their pride and morale and makes them feel that they are held back from reaching their full potential. Sheriffs recognize the need for a greater presence of peace officers in their communities, particularly in remote areas, and are disappointed that they cannot contribute to improving public safety in a meaningful way. Without expanding their duties and authorities, employees will continue to leave the BCSS due to the perceived limitations of their roles.

Expanding the role of sheriffs is crucial for enhancing job satisfaction and retention. Conducting a comprehensive legal review is necessary to determine areas where sheriff duties can be expanded, as there is currently a lack of clarity regarding the precise scope of a Deputy Sheriff's legal authority.

Recommendation: *At a provincial and local level, facilitate cross-training and rotation of duties to allow for a greater variety of tasks and job opportunities. Account for personal preferences wherever possible while still meeting operational needs.*

Some of the dissatisfaction with current job duties is attributed to the repetitive nature of the work. Introducing a greater variety of tasks could help Deputy Sheriffs find their job slightly more interesting. Numerous Deputy Sheriffs express interest in acquiring new skills; therefore, cross-training in a different area might foster a sense of growth and development.

Reduced Role Due to Increase in Virtual Proceedings

Recommendation: *Review the role of Deputy Sheriffs in virtual court proceedings. Clarify their roles and responsibilities, and assess where sheriff training and expertise is required, versus what responsibilities could be assigned elsewhere. Determine where processes could be improved to make better use of sheriff time.*

The work of sheriffs has undergone significant changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of virtual court proceedings. Their traditional tasks, such as bringing the accused to the courtroom or supervising them in the cells, have decreased, while their involvement in supporting virtual court proceedings has increased. However, many sheriffs have expressed dissatisfaction with this new type of work, citing monotony, a lack of alignment with their skillset, and ineffective use of their time. There have even been instances where sheriffs have been assigned to monitor empty courtrooms, with only the Court Clerk attending in person, while all others participate virtually.

To address these concerns, it is recommended to review and clearly communicate the business rationale behind requiring sheriffs to perform these tasks. By providing a better understanding of the importance of their role in the new processes, employees will be more engaged and motivated. Additionally, collaborating with partners in the justice system to improve the effective and efficient use of sheriff resources will help alleviate employee frustration.

Supervisory-Level Management

Lack of Training for Supervisors

Recommendation: *Implement a BCSS-specific leadership and supervisory training program, to develop high quality, confident leaders across the organization.*

Training should focus on the following key areas:

- BCSS policies, procedures and operations.
- Incident command training and critical incident debriefing.
- Addressing inappropriate conduct, HR issues and safety concerns.
- Effective strategies for managing difficult conversations.
- Coaching techniques for employee development and empowerment.
- Principles of procedural fairness in administrative decision-making.
- Leadership in a law enforcement setting.

Currently, there is significant inconsistency in supervisory techniques and varying levels of satisfaction with supervisors throughout the BCSS. New supervisors have expressed feeling ill-prepared for their roles and have not received adequate training in supervision or leadership. To address this lack of consistency and preparedness, it is recommended to introduce prerequisite training courses that must be completed before employees can pursue supervisory roles. Different levels of training should be offered to prepare individuals for specific roles, such as Sergeant and Staff Sergeant, Inspector and Superintendent, and Chief and Deputy Chief positions.

The BCSS already has a training model in place to prepare sheriff instructors for their roles, and a similar model could be adopted for the supervisory and management skills program. In addition to formal training, there should be ongoing mentoring and feedback provided to supervisors to support their development as they progress in their careers. These elements would be most effective if they were supported by organizational programs and systems, rather than relying solely on individuals to pursue their own development. Supervisors play a crucial role in shaping the day-to-day experience of employees, and enhancing their skills throughout the BCSS has the potential to significantly improve employee satisfaction.

Recommendation: *Identify and document what good quality supervision looks like in the BC Sheriff Service. Develop a “Principles of Supervision” charter, that all supervisors and managers should understand and commit to following.*

There are significant differences in supervisory approaches across the BCSS, with some being more effective than others in supporting and empowering staff, building morale, and creating cohesive and high-performing teams. A charter of guiding principles for supervision would help create clear expectations for supervisors to work from and would assist in preparing and guiding supervisors in the performance of their roles. This document would not specify exactly how they should do their work but would provide overarching goals and priorities that their decisions and actions should align with. Its aim would be to support supervisors while also improving the experience of the employees they supervise.

Lack of Accountability for Supervisors

Recommendation: *Increase transparency in communications where possible to assure staff that employees and supervisors are being held accountable for inappropriate conduct, while still respecting rules regarding confidentiality. Work with the Public Service Agency to identify what information can be shared with affected employees.*

It is often challenging for managers to communicate how they are addressing instances of inappropriate conduct due to rules around protecting employee privacy in HR matters. This can leave affected employees feeling like they have not been taken seriously and are not cared for because they are not informed about the steps that have been taken. While confidential details should not be shared, it may be possible to increase communication about the processes and explain why more information cannot be shared. Creating a communications template that explains privacy policies, processes, and the types of information that can and cannot be shared could be useful. Increasing communication where possible would help alleviate concerns, confusion, and rumors while providing reassurance to employees affected by inappropriate conduct.

Stress and Workload

Staffing Shortages Impacting Workloads and Operations

Recommendation: *Create an employee retention strategy based on the recommendations of this report. Develop and communicate an implementation plan that includes specific actions and target timelines. Provide progress updates as actions are completed.*

Sheriffs want their executives to acknowledge the issues causing problems within the organization and commit to taking concrete actions to resolve them. By creating a plan to address these problems and reporting on progress, executives will have a better chance of convincing employees that real improvements will be made in the workplace. This will demonstrate that it is worthwhile for employees to stay with the BCSS and invest their time and effort in the organization. The goals and actions outlined in the plan should be specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant to the issues raised by employees. Additionally, the plan should include timelines for developing solutions.

Increased Stress, Burnout, and Sick Leave Usage

Recommendation: *Ensure that staff receive enough time off to meet their mental and physical health needs and are aware of the health benefits available to them.*

In the context of staffing shortages and efforts to meet operational requirements, it may seem logical to deny requests for time off and encourage employees to work overtime hours to fill scheduling gaps. However, in the long term, this approach is not sustainable and may do more harm than good. It reduces job satisfaction and may lead to increased resignations. Additionally, employees who work excessively are at a greater risk for burnout, which can be a serious condition requiring extended medical leave and causing personal hardship. This is not in the best interest of the employee or the employer. Therefore, in the long term, it may be worth sacrificing some operational needs in the short term for the long-term health and wellness of the workforce. By ensuring that employees feel valued

and confident in their organization's support and care, they will be more likely to believe that their career contributes positively to their overall quality of life.

Recruitment

Lower Quality and Quantity of New Recruits

Recommendation: *Create a dedicated unit within the BCSS that is solely focused on recruitment, with sufficient staff and resources to develop and implement a competitive recruitment strategy.*

Recruitment efforts are currently insufficient to fill vacancies in the BCSS. Attracting a larger and more qualified pool of applicants will require a dedicated team and additional resources. Currently, the BCSS has a small unit that handles both recruitment and training responsibilities. Forming a team solely dedicated to external recruitment would better meet the organization's needs and increase the number of applicants. To effectively carry out the recruitment effort, a strategic approach is necessary, along with expanded promotion targeting a broader audience at the provincial, regional, and local levels.

Recommendation: *Develop strategies to recruit high-quality applicants who may not have a specific interest in pursuing careers in policing.*

Currently, many Deputy Sheriffs complete their initial training, work briefly with the BCSS, and then apply to join a police agency. It is understood that these applicants view the BCSS as a steppingstone towards becoming a police officer, with a police career being their primary goal. While these individuals often prove to be valuable employees during their short tenure with the BCSS, it is unsustainable for the organization to consistently lose a significant number of employees after investing substantial time and resources in their recruitment and training.

Although some employee attrition to police agencies is inevitable, the BCSS would benefit from attracting candidates who do not solely focus on pursuing police work as their primary career objective, as these individuals are more likely to remain with the BCSS for a longer duration. Achieving this objective could involve implementing a combination of targeted marketing efforts and screening procedures to attract candidates who prioritize the stability of a regular work schedule or who may prefer a slightly lower level of risk, among other factors. Importantly, this strategy does not necessarily involve excluding candidates who are suitable for police work, nor lowering the required standards, but rather expanding the pool of potential recruits by appealing to a broader audience.

Misleading Advertising of the Job

Recommendation: *Ensure promotional materials accurately portray the duties of Deputy Sheriffs.*

In the past, BCSS marketing campaigns and promotional videos have emphasized action-oriented duties that constitute a small portion of a sheriff's responsibilities. This has resulted in new recruits feeling disappointed when they discover that the job is less exciting than portrayed in the marketing materials. Consequently, they have doubts about whether the job aligns with their interests. To address this issue, the BCSS should ensure that applicants have a realistic understanding of the job and the opportunities within the organization throughout the entire recruitment process. It is encouraging to note that more

recent marketing materials seem to be better aligned with the realities of the job, and future marketing efforts should continue this trend.

There are numerous positive aspects of sheriff work that can be highlighted. Deputy Sheriffs make significant contributions on a daily basis, such as assessing threats, de-escalating tense situations, and providing information to court participants regarding processes and services. They often serve as the public face of the BC justice system, interacting with victims, jury members, witnesses, and the accused. Promotional materials that reflect these types of activities could be appealing as well as realistic.

Process Creates Unnecessary Barriers for Applicants

Recommendation: *Streamline the application process to simplify and expedite it, eliminating any unnecessary steps or requirements that are not essential for the assessment of candidates.*

The BCSS currently employs a lengthy selection process that typically lasts 6 to 8 months and involves numerous requirements. This process requires significant effort from applicants and includes certain steps that may not be essential for identifying suitable candidates. By eliminating unnecessary steps, the BCSS can improve the timeline for filling vacancies and reduce barriers that lead to eligible candidates dropping out or being screened out unnecessarily. For instance, the requirement for applicants to be proficient in the specific verbal response technique (the Situation, Task, Action, Result model) used in competency-based interviews may not be a relevant assessment of their suitability to become a sheriff.

Recommendation: *Reduce financial barriers associated with the current application and recruitment process.*

Candidates are currently required to pay for certain certifications, such as a class four driving license and medical examinations, in order to apply to the BCSS. However, the cost of completing these requirements acts as a barrier for new applicants. To address this issue, the BCSS has recently implemented some changes. For instance, they have included certifications like First Aid in the training process for new recruits and started reimbursing the costs of medical examinations. These changes align with the findings of this report, and it is recommended that the BCSS continues to evaluate which requirements can be shifted to the post-hire period and paid for by the employer.

Furthermore, applicants residing in remote areas have been obliged to travel to other cities to complete certain steps in the application process. This has resulted in significant personal travel expenses that are not reimbursed. Whenever feasible, the BCSS should strive to minimize the need for applicants to leave their home communities. In cases where travel is unavoidable, efforts should be made to ensure that it takes place within the applicant's own region, reducing the financial burden associated with long-distance travel.

Recommendation: *Transition to a regional recruitment model that prioritizes hiring local people to fill positions in their home communities.*

One deterrent to applying to the BCSS is the inability to guarantee job placements in candidates' local or regional communities. Candidates must be open to relocating to various communities across the province, which reduces the potential applicant pool. Many individuals are unwilling to relocate due to their attachments to their home community, family, and existing commitments. Implementing a regional hiring model that gives priority to local job placements would likely increase the number of

applicants. Moreover, it would improve the likelihood of employees being willing to remain in remote communities in the North and Interior regions, as they are already accustomed to living there.

For potential candidates residing outside the Lower Mainland, the requirement to spend several weeks at the Sheriff Recruit Training at the Justice Institute acts as a deterrent. The BCSS should explore opportunities to train recruits in regional centers or potentially offer some coursework virtually. This would reduce the time recruits need to spend in the Lower Mainland, away from their families.

Recruiting at the regional and local levels will require dedicated resources in each region, such as a regional recruitment coordinator responsible for planning targeted promotional campaigns, participating in career fairs, and engaging in other events where sheriffs can interact with the community. While designating Deputy Sheriffs as regional ambassadors in each region is a positive step, consideration should also be given to establishing full-time recruitment positions.

Recommendation: *Introduce a second stream of recruitment with reduced training and screening requirements to facilitate the bridging of candidates with previous law enforcement training and experience.*

There are law enforcement professionals from other agencies and returning sheriffs who have already undergone training equivalent to that provided during Sheriff Recruit Training. Requiring them to undergo the same training again could serve as a deterrent to joining or re-joining the BCSS. Implementing an exempt recruitment model that bridges in pre-qualified candidates with a condensed training period and reduced screening requirements may encourage transfers from this potential candidate pool. Municipal police forces have successfully utilized similar bridging programs, which could serve as a useful model. It is understood that the BCSS has recently started to implement this type of bridging program; this aligns with the findings of this initiative and should be continued.

Staffing Practices

Dissatisfaction with Behavioural Competencies

Recommendation: *Reduce the emphasis on behavioural competencies in BCSS promotional competitions and create a more balanced evaluation framework that places greater importance on past performance, knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities.*

The current panel interview process for internal promotions relies heavily on assessing behavioural competencies. Employees have expressed concerns that this approach does not accurately gauge an individual's potential for success in a leadership or managerial role. Other crucial factors, including leadership qualities, job-specific knowledge, technical skills and the ability to apply them in practical situations, are often overlooked. Consequently, the existing system may fail to identify individuals who have the potential to excel in higher positions.

Selecting the most suitable candidates for promotional positions within an organization is crucial for maintaining productivity and ensuring effective leadership. A more balanced model could be tailored to better align with the needs of the BCSS. This approach would improve satisfaction with the fairness and effectiveness of staffing practices and enhance employee confidence in supervisors and managers.

Competency Hunting

Recommendation: *Eliminate the use of the behavioural competency “holding people accountable” in BCSS interview processes.*

Accountability is a crucial element of organizational effectiveness, emphasizing responsibility, transparency, and consequences for actions. However, overemphasizing the notion of accountability has had unintended negative effects within the BCSS. It has led to division and distrust between peers and supervisors, and promoted a culture of blame and fear. Emphasizing this competency in promotional interviews has led to the practice of "competency hunting," as employees seek to create scenarios of holding others accountable that they can then describe during an interview. Removing this competency from all interview panel assessments would reduce the incentive to unnecessarily undermine other employees. It would better serve the organization's culture to assess candidates on how they have promoted trust, collaboration, professional development, leadership, or teamwork.

Recommendation: *Ask interview questions based on hypothetical situations instead of asking candidates to describe past events.*

The current approach of asking candidates to describe past scenarios in interviews often limits the scope of knowledge that can be tested and does not fully capture a candidate's ability to apply their knowledge in different contexts. A candidate may be competent and prepared to handle a potential situation, even if they do not have a recent example of encountering such a scenario. By using well-designed questions about hypothetical situations, panel members can assess relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies more effectively. Additionally, the use of hypothetical scenarios eliminates the need for "competency hunting," where employees may undermine co-workers or artificially create situations in the workplace to discuss during their interviews.

Negative Impacts of Temporary Assignments

Recommendation: *Make staffing decisions efficiently, selecting permanent incumbents as quickly as possible.*

The use of extended temporary assignments in certain positions within the BCSS has resulted in periods of uncertainty and reduced effectiveness, both for the individual in the acting position and for the employees they supervise. Acting leaders feel less confident in making decisions, and feel greater fear of making mistakes because they are aware they could be removed from their role at any time. They also tend to focus on short term issues over solving long term problems, because they do not know if they will remain in the position. Filling vacant positions on a permanent basis as efficiently as possible would be beneficial for organizational effectiveness, resulting in more confident leaders who feel ownership of their roles, and increased employee confidence in supervisors and leaders.

Professional Development

Lack of Ongoing Training

Recommendation: *Implement a comprehensive program for ongoing professional development specifically designed for sheriffs.*

Sheriffs currently have a high-quality training program for initial recruits, but there are limited options for ongoing professional development throughout their careers. Most sheriffs have a desire to expand their knowledge and skills, and to experience personal and professional growth. Accessible and relevant training opportunities throughout their career would improve employee satisfaction and increase expertise, confidence, and job performance. Training modules could address various aspects of their roles and responsibilities, including leadership and management, legal and ethical responsibilities, crisis management and emergency response, and community engagement and relationship building. To effectively implement these modules, strategies could include collaboration with academic institutions and other law enforcement agencies, as well as the utilization of online learning platforms where appropriate. Many professions have established continuing education as a key strategy for maintaining high levels of performance. Investment in ongoing development could help improve retention and ultimately contribute to the overall effectiveness of the BCSS.

Recommendation: *Encourage employees to practice more often with their firearms, by reducing barriers and creating incentives.*

There are concerns among some Deputy Sheriffs that they do not have enough ongoing practice with their service pistols. This reduces their confidence in their abilities and level of preparedness for an emergency situation. Reducing barriers to ongoing firearms practice would be beneficial for maintaining proficiency and increasing confidence in using this important tool to protect public safety should the need arise. The BCSS should aim to eliminate financial barriers by allocating sufficient funds to cover the cost of practice ammunition. Additionally, forming partnerships with local shooting ranges may provide opportunities for regular practice sessions, with the potential for reduced fees or occasional free sessions negotiated exclusively for sheriffs. Furthermore, the BCSS could explore strategies to incentivize staff participation in ongoing firearms training, including team practice sessions and the use of recognition programs that acknowledge outstanding skills and facilitate continued training opportunities.

Unequal Access to Training

Recommendation: *Promote greater access to training for sheriffs across the province through adequate funding allocation for travel to the Lower Mainland.*

It is often necessary for sheriffs to travel to the Lower Mainland, where more comprehensive training opportunities are available. Sheriffs working in regions outside of the Lower Mainland are concerned that they have fewer opportunities for training because they do not receive approval for travel. They feel like they are treated as second-class employees due to their work location. Allocating sufficient funds to cover travel for training would assist in equalizing access to training opportunities and equipping all sheriffs with the necessary skills and knowledge required for the effective performance of their duties. Greater equality in training opportunities would establish a standardized level of proficiency across all

regions, ensuring sheriffs are adequately prepared for their responsibilities. It would also improve morale and employee engagement.

Recommendation: *Provide flexible training options and explore virtual delivery models where feasible.*

Currently, training opportunities are frequently denied or canceled because the BCSS does not have sufficient staff to cover for the absence of a sheriff on a course. This is especially true in small locations in the North, Interior, and Vancouver Island regions, which have fewer sheriffs available to provide coverage. Employees in these regions have to be away from work for longer periods to travel to the Lower Mainland for training. Flexible training opportunities could allow for better convenience and accessibility while reducing the operational impact of training absences. Training that can accommodate different shift patterns and occur outside of regular work hours would ensure that sheriffs have equal access to training opportunities. This would increase employee satisfaction with fairness in the organization and facilitate more consistent skill development across courthouses. In addition, virtual course delivery could be a way to increase accessibility. However, the effectiveness of this method should be critically evaluated depending on the course material.

Recommendation: *Increase regional and local training options, including team-based scenario training.*

Sheriffs in regions outside of the Lower Mainland face barriers in accessing training due to the lack of regional and local options. Offering more courses regionally and locally would improve access to training. This would involve identifying suitable locations and partnering with local training facilities. Bringing trainers from the Lower Mainland to regional and local locations could be less disruptive than having sheriffs travel away from their locations. These measures would enhance accessibility, minimize travel requirements, and provide flexibility for participants in accessing sheriff training programs.

Furthermore, introducing more team-based and on-site training at the courthouse could have multiple benefits. This approach would foster collaboration among team members, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and enhance the application of learned skills in real-life scenarios. By emphasizing teamwork during training sessions, sheriffs could develop a deeper understanding of their roles within the context of a team, ultimately leading to improved overall performance.

Block 2 Training Not Conducted in Posting Location

Recommendation: *Ensure Block 2 training is conducted in the sheriff's permanent positing location.*

Block 2 training is the first introduction to on-the-job duties for new recruits. Previously, this training took place at a courthouse in the Lower Mainland, regardless of the employee's eventual posting location and the unique operational circumstances there. The BCSS is currently working on rectifying this situation by conducting Block 2 training in the recruits' permanent locations. This modification will allow trainees to gain firsthand experience of the physical space, layout, and limitations they will encounter during their duties. By adopting this approach, a more realistic and practical training experience is ensured, enabling the recruits to adapt quickly and effectively to their assigned locations. Additionally, this change enhances the recruits' ability to establish working relationships and find mentors among their new colleagues, facilitating improved integration and a sense of belonging.

Tools and Workspace

Unsuitable Radios and Communication Infrastructure

Recommendation: *Conduct a thorough assessment of the existing radio and communication infrastructure employed by the BC Sheriff Service, including within courthouses, during urban and remote transportation, communication with dispatch, and inter-agency communication.*

This recommendation would require the following:

- Examine the functionality of communication infrastructure within the courthouse, including handheld radios, intercom systems, and other devices utilized for internal communication among sheriffs.
- Analyze the communication equipment and protocols used during prisoner transportation, ensuring their effectiveness in maintaining secure and efficient communication, including on remote highway routes.
- Review the existing communication mechanisms and protocols utilized when interacting with external agencies, such as police departments and other emergency services, to ensure effective collaboration and information sharing.

Deputy Sheriffs are dissatisfied with their current radio and communication infrastructure, which they feel is unsuitable for their operational requirements. They feel like their safety is not valued, and that they are working for a second-class law enforcement agency.

A comprehensive review of the radio and communication infrastructure would address the identified shortcomings, propose feasible solutions, and prioritize the safety of front-line staff, ensuring their involvement and agreement with the proposed changes. By assessing the reliability, coverage, clarity, and ease of use of these systems, potential areas for improvement can be identified. By involving sheriffs at all levels, particularly front-line staff, the review would facilitate a thorough understanding of communication challenges and opportunities for improvement. The outcomes of this evaluation are anticipated to enhance operational efficiency, safety, and effectiveness within the BCSS, promoting seamless communication across all organizational functions.

Distribution of Carbines

Recommendation: *Conduct a comprehensive review of carbine distribution and clarify their use and associated policies within the BCSS.*

In any decision involving public safety and the use of firearms, it is crucial to strike a balance between the need for effective tools and concerns about safety, accountability, and public perception. The use of firearms by law enforcement agencies is a complex and sensitive issue, and decisions regarding their deployment require careful consideration.

A comprehensive analysis of the distribution process of carbines within the BCSS, specifically focused on the necessity and usage of these firearms within the context of Deputy Sheriffs' duties, may help to provide clarity for staff and ensure that current resources are managed in alignment with the overall

objective of the organization. This review should be conducted with the intention of clarifying when carbines are necessary and providing a clear rationale to staff regarding their usage.

Establishing clear protocols for their acquisition, storage, and distribution, will ensure the responsible and effective use of carbines in high-risk situations. The goal of this review should be to assist decision-makers in adopting an evidence-based approach that optimizes public safety while ensuring responsible firearm deployment.

Difficulties Obtaining Equipment and Uniforms

Recommendation: *Review the process for obtaining and requesting uniforms, and work towards streamlining the process to ensure ease of access for sheriffs in acquiring new uniforms from the central supply.*

Many sheriffs expressed frustration regarding delays and difficulties in obtaining appropriate uniforms. Efficient processes for acquiring and requesting uniforms are essential for law enforcement agencies to ensure that staff members are properly equipped for their duties. Conducting a thorough review of the uniform acquisition and distribution process can help identify areas of inefficiency and opportunities for improvement. This review should involve key stakeholders, including sheriffs, uniform suppliers, and relevant administrative personnel. By mapping out the existing process and gathering feedback from stakeholders, potential bottlenecks and areas for streamlining can be identified.

Recommendation: *Review and optimize the process for obtaining quality safety equipment in courthouses, ensuring staff have an adequate and appropriate supply.*

Deputy Sheriffs have commented on the difficulties they face in acquiring necessary safety equipment. Some locations have raised concerns about insufficient safety equipment or equipment of questionable quality. Safety equipment plays a vital role in protecting the well-being of staff members and visitors in courthouse settings. Reviewing the existing process and policies around quality standards and minimum inventories, and communicating the findings to staff, would increase employee confidence in their tools. Sheriffs desire easier access to safety equipment, as it would make them feel more prepared, respected and supported.

Recommendation: *Ensure the proactive replacement of safety vests before their expiry date.*

Deputy Sheriffs have expressed concerns over delays in receiving replacement safety vests before their expiry dates. This has led some individuals to share pictures of the expired vests with their spouses and instruct them to pursue legal action against the government in the event of any injury or death resulting from inadequate safety equipment. Expired vests may compromise protection due to degradation or changes in standards, making timely replacement important. Implementing strategies such as inventory management, training, and collaboration with suppliers can facilitate efficient replacement processes. Proactive vest replacement not only mitigates risks but also optimizes performance, ensures compliance, and demonstrates a commitment to employee safety.

Lack of Security Gates

Recommendation: *Improve the transparency of communications regarding the allocation of security gates at courthouses. Review policies and decisions to ensure the standardization of security gate allocation across the province.*

Sheriffs have raised concerns and questions about why some locations are equipped with security gates at the entrance, whereas others are not. Sheriffs understand the importance of ensuring access to justice and making the public feel welcome in the courthouse. However, they feel that the lack of consistency in the allocation of security gates is unfair and illogical. In locations without security gates, the job of sheriffs can be more difficult, and there is a greater risk that dangerous items may enter the courthouse. Clearly communicating the rationale and decision-making process behind the allocation of security gates in specific courthouses would likely increase employee acceptance of these decisions. Additionally, a review of policies and decisions should be conducted to ensure the standardization of security gate allocation decisions, thereby ensuring that the process is transparent and consistent across the province. These efforts will contribute to maintaining a secure environment in courthouses while fostering employee and public trust in the fairness and effectiveness of security measures.

Inadequate Building Design and Amenities

Recommendation: *Establish an inventory of facilities issues and assess safety implications for staff members and participants in the justice system.*

Deputy Sheriffs have raised concerns about the presence of building design flaws that pose safety risks in certain courthouses, particularly in smaller locations. They find it frustrating that their concerns are often not addressed, and little is done to make the necessary changes or repairs. Ensuring a safe environment is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the justice system and fostering public trust. By working with facilities partners to proactively address these concerns, the BCSS can mitigate risks and promote a secure and conducive environment for all parties involved. In addition, increased communication and follow up with staff regarding facilities priorities and project status updates would help employees understand what progress is being made.

Recommendation: *Assess and identify facilities issues that are causing inconveniences for staff and optimize facilities where possible to improve employee morale and the physical working environment.*

Deputy Sheriffs have highlighted issues with the amenities available in the workplace, acknowledging that while they are less critical than safety concerns, they still have an impact on employee morale. The physical working environment plays a significant role in the well-being and performance of staff members. To improve the physical workspace, it is necessary to understand the inconveniences experienced by staff. Gathering feedback directly from staff will provide valuable insights into their experiences and help identify areas for improvement.

Comments from the Field

Although most of the focus group time was taken up by the two main protocol questions and was inherently free form, the research team posed a directed question at the end of all the focus groups. This question was:

“Is there anything else you think our research team needs to know about, or that you would like to tell the Deputy Minister directly?”

The goal of this question was to collect information directly from participants that they wanted to have transmitted to ministry decision-makers. This information was used in the [Research Findings](#) and [Analysis](#) chapters as explained in the [Methodology](#) but is also presented here so that readers can understand the priorities and perspectives expressed by the focus group participants.

The research team provided every participant an opportunity to make a statement at the end of each focus group in turn. Every effort was made to capture these statements directly and verbatim, although this was not possible in every instance, usually due to long or fragmented responses.

In many cases, there were short responses that were repeated many times and were identical or very similar in nature, for example, “pay”, “pay us more”, “we need more pay”, etc. In the interest of avoiding undue repetition, repeat responses have not been included in this chapter, but have been included in the frequency count below.

Some individuals addressed more than one issue when answering the final focus group question. If a participant discussed multiple issues, the researchers split them out to be coded and counted separately. As a result, there are more responses than the total number of focus group participants.

Note that when a comment or statement was made that identified a specific individual, where an individual’s identity could be easily inferred, or where details of the comment could compromise BCSS operational security, the research team either removed the comment, or redacted that information and added in a more generic substitution. Substitutions and redactions are indicated where relevant.

Table 13 - Comments by Theme

Theme	Count of Responses
Pay and Benefits	130
Executive-Level Management	85
Supervisory-Level Management	83
Duties and Role	68
Placement within Court Services Branch	59
Stress and Workload	50
Recruitment	22
Tools and Workspace	21
Professional Development	20
Staffing Practices	12
Total	550

Pay and Benefits

- Grow and evolve with the times – what worked for the service 10 years ago does not work now, the service hasn't evolved with the times. Issues with recruitment and retention haven't evolved, and the salary from 10 years ago is not sustainable now. Everyone else keeps moving, but the service is stuck in the same place.
- If retention isn't addressed through competitive wages, the many years that went into establishing the service's reputation will be at risk. We won't have the resources to fulfil the mandate.
- I want [executive] to step into my shoes for one month. Pay my bills, my gas, do my job, and support my child, for one month.
- Same here, I want the [executive] to step into my shoes for one month. Support my [family], living on this wage, I'm watching the line of credit go deeper and deeper every single month. Inflation is cutting more and more into the pay we're getting. And try all of this while coming into work with a smile on your face.
- Pay needs to be more in line with other similar agencies if the service wants to retain people. It needs to be competitive. Can't keep dancing around the issues. We are not disposable.
- Delta PD could put together a whole squad with people who have left sheriffs.
- We're professionals, treat us like them. Pay us like them. Don't nickel and dime us.
- If we got paid more, we'd be able to retain a lot more of the young guys that go to police, because this is a Mon-Fri, 9-5 gig, and it's safer.
- Money – I will take a leader who kicks me in the head as long as they pay me 30k more a year.
- Some people are travelling daily from Abbotsford because they can't afford to live downtown with our current salary.
- Back to pay, even [management] complain about how much they could be making at federal corrections or RCMP. People stopped talking about money, but it's still an issue.
- If North gets isolation pay, what about Lower Mainland cost of living pay?
- I have 3 young kids, a mortgage, and entry level on this job is so low it is a joke compared to entry level at other agencies. The wage people claim we get is the 5th step, but when you start, you're on level 1. We need to do away with the steps. We come in on SRT, and we have to give 2 years. If we don't, we have to pay a portion of training costs back.
- The service can't afford to bleed for another year before this report is read and actioned. We need to stop the bleeding before then.
- Pay us properly. Respect the job we do. Value us, especially those with seniority who have stuck it out and do their best, year after year. And tell the people who want to leave to hang on and stick with it, don't cater to the new people, because they're leaving anyway. Have the policy people come talk to us, the boots on the ground. Don't hand cuff us. Let us do our jobs.
- I applaud you guys for doing this and I am hopeful that there will be a resolution, but I have been here for 20 years, and we have had several committees over the years talking about these issues repeatedly and how can we fix things. The solution is more money. We have deputies who hold a firearm who must work second jobs and can barely make a living. As a Sergeant, I am even thinking that I need a second job to pay some of my bills. I really hope that it is different this time, but I have lost faith after seeing this happen repeatedly. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. We need change.
- We need to acknowledge the generational shift from the gen x and baby boomer mentality of survival to the millennial and gen z mentality of wanting to thrive. We need to address the pay gap and pay to cover the cost of living.

- I don't think we should think of ourselves as a steppingstone for other law enforcement agencies. We need to be more competitive in terms of salary and we need to work to deter people from leaving us for other agencies and become a career path and add incentives for people to stay.
- Most of us have chosen to work here, and we still care, but our hands are tied – we need better wages to close that gap, engagement. Tough to keep the positive face because it always feels like our hands are tied.
- Disparity in wages is a huge issue and I think the government has really dropped the ball in addressing the issue and it has led us to our situation today. I think sheriffs are also underutilized for the talents that this organization has and the training we have. However, no one will want to do more duties unless we get a decent wage for the work we are doing.
- It costs 52 thousand dollars to train a new recruit. We have to care that people leave for other law enforcement agencies when we put in 52 thousand per person to train them up. We need to figure out a way to make BC Sheriffs a career path and stop giving our employees to other agencies.
- I want to be proud to work for the BC Government. To see the Legislative Security Officers wear essentially the same patch as us and be treated so differently and get higher pay, it is very difficult to have that pride. I think we should be modelling ourselves to get that same empowerment and funding that they do.
- Let's get the 40-hour work week in place. We spent so much time and energy trying to push it through and I think it will be a huge boost for staff and supervisors. If we don't have a starting point like the 40-hour work week the problem is going to get worse.
- Cost of Deputy Sheriffs doing OT – paying an extra hour a day would save the service money.
- People who have left to police would come back to sheriffs if offered more money via a 40-hour work week.
- Lessening the wage gap between sheriffs and police would have them coming back – younger people who haven't been with police long who haven't invested in their pensions long enough will definitely come back.
- Sheriffs don't generate revenue for the province, so we aren't respected – the PSA needs to loosen our leash and give us the 40-hour work week. Right now, they are just looking for a dog to beat.
- 40-hour work week – why aren't we working these hours? That's another 8-10k per year, which solves a lot of issues!
- Would like to get a 40-hour work week to address some of the many inequities in the system.
- Hemorrhaging staff, use our bandwidth appropriately, please implement a 40-hour work week.
- Better pension rules. Rule of 85 shouldn't apply to us as law enforcement.
- It is also about the wage. I'm almost 55 and to get a full pension I still have to work at 60. I'm making less than what a starting constable makes. If I was able to make closer to what a constable makes at the start of my career, my life would have been very different, and I wouldn't have had to work second jobs to make ends meet.
- Equality applies to the 80%, but noticeable difference inside provincial environment – little inequalities, applying for brand new job instead of easy interchangeability. Inequality – competing with same or similar employees but getting less money, later retirement.
- Wages and pension – can't do this job at 65, this is why senior staff leave. The service essentially says, 'Welcome to sheriffs, you will work until 65.'
- Change our pay. Increase it, instead of insulting us with the 25-cent raise. It's a slap in the face for what we do.
- Don't get me wrong, I love this job, but not enough to keep me here if my kids are going to be starving in a year. The new deal was front end loaded, so it's not going to come close to addressing the inflation we're about to face.
- 53% of union voted to accept new contract, which didn't even get sheriffs the cost of living.

- We were threatened that if we didn't vote for the component agreement, we would lose the ability to have 40 hours in the future. 'We will no longer table what you want', from the union, that's what they said. Keep talks open, but if you don't vote, we're shutting the door on it. The union said it, not the employer. All the perks we were told, really only applies to big offices. In offices 10 or more, that's where things happen.
- The union doesn't make sense. Deputy Sheriffs are lumped in with clerks. Should be with paramedics or police, the issues are very different. The BCGEU is not helpful, sheriffs are not satisfied with bargaining results. Bait ball of sardines eaten by pelicans and sharks - this is the Sheriffs.
- Corrections – got handed a belt with a keychain hook, blue shirt, no gun, no training, no force ops, etc. – and somehow, they get designated as a public safety occupation, but why not sheriffs?
- There are issues with the employer and the union – contract wording makes things difficult for sheriffs.
- Working over lunch – sheriffs in uniform are always on the clock, people come up to sheriffs all the time, they see the uniform and ask for help even when we're supposed to be on break.
- Sergeant isn't making overtime, so why bother taking the promotion if it's a pay cut?
- High security escorts – used to be done by police – 5 to 10k per day, sheriffs do it for no bump in pay.
- Sergeant position; often get paid as one while acting but doing the job full time anyway.
- Training instructor is in the office all the time, but only gets paid during instruction hours.
- What is underappreciated with the BCSS is the knowledge base and the experience factor. We do such a good job behind the scenes and carry a lot of responsibility and it is underappreciated and underpaid. I'm telling you right now if it isn't recognized through compensation there will be a serious incident because we will be forced to staff more inexperienced people.
- Not an easy job – sheriffs act as first responders, deal with a lot of shit, but seen as 'JUST' sheriffs, not dealing with things that police deal with. Police make arrests when people are high, but sheriffs have to deal with people going through withdrawal, etc.
- Lacking money and respect for what we do – our firearm is classified the same as an office worker's handheld scanner. That is a slap in the face, it is a tremendous responsibility to have a gun, and dealing with dangerous situations weighs heavily on Deputy Sheriffs.
- Classification change – align with police, as safety officers – corrections, conservation.
- Recognize long term employees beyond a stupid pin. First 5 years and you're done with the grid increases. No salary increases unless you advance to supervisor, etc. Senior employees could have corporal rank, etc., and it wouldn't matter.
- 15 years in service, wage has increased \$200/month in 15 years. Now I'm looking for a part time job. Lots of people have part time work. BCGEU court staff are going to food banks.
- We don't want to work 300-400 hours of overtime to have a living wage.
- Deputy Sheriffs are struggling to make a living, will take any OT they can get, skip meals, breaks etc., we live and depend on it.
- Sheriffs are put in a tough position, we have to make a choice of working a ton of OT to make money for cost of living versus safety – Should I do OT tonight? How tired will I be tomorrow; will I be able to do my job?
- I currently have 3 jobs, multiple applications in. I need more pay – around 85k, and a 40-hour work week.
- Deputy Sheriffs are looking for jobs working for dump trucks, Paladin security, Super Save blue fence propane, all the shit suckers, etc. Sheriffs are filling out applications on their work computers, that's how resigned they are, not even trying to hide it.
- We are looked at like a joke, no money, no respect.

- Someone high up said ‘it’s not just a job, it’s a lifestyle.’ Well, poverty is not much of a lifestyle.
- The answer’s not necessarily red and blue lights, but the service should respond to things as they happen. People shouldn’t be going bankrupt trying to stay in this job.
- Told [the sheriff leadership team] the same thing – always circles back to pay, not feeling like it is a career, it is just a job.

Placement within Court Services Branch

- Until this branch is in a position where it is its own entity and can stand on its own and separate from CSB, I don’t think we will do well moving forward through these challenges. A shakeup needs to happen for us to be able to maintain the safety and the standards for the province. If we don’t get an equal seat at the table when it comes to staffing and safety decisions, I think this organization will implode.
- Massive proponent for getting out of Attorney General. Not just for this service, but provincial services branch is a great idea, CVSE, conservation, etc., these forces should have training all together at the JI. Standardize your training, do all your certifications, then choose to specialize into conservation, sheriffs, etc. Make bridging easy. A centralized provincial service. For budgetary reasons, and job satisfaction, standardizing training like that makes sense.
- We need to have more of a voice, and we need to be on an equal playing field as Court Admin. We need to have equal voice and representation and that is the only way we are going to move forward and effect proper change. Until we can move out of CSB and be our own agency and separate from Court Administration we will never be able to fix our problems.
- I appreciate the safety in living under the umbrella of the Judiciary’s protection, but they also hold us back.
- We need our ministry and executive to believe in us and trust in us and need to put us front and centre. We need to move out of CSB and stand on our own. Let us be your number one and stop hiding us in the closet. We need to be the forefront for the province the way sheriffs are in other provinces. Let us show you what we can do, and we will move forward from there.
- Look at the Alberta model of the sheriffs and apply it to the B.C. model of sheriffs. We need to separate from Court Admin and CSB. We need new duties and opportunities that will allow for better salaries for sheriffs. And please bring our pension back, I can’t be a sheriff at 65.
- I have 30 years of being on the force, and a severance from Attorney General is important. Not being part of corrections, either. Just get us out of court services. We can be journal vouchers for courthouses across the province. But get us out. We can be constabulary of the courts but do it independently like the Crown and Judiciary do. They want us to be impartial but if we are arresting people downstairs, we aren’t impartial.
- A previous ADM used to carry a gun around when he was filling people in about the Sheriff Service. We don’t need wannabes. We need to be an independent entity that isn’t impeded by people who don’t know anything about our jobs.
- If we want to make a change, it feels like it has to be passed through the Judiciary first.
- I would like the upper echelon to see us as an integral part of the justice system. There is a disconnect between sheriffs and CSB. They are executive, and we are law enforcement, we need to be included somehow. We are an important part of the system.
- We are not consulted, even if a change makes zero operational sense, we are just ‘monkeys in the blue uniform, here to make sure everyone plays nice,’ so it’ll happen regardless.
- We need more input-on decision making before implementation, like before the implementation of video court, for example.
- Systemic issue – proud to be sheriffs at the beginning, slowly morale has declined because of the lack of respect.

- Our former AG said Sheriffs is a steppingstone, and that insulted a lot of us. This was 10-12 years ago. It doesn't need to be a steppingstone. People that left are flourishing elsewhere, these people could have been our leaders. But management was threatened by them, so they targeted them and now that they're long gone, they label them as deadwood.
- Just listen to us. When it comes to decisions that affect us directly, talk to us first.
- I just want to be more recognized and thanked.
- Even without wage increase, should get corporal titles for recognition.
- I've been with the public service since [date]. I have trained more than half this service and I was a very proud member of this service. I don't think anyone is proud to wear this uniform anymore because we aren't respected or appreciated and that is extremely sad.
- We as a service are very talented, very skilled, very dedicated and we are extremely underutilized. It is challenging to feel like we are at times not respected, taken for granted and not really appreciated for everything that the service has to offer.
- If you're going to make it feel like we matter, then show us that we matter.
- Corrections still tests people on arrival. This comes back to people in offices making decisions and not telling or consulting us. Blanket operational processes do not work.
- Not sure if court manager handles budget, but it seems like some things are shared, some things divided. Should a court admin manager really be the one to handle the Sheriffs' budget?
- Sheriffs get lost in the mix as a minor group of people in CSB.
- Why are sheriffs under CSB to begin with, even if he wants to do things for sheriffs, [executive]'s hands are tied by CSB higher ups.
- Sheriffs get washed down by bureaucratic stuff, buried by CSB.
- Remove this organization from CSB. They handcuff us severely. Take us out from AG and put us in PSSG. We are saddled in CSB and have to report to clerks.
- The BCSS needs to separate from the PSA and union red tape so we can get what we need and require for the future of the organization.

Executive-Level Management

- Whatever is brought forward, the changes have to happen NOW. It can't take a year or 2 years. It has to happen with the stroke of a pen. And it can. It's been demonstrated before. House of commons is an example.
- This organization is full of management but is lacking leadership.
- Daily job satisfaction – rests on a change of upper management.
- Sheriffs are a sinking ship. There's water in the engine room and our leaders are ignoring it. Sheriffs are at 50% capacity. All the jobs we could be doing that would make things better are held by people who are inept. Each office leader is doing a different thing. We have no focus on what the real problems are. This isn't a quick fix, we have a gaping wound, and we have no medic, and there are more shells being thrown at us.
- The number one thing that would benefit everyone in this organization is for the decisions that go forward to be made swiftly. There have been issues brought forward in the past, serious and problematic things, and within the stroke of a pen, the changes were in place. Not 6 months, a year, whatever.

- Who reads the WES comments? We rely on that for our venting, we think someone is actually going to listen and care. But we find out it doesn't go anywhere, it's unacceptable. Who do we talk to, the supervisors who are part of the problem?
- Rank and file want to see a real head leading the service, not a puppet controlled by the union and PSA.
- Retention problem will continue to go unaddressed – higher ups say there is no retention problem even though they are aware of the issues.
- Should be a lot of things ripped down from the top – fire the coach and big team players. Integrity commitment respect is the motto, but it is not there.
- There's a lot of disengagement now. I don't know if things are listened to. Is this stuff even being listened to? The WES participation this year has likely declined because people are tired and don't think their issues are being addressed.
- The follow-up to the diagnostic tool that is the WES, is missing. This research project is too late, there needs to be something else.
- A lot of things were identified in the 2020 Sheriffs Engagement Report, but when they came up with solution streams to go down, they identified things that were convenient to them; new uniforms and fluffy bullshit that doesn't matter. The issues that are important to staff (remuneration) were ignored and put on a tertiary level, priority-wise.
- Focus on the numbers. If enough staff are putting the same thing out there (i.e., that we need more money), then 'it's out of our scope' doesn't work as a response. If the numbers are low enough, they need to readjust their scope. Don't throw new badges at us.
- Sheriffs don't even bother talking to [executive]. [Executive] tells every class to go to a police recruiter (one instructor said they say this to every single class).
- How does [executive] not know what is happening in his own organization? Feels like he just doesn't care.
- The sheriffs are sick, and good luck finding a cure. I don't want to be pessimistic, but it's true. There are some fixes, but it depends how committed leadership is to getting sheriffs to what they state the service should or could be.
- It still feels like this might just fall on deaf ears.
- Staff put time into researching improvements and make suggestions but always fall on deaf ears. Management doesn't want to spend any money.
- Disconnect – they won't listen to what sheriffs have to say, don't give a shit what we think, nothing will change, this is just for optics, so it looks like executive is trying.
- This meeting will not achieve anything, we'll have the exact same conversation down the road, very frustrating to continuously hear lip service about how we fix this because nothing ever happens.
- [Our union rep] is beat up by [the sheriff leadership team], [executive], etc., no one has issues with him outside of work, but he should stand up for sheriffs.
- The fear is that execs are going to focus on one problem that distracts from the real issues. I.e., getting new uniforms, new badges – who cares? New uniforms don't pay bills, doesn't address the important issues like wages.
- We don't want them to cherry pick small issues to focus on.
- The attitude in the office is that nothing is going to change – people didn't bother going to the focus groups because they don't believe anything will happen.
- We've been around a long time, and it goes into politics. Ministerial and legislative. It's above our [executives]. The PSA said they'd monitor changes, but no promise was kept. They said, 'well thanks, we'll mark as this complete.' A check box. It's unbelievable.

- Better commitment to resources to address all the issues, whether it looks like money to improve training, recruitment, and retention, or whatever. Stop the cycle. Fix the real issues. It might not fix it right away, but long term it'll be worth it.
- Whatever they deem the solution to look like – put the resources to a real commitment to solving these problems. Lessen the load of issues.
- This whole focus group thing, it's a start to solving this – we're the ones who can fix it and formulate the solutions. But the top needs to care and actually take action.
- Money is a hard one, pay is huge, but an effective organization needs to solve all these small issues. Our leaders know the issues, now we need to actually take action.
- Senior management and [executive], etc., when you put communications out, be genuine about it. Not just when your foot's in the fire. Because that's honestly how it feels when you get these posters and emails. Like the 'bullying and harassment shouldn't exist in the workplace' posters, it feels like a joke. A gaslight. Don't just give lip service. Take action.
- When I started 16 years ago, I had a sense of pride about the job and felt that this was a lifelong career. I'll be honest, now I'm looking forward to retirement more than I ever did and I'm looking forward to getting out of here. We are hurting right now and there is a recruitment and retention issue that we have known about but hasn't been addressed. Our organization knows the issues and knows how to address them, but they choose not to. We know how to address it and we need to show staff that we are addressing the root cause of what is causing people to leave.
- Stop being a reactive organization, be proactive. We always wait till things fail or go wrong before we make changes. We know the issues, our leadership knows the issues, it is time to act.
- Deputy Sheriffs have no respect for Exec now.
- Sheriffs is a sinking ship – has been sinking for the last 10 years. My screen saver is actually a sinking ship on my computer, and it is how I feel about this organization.
- [A member of the sheriff leadership team] here has made a comment about our former [management], 'Be careful what you say, he's still my friend.' That's personal. I don't have to like you to work with you. Stop making it personal, this is business.
- A couple of years ago [executive] sent out an email where everyone could comment or reply to them with issues to them without any reprisal. This sort of thing could help prevent the boys' club from forming, reforming or existing. A direct line is necessary. Information and issues are stopped before they get to the top.
- Advocacy, and support your staff– the importance of a hierarchy is inverse. You only have one chief sheriff, because you only need fucking one. You have 400 sheriffs, because you need that many.
- A top-down pride and conviction is what we need. Most of us wouldn't even want to be a cop, I never thought about it before a year ago. I like this job, but it goes up to the top and the lack of support for staff. We have emergency lights on our vehicles that we can't use. If you touch those lights, you're screwed. [Details of second job], but the sheriffs don't trust us to use our lights appropriately. A [major incident on the highway] and we're the first emergency individuals on the scene, and they want us to put on our hazards. We got hauled into the office the next day and berated for putting our emergency light on.
- The investigations that happen in this organizations are not finite; they go on forever.
- Support us. We're front-line workers, and we're out there doing it. Deputies started doing their own thing and taking on liability, but there is nowhere to go, no one to talk to.
- It's hard for me to feel enthusiastic about doing this for another 35 years, working two jobs, when it's a lot of 'we can't, we shouldn't, we won't', even though we have the training. And 'we're going to grill you if you do use it'.

- Practices seem to be based on minimal standards with the hope that nothing bad happens. Sheriffs will pay the price and it will happen if things don't change.
- Management is afraid to stand up for what is right, they keep their heads down to cover their own asses.
- Support everything that goes on in courts and movement of prisoners – safety needs to be a priority.
- How to fix the solo runs issue without being the victim, and navigate the red tape. We're just waiting for someone to bite it.
- A few years ago, I [experienced an incident on the road], I turned my emergency lights on, and my supervisor told me to rewrite the paperwork to say I didn't turn my lights on. The organization is more worried about liability than staff safety.
- We need top-down honour, support, and commitment. Somewhere there needs to be someone listening to us. They can't override what's swelling up from the bottom. Empower and support your staff. Someone should be looking out for us.
- My biggest fear is, despite loving my job so much, is getting in trouble after saving someone from OD-ing, and then getting pulled up in front of HQ and getting in shit for writing the report.
- They don't care about us, only when a scandal comes into the light.
- We are going down the toilet, but at least you're listening to us now. It really feels like this organization doesn't care about sheriffs.
- There was a company I heard about where anytime any workplace injury occurred, the CEO requested to know everything about it by the end of the day. Within 5 years, it was a 5-billion-dollar company. Because all he cared about was the people at the bottom of the rung. We need people who care about the line staff.
- Support. We have to fight with in-custodies, and then we have to fight our supervisors, the 6th floor, and everyone in between. We shouldn't have to fight all the time. We should have support right from the top. And I hope we can get it fast, because we're losing experience and knowledge, and advocates are losing steam. It's going to get to the point where quiet quitting is all that's left.
- We need to have a long-term plan and vision that we actually stick to for the organization. Our leadership knows the issues, now we need a strategic plan to get there. We need to have smart goals and a vision that is realistic and obtainable despite changes in management or political will. We need leadership that will actually address the issues, instead of doing nothing. I've been here for 15 years, and I've seen so many lofty goals that don't come to fruition and those emotional peaks and valleys wear on staff. Even if it isn't glamorous, we need an honest vision and strategy that we can obtain. We can't just have carrots dangled in front of us over and over again.
- The service needs to put concentrated effort into successfully implementing one new initiative at a time, instead of having so many on the go that never get off the ground.
- No direction for where sheriffs are going – there was a time when sheriffs were doing a pilot project for traffic duties. Became very political and was shut down.
- Pay, duties, we want to hear from [executive] – where do you foresee sheriffs in 5 years?
- If sheriffs are not getting duties back, what is your plan for sheriffs?
- The BCSS needs to determine our identity and point the service in that direction. If that means more duties, go that direction with more switched-on people. If it means staying with the low number of duties we have, then switch recruitment pools. It's all based on identity.
- Lip service. 'Oh, we'll look into it,' isn't enough.
- We want access to the final report. Transparency is needed.

- Give us a timeframe for when we can expect changes – reports go out, people change all the time and things in progress just disappear. I.e., Retention strategy was just updated, but then person in power changes and it gets forgotten. Was talking about retention in 2019, still talking about it now.
- Management is just meeting checkmarks.
- Lack of respect is causing new deputies to leave, which trickles up to senior staff. Sheriffs are losing good staff, the only ones staying are the micromanagers. Everyone openly talks about where they are planning on leaving now.
- Had big stuff happen for escorts, [executive] didn't show up. Come to reassure or show support or even just show your face!
- Very top heavy – [member of sheriff leadership team] at Sheriff Provincial Operations Centre – [executive] said upfront there is no money, and we will not have any more money unless we lose people up top, then fired someone from downtown and replaced with 2 people at the same salary. After saying there was no money.
- No one will openly go talk to anyone, everyone is aware of the issues, including management.
- Want management to actually listen to deputies – important for staff to feel heard, management needs to take feedback.
- First time in 28 years where a separate organization has come in to listen to sheriffs. That creates a certain mentality in the workplace.
- You get what you give. Sheriffs work 10-12 hours because they love their job and coworkers, want to be proud of their job, but don't see the respect reciprocated by employers.
- We want to be able to recommend the job to friends but we are embarrassed by the organization.
- [Executive] is really just a politician – deputies see emails from [executive] going out about other things, but they have a guy fighting for his life right now and have heard nothing from [executive].
- No respect – just lip service, we don't feel like management are fighting for sheriffs. We do everything for them, what are they doing for us?
- If you stick your neck out to speak out, you can say goodbye to promotions.
- Look at the future of the service as opposed to just barely keeping the lights on.

Duties and Role

- We're dressed like this, but we may as well work at Walmart. 'Hey, welcome to Walmart! Do you have an unendorsed warrant out for you? Great, would you mind please taking a seat over here? Thanks!'
- Trust, accountability. We're all the first ones in the room who will step up and be accountable. But when we're going out and we need to make a decision, we have an internal check list how am I going to articulate this, how am I going to justify this. Our training is world class. I can do my job. But some [offender] with an unendorsed warrant walks [distance] off our property and I can't do [anything]. We can't arrest him even if we're looking at them. Give us responsibilities and power, we are trained. We're doing 30% of what we're capable of doing.
- Use us for what we're trained for. We're called peace officers, use us as such. We could help with the stuff that CVSE helps out with (they helped with curfew checks during COVID, and we couldn't). They were assigned this stuff despite being unarmed, other than OC spray that they buy themselves, and a baton. There were security guards doing during the floods in Chilliwack. We just hide. We're like the best kept secret.
- Let us do our jobs. Stop putting these policy restrictions on us. Empower the sheriffs. Believe in us.

- Our policy makers and executive are making these decisions – unless you are advanced escort trained on flicking a switch, you can't do it. They don't understand what it's like to be in the middle of nowhere at a crash.
- We were sitting on a C corner, and we had to put our lights on, people flip their cars, lights have to go on. Write me up, I don't care. We shouldn't have to think we're going to get written up for doing the right thing. If we get hit by a car because our hazards are on and not our emergency lights, imagine going to the public after and saying 'Well, we weren't allowed to use them. That's why they weren't being used to prevent the crash.'
- Sheriffs is not deemed an essential or emergency service until a situation arises where they are forced to stay and told they are essential.
- Take responsibility for current duties – let us do things we have authority to do.
- When I got into this job, I was so excited. But now, lack of identity and job satisfaction are insane – we're overtrained and underutilized.
- COVID protocols are useless now, but policies don't allow any room to bend the rules. Extra \$100 in fuel spent because escorts have to send two trucks for 3 transfers... Waste of time and resources.
- Regardless of the dumb, redundant covid screening questions, the process doesn't change. Whether they identify with all the screening symptoms or not, they're getting on that bus and going to corrections.
- Process for changes is EXTREMELY slow. Seems like decades of pushing and pulling/prying for things, that under the authority it looks like we have, we should already be able to do.
- The perception of what we should be, versus what we are is skewed. We get 2 types of recruits usually: 1) people who want to get into law enforcement or 2) people that have family values and want a work/life balance. But they get here, and they can't do either. Work is unfulfilling. People end up going elsewhere because of this. We offer neither of what the service promises to.
- I still get people on the streets asking what I am... 'Oh, we have sheriffs in BC?' We're way too low profile, no one knows what we do.
- We would be much more recognizable if we had more duties. We need more than courtly duties...we should be expanded. Things like arrest warrants, etc., even if we don't get to go into the traffic stream and other things.
- Our qualifications are so important. But make us something to be excited to achieve. Something worthwhile. I'm not proud to be a sheriff right now.
- I never even say I'm a sheriff. I just say, 'I work for the provincial government.'
- I don't even recruit anymore. When people ask if they should apply to the Sheriffs, I just say 'Do you like to sit around and babysit? Then sure, apply.'
- We are basically waste management. But I can tell you this, actual waste management pays more, and I would bet they have more autonomy than us.
- Let us be sheriffs! We should be proud to be law enforcement. If you want Paladin security, get them! Or let us do what sheriffs should. Let us be real law enforcement. People wouldn't leave if they had a real job.
- We need a clearly defined role and responsibility within government, self funded or funded, that is sustainable.
- The province has 500 well trained officers who went to school for 4.5 months, which is barely less than the police. And they still treat us like toddlers. It's interesting to see how it unfolds after SRT; we get posted and we're treated like kids.
- Expansion of our duties – can't handle anymore of the 'Stay in your lane, don't chase anything' mentality.

- I think this sort of longevity will help with retention. People who are in the middle of deciding their career goals, those who haven't already resigned to focus on the road to RCMP or police, those are the ones who can be convinced to stay. Just need to be able to do more and grow and train, that would make them stay.
- Listen to your frontline deputies. Build connections and transparency. Expand the scope of our duties and work with our jurisdictional properties so we can work better to meet the needs of our province.
- Utilize the sheriffs for more than what we're doing because we're not doing anything. More duties. More diversification in the job description.
- I don't want to be trained less, use us more.
- As the professionals we are, we deserve autonomy. We should be able to make decisions without being talked down to and know that we'll be remunerated properly. Courses, promotions, training opportunities, etc., they all need to be distributed equally and equitably.
- It would be nice to be trusted with our training, and to utilize our training. Really the only reason I'm here is because I can't apply elsewhere right now. But I can't do this for 35 more years, that's a long time to watch TV in court.
- It needs to be a good destination, not a good place to start. A career, not a steppingstone.
- Varied duties that align with Sheriff's' neutrality – opportunity to do something different once or twice a year.
- Find a way to utilize sheriffs more than just walking empty halls, like when court is done by video and sheriffs aren't needed.
- A lot of people get their hopes up about new initiatives or talk about things, debating whether they should jump ship. People coming out of JI hear all this talk of maybe, but nothing transpires so they move on. Started to do traffic, but that too was shut down.
- You need to make people want to work for the sheriffs and stay with the sheriffs. To do that you need to let us be proud of who we are and let us do the work and make our work meaningful and something we can be proud of.
- The job has changed so much since COVID. I don't consider this a career, this is just a job.
- You could put a security guard in our job. We are going backwards, not forwards.
- Washing vehicles falls under my job description, really? Moving furniture, that's what my highly trained self is for? It's embarrassing having the public watch us be movers. And management claims all those things we're shafted with consist of only 5% of our jobs, but it's more.
- There is room for collaboration with other law enforcement agencies. Curfew checks; keeping the peace; etc. We don't even need to be traffic sheriffs like Alberta but look for ways for us to collaborate and give back somehow. Or wildfire roadblocks -- we can't go out and help unless the police ask us directly, and the chief signs off.
- Duties – we won't jump to traffic in a year but give us little things. MVAs should be our jurisdiction. Criminal warrants we could do. Security for weekend events used to be an option, why can't we do that? Probation checks, too. Did something happen, why can't we do those things? The sheriffs should be able to help at Wake Fest, etc. The police can arrest, sheriffs can process through. That's a great opportunity for us. We used to be more involved.
- We got given DNA and we were excited to start doing it a while back. This was where courts would order DNA samples, and we would take the samples. This was going to be another qualification for us. Another notch on our belt, so we could be paid more. But I have done exactly one in 12 years.
- I want a tier system like Alberta.

- Let's create an enforcement and compliance unit – could be a central agency. Sheriffs have management that came from other agencies, these people already have the blueprint, they have the background knowledge.
- Divorce trials – judge often gets police to monitor a guy getting his stuff from spouse's house, even though sheriffs could do it instead of wasting police resources – sheriffs are not utilized.
- Video for fixed dates – certain things like this are appropriate for virtual meetings NOT bail hearing etc.
- Here you can only be an instructor, Deputy Sheriff, or supervisor, and that's only if you're in the boys' club, anyway. I've never had any opportunity to grow. Why can't we mirror more of Alberta Sheriffs?
- Right off the bat morale for new recruits is bad because they transition out of top-notch training. There is no incentive to work hard – how are instructors supposed to motivate a class when no matter how hard you work as a Deputy, you don't go anywhere?

Supervisory-Level Management

- Staff all get along, have no issues with each other, but middle management is a big issue.
- In a nutshell, I usually don't have problems with prisoners, I have problems with supervisors and upper management. And that's sad. I can't wait to go. I lost respect for the organization. I'm sick of this shit. The organization has no respect for us, and it is extremely disheartening. This uniform, this building, this job, this belt. 3 months, 3 years, and 30 years, doesn't matter, we all feel the same.
- Had great staff who left because they weren't getting support from up top, but they said they would come back if the Staff Sergeant left.
- Staff Sergeant should not harass people who call in sick. Sick leave monitoring – being asked what your symptoms are, which they have no right to do; harass Deputy Sheriffs by texting and calling asking for symptoms, making statements like 'this isn't like you, why are you calling in sick?'
- Supervisors and different people in authority are making life a living hell. It is fun for them.
- Deadline of when to deal with issues – too late and they get away with it because the window is closed. How is that fair? How does [executive] not know?
- This might be too broad, but...you need to get rid of the old boys' club. That's where it all trickles down from. Being a female, I have had so many issues with sexism. It's 2022, but I have had people tell me, 'Look at this guy, he's the model for perfect sheriff.' There are lot of people that think I should be sitting at home with kids. It's ridiculous, it's 2022. It's very old fashioned and sexist. I love my job; the sheriffs here are great. But the morale is brutal and awful. It's not an easy fix, but it can be fixed.
- The boys' club has to be completely obliterated. It has to be put out there that this agency, ministry, and government isn't going to tolerate it anymore. The micromanagement, bullying, and more.
- I might be jaded, but I expect nothing out of this focus group exercise other than a target on my back. I will likely be targeted for this.
- Boys club – [A member of the sheriff leadership team] for the region is the head.
- If I perform a certain task, this individual may never talk to me about it. Maybe I'll get a "Good job", or whatever, nothing. Another person might do the same task, the same way, but he might coach them and tell them how to do it better. We're all professionals, the end goal is the end goal. Sometimes the details don't matter. We don't want to be patronized, micromanaged, or talked down to.
- The boys club – disband it, move them to different regions, something. Retrain them under good people, fire them, doesn't matter, just something.
- Any good ideas are automatically shut down, discourages coming forward with any new opinions.
- We get blackballed if we speak up.

- They want ‘Yes men’, not people who are vocal and push back.
- Supervisors like to pit us against each other – can see it in how the schedule is done, how time off is given.
- People not part of the clique aren’t given a chance, you have to be part of the family.
- They got rid of a guy who was too proactive.
- There is a [supervisor] who knows the policy and uses it against sheriffs, that’s weaponized administration. [Work unit] people were intentionally sent to places they didn’t want to go. This is a power move for supervisors.
- Confused why some people are still supervisors. They are protected by management, not in the job for the right reasons, in it just for the money.
- [Manager] got where he is because he was helped by [sheriff leadership team]. He sexually harassed someone and is still a manager.
- Bullying and harassment has gotten better. A couple superintendents have left, but there are more subtle things – they are just smarter about it (favouritism, weaponized admin, etc.)
- One particular Deputy Sheriff can never get his choice for CTO, while another always gets it.
- You can hate the culture and still be passionate about the job and service, but the soul gets worn down. The supervisors hover and wait to attack. You get sick of the treatment.
- Supervisor training: diversity training needs to be in there. That old school mentality is still really in there. People are getting better but getting rid of the old boys’ club is really important.
- I have an email proving I have told our [executive]. In this office there is no succession management. There is no plan to empower and train the next line of Sergeants. No one here meets the base requirements to apply for Sergeant. If someone cannot panel after 2 years of being Deputy, we have failed them. They need to be at the base requirement. We have failed everyone at this office.
- A Deputy Sheriff was in a bad trial – [specific details of case]. The Deputy Sheriff asked supervisors if someone else could take over, needed time away from trial, [personal characteristics of Deputy Sheriff]. No sympathy was given. There is no emotional intelligence on the part of supervisors.
- Sergeants – some will get things done, but some are checked out, disconnected.
- They should have respect and knowledge of the job, instead they just promote people so they can move them.
- Supervisors do not lead by example.
- If there is a gunfight, staff will not follow the managers.
- Deputy Sheriffs don’t even want to act because they don’t respect supervisors.
- Supervisor has online courses, but it is up to them to take initiative.
- There are no leadership courses at JI.
- Bad people are in supervisor positions while good staff are not getting promoted.
- Supervisor is retiring soon, there will be a person off the eligibility list come in, and it will be Deputy Sheriffs training him, not the other supervisors.
- Deputies would follow their colleagues into burning building but would push management into a burning building because they’re so bad.
- It’s not just the policy... so if I have 6 guys in a Zulu, and I express these policy and safety concerns to middle management and say, ‘This policy puts us in unsafe work situations,’ they’ll just say ‘Well, you can fight it if you want.’ Mother fucker, you’re supposed to help me fight it! You’re my supervisor!
- Professionalism. This is lacking hugely in the supervisory and management roles.

- I just want to be happy coming to work again. We were told by our management that, 'It's on you to make yourself happy. We aren't here to make you happy.'
- PSA teaches courses on management, but this actually has nothing to do with leadership.
- The only leadership you see is at the Deputy Sheriffs level, management is just ticking boxes and meeting competencies. [Executive] also agrees it is a problem.
- If you want to be a white shirt, you do training – here it is just the panel, no training.
- In the military if you want to become a supervisor, you do training, if you want to become an Exec, you go back and do more training – why is there no training requirement for management in sheriffs?
- A lot of leadership you can't even talk to. They should be held to a standard, so they can function as leaders.
- Rotate all senior supervisors, at least inspectors should move around so offices get a fresh face, new input.
- Middle management needs to be quicker not to say no right away, listen to the staff and consult us.
- Transparency: we need to know what's decided at the top level; no one tells us what the supervisors decide in their meetings.
- EPDP, MyPerformance – supervisors don't talk with Deputy Sheriffs except around MyPerformance time. No personal engagement, no presence or communication with sheriffs.
- Sergeants and Acting Sergeants bring things up – [senior position] quashes it immediately.
- Issues circle within sheriffs instead of being addressed.
- Communication is top down – we see and hear things from other offices, but not sure what is happening in our own office. The rumour mill and lack of communication negatively impact morale.
- Feeling heard is a huge step to change. Speaking to you guys in person is a really welcome change. I don't think I would have been as open to inspectors. Again, it would feel similar to falling on deaf ears. So, I appreciate this. We're being heard for once. Otherwise, in other situations, feedback is taken personally in this organization.
- Staff need to feel cared for – Abbotsford office is like a family, everyone involved in everything. Need changes, to move people around, and more money.
- Racism – one Deputy mentioned the word 27 times in one WES survey – it was a waste of time, nothing ever happened.
- I've had supervisors tell me 'Well it's kind of late in your career to move up.'
- The organization doesn't protect us. They throw us under the bus. If we don't document everything, we're screwed. I started writing everything down because [supervisor] didn't believe me. If it's not written, it didn't happen. So, I said, 'fuck you, I'm starting a book.'
- There is disregard for a person as an employee – You made me feel so uncared about that I don't want to work for you.
- We feel unprotected, we feel like an inconvenience.
- Anything said will be held against you, so you don't say anything.
- As soon as someone gets a white shirt, they have immunity and stop caring. Will not catch an Inspector working past 5:30.
- Supervisors should no longer be able to pick on staff because they don't like or agree with us. People aren't held accountable to the same level.
- Stop letting sheriff management get away with everything and stop turning a blind eye.
- Management or union employees – deal with toxicity professionally and promptly. Nip it in the bud.

- Acting supervisor had a complaint filed against him racially charged – went under investigation, was found to be innocent, but there were no repercussions against person who filed the false complaint.

Stress and Workload

- Level one escorts. We want that on the Island for safety. Don't downgrade risk assessments.
- If nothing changes in 5 years, this outfit might be gone.
- Since '74, there's been a number of studies into the BC Sheriffs. And basically, nothing can cataclysmically change until other stakeholders come in and do something. So, it might be up to the Judges or whoever to be the ones who push for change here.
- How do we plug the dam before the April/May report from this project comes in?
- We've lost so many staff. We've been told all this time 'Oh, retention is fine.'
- Always a dollar short and a day late.
- It takes 6-9 months to hire someone, and then longer to train them, as opposed to the quick, jump-in for other job openings in the public service. And what's our return on investment? If you're not paying and treating us well enough, all this time and training goes down the drain.
- Management likes to say, 'If somebody quits, we'll just go grab someone else,' but that's not how it works. Replacing someone who's been on the job for 15-20 years is tough. We can't get any random off the street with the same level of knowledge and value.
- We're going to lose good staff – out of 7, only 2 older guys are staying, and we are already burnt out. Soon there will be no one left to keep everything running.
- Young staff are leaving, no staff in between, no staff to show new people the ropes and help with workload.
- Trickle down effect – attrition will always be there because sheriffs is used as a steppingstone. Reason for staying was work life balance ability, but if that isn't there, what is the point of staying.
- Float pool for 3 years – only 2 people are still around from a class of 20.
- Staffing and retention issues everywhere, including pretrial – walking around with clips asking all staff if they can do OT.
- Courts depend on OT. If Deputy Sheriffs didn't do OT, the courts would fail.
- Make the job easier to deal with, make it less frustrating.
- Staffing levels. Sheriffs are expected to move guys, and be in isolated areas. We need to be partnered, we should not be doing solo runs.
- Solo escorts are getting to be a safety issue. An inquiry was made through Corrections for a death during a 2-man escort, and recommendations were made. Recommendations were made based on 2 man, not solo escort. Needs to be 2 for safety, for all the issues previously mentioned, plus even just to help stay awake.
- We need to put more resources into retaining our staff, especially the staff who have been here quite a few years. They are responsible for training, mentoring, and passing along that knowledge and that's not getting done because we don't have the staff.
- The stats in individual offices are worth looking at. We're a busy office, but we constantly have to draw resources from elsewhere.
- Cell checks and calling every 15 mins while driving solo is dangerous. We have to take our eyes off the road to tinker around on our not functioning radios. The policy is for safety but it is inherently unsafe.
- People go on runs by themselves. Some people coming off drugs need up to 4 people to restrain them. People are getting injured seriously.

- Should be a 2-person run always, but with staffing issues it is always just 1 person per run.
- We used to have a policy where staff working OT overnight work for jury protection would get the next day off. Now it is split, and we have to work a regular shift plus OT. Have to work 16 hours, with a short break between. 8 hours between shift and OT – that does not account for driving in traffic, sleeping, eating, showering, etc.
- Now deputies work the day shift, go home, come back at 12:30am and work through to 8:30am. That plus their regular day shift.
- Work 8:30am to 4:30pm, then night shift, and then get next day off – should keep split shift, but Deputy Sheriffs who got off at 8:00am should be able to go home for the day. Local policy differs so much. Other offices are able to go home after, why is this office different?
- Used to be a good way to supplement OT but it's not appealing anymore – Sheriffs will do any OT but not the 12:30am shift because they know they will be compromised the next day. Failure on part of management, should not be putting people at risk. Why is this policy different from other offices, should be standard across all offices.
- Taking leave is difficult. Banked time off is outlawed, couldn't get loaned out to other office, almost missed a wedding, and missed a medical appointment.
- Staff with mental problems – deputies were put under a supervisor who would cry in her office everyday, staff were told don't make her mad, keep your head down, and did not do anything about the supervisor.
- Feels like a world of hurt staffing-wise.
- It's not the job that is stressful, it's everything else. Sheriffs love their jobs, it's just too bad they have to work around the clock to make a living.
- If wage isn't something that can be done due to budget, then flexibility needs to be created. Work/life balance needs to be a real priority. Walk the walk.
- To keep people in the North we need to keep people healthy. Better mental health benefits: only \$500/year isn't enough, cannot fund out of pocket.
- The situation in the South Okanagan Escort Centre really needs to be addressed. All the sheriffs in Vernon, Kelowna and Penticton are being affected and burnt out. It needs to be looked at. Too much is being pushed under the rug.
- People should get paid time off for safety reasons – people will make mistakes when they are tired.
- Would like to take leave without prejudice or judgement.

Recruitment

- Hiring should be done locally; this way people have a clear picture of what the day-to-day role is – otherwise it's always a bait and switch. Join in the North, stay in the North.
- Female deputies can search and transport male inmates, but male employees cannot do the same to female inmates. This puts so much work on the female deputies, they start thinking I'm just the gopher in the office, running around from woman to woman. Focus on female officer retention.
- There are so many people in these locations (Fort St. John, Quesnel, etc.) that want to work for the service, and who would be great, but maybe don't have the qualifications or the process is too complicated, so they don't do bother applying.
- Revamp the application and recruitment process.
- Introduce a fair and standardized application process but tailor it specifically to regions.

- Make an exemption process, a challenge process for recruitment from say, the RCMP: take people who want to lateral into Sheriffs but don't want to go through the application process.
- The job changes you, you become very jaded (it is a justice system thing). People are complaining there is a lot of swearing, etc., and they go to the Chief for this stuff. Why are people that are too soft being hired? They will get pushed around by managers and accused, convicted, prisoners. It's a big mess.
- Had one of the worst deputies doing training, so recruits are being trained poorly.
- Can't hire the right people, can't fit them in the right spots.
- We're so far behind that we have to keep people who shouldn't be here.
- Sheriffs' is made of people close to retirement. The ones with experience are leaving.
- People would leave sheriffs and go to police if they weren't too old.
- Someone who shouldn't be a sheriff and gets through the cracks will be given a gun sooner or later because they can't fill classes. People in classes now are the bottom of the barrel, people who were turned away the first time.
- There are quality people who want to stay but can't afford it.
- Online courses are easy to cheat on.
- The deputies complete training at the JI but then when they get to the job, it's nothing like it.
- Transparency in recruitment – none of that 'Come to sheriffs because it's action packed' stuff anymore. If people understand where their career is going, people might not be stuck looking on for other things. The fact that the last two years have pushed out the people who were most excited about the job, says a lot.
- It takes more to become a sheriff than RCMP. You going to spend 700\$ to roll the dice, or just apply to the RCMP and get in? They take everyone. People who fail sheriff interviews become cops and get paid more.

Staffing Practices

- Float pool – get rid of it.
- No law enforcement agency has a float pool. Should staff each office to capacity.
- Float contract supersedes everyone else's – special contract for this position, gets prime time in July.
- New people should not be floating anyways, they are set up to fail because they are constantly moving offices, they should settle into a location. Otherwise, they don't know exits, don't know procedures or plans. Just thrown a set of keys.
- New people are strewn about, other Deputy Sheriffs say it is scary watching them.
- People only get a supervisory position because they can tell a good story. They get help with competencies, but they can't do a good job. Line staff have to help train them to do the job.
- Program needs to be analyzed from top to bottom because it's not efficient and it's morale-damaging.
- Panelling – they'll give extra marks to someone, they get the position, now they owe the person on panel something for the extra points.
- The inside joke in this office is that things will be better 'by October,' because 6 or 7 years ago that's what a supervisor said in regard to them getting more staff by October of that year. It never happened, so the joke is still running.

Professional Development

- More training. Keep the stability and hours though.
- If I show an interest in advancing my career, then let's actually make movements. We constantly bring it forward to get training opportunities, but if I don't drive the bus fully on my own, nothing happens. It should be a priority, if we don't get that, people leave.
- The training piece – there needs to be more engagement. There should be some more avenues of choice for people who want to improve themselves. Here you can either be a trainer or a supervisor, you should have options other than supervising. Variety to grow and expand. Even our legal studies, there's no refresher on it. There are no formalized avenues to learn and branch out. Have your go to people in each office about things who can mentor others who are interested. Give people something to work towards and more training!
- You need to properly develop the new ones, but there's not enough ongoing training or knowledge succession. The idiosyncrasies and nuances – no one listens to the folks with 30 years of experience!
- You want to be trained by the people who are passionate about the job – but now the best ones, are bitter. Because the organization has ruined the job for them.
- More opportunities, swapping Lower Mainland employees for Northern employees. Sending people to the North so Northern people can go do other things.
- If something happens 3 years after training, we won't remember how to act – we need refreshers.
- IIO will hold sheriffs liable if something happens, and they didn't have the training or refreshers they needed. Shooting is a perishable skill, we need more practice, training, and refreshers.
- Bring staff together, currently there is no team camaraderie, it is office against office. Everyone is all supposed to get the same training. We should be training together, not only to complete the training, but also to get to know people in the office in a different way, to know how they are going to react in a situation, know how they will handle things together, and build respect for each other.
- We should be compensated for training time, we can't afford it.
- There is favoritism for opportunities, and nepotism – you have to really fight for what you want.
- If you put in a request and the supervisor doesn't like you, they will reject it.
- Filled out EPDP for Deputy Sheriffs to just sign it instead of filling it out himself.
- There's a Deputy who has all the training and skills necessary, but they won't make him an instructor because he is too vocal.
- More even distribution of training and ability to get into some of these programs.
- Vancouver Law Courts (the mothership) can snap their fingers, and they get unlimited resources. They do not have the same constraints that a lot of the satellite offices have.
- The Interior generally feels like we're in a different country. Lower Mainland feels like the main focus. People know and assume that there'll be no training up in the Interior.
- Police agency tells young people to get pre-trained with sheriffs for 6 months and then come to police. On graduation day new trainees get poached by police recruiters.

Tools and Workspace

- Radios are terrible. Glitchy, change channels, no reception, known to be not good, even when there is cell service everywhere. No radios when Rogers went down, operated without comms for a full day. Everyone is aware of issues, but no action is taken. Reactive not proactive. Radios don't even work across the street and in the basement. How can they consider these safety concerns as acceptable working conditions?
- We don't have a SPOC radio channel, and cannot communicate with SPOC. Radios have zone 1 and 2, 222, 222a, 222b, but not SPOC. Radio comes preloaded with all court locations except SPOC channel because there is only limited room in the radio.
- RCMP radio has an extensive system – sheriffs should get RCMP radios.
- Boot allowance is one pair for 12-15 months, but if something happens earlier it's way too difficult to get them replaced.
- We have new vests, but we can't use them properly because [of] claims we look too much like police. 'Look like this, but don't act like this.'
- Sheriffs have evolved over the years – every piece of gear was accumulated over the years as some sort of trinket. Items are just hand me downs from police, given to mollify sheriffs – these are just band aids – no more trinkets and cheap hand me down gear.
- Search gate needs to be implemented, but it won't happen until there is a major incident. We're reactive not proactive.
- Need video units to be operational, and we need staff. We're at the mercy of corrections moving video court units at their leisure. Takes months and months to replace units.
- Some of the policies are going to put officers in danger.
- Trust in our training more. Let us utilize the tools that have been provided to us e.g., the carbines and emergency equipment. We teach active shooter training and how to stop a threat. If there is ever a major incident such as an active shooter situation in a courthouse the carbine rifle would be the appropriate tool and we should be able to use those tools if needed. We should be able to use our emergency lights because it protects our Sheriffs on the road, and it also protects the public if there is an accident.

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Appendix 1: Survey Instrument

About this survey:

The WES surveys provide the insights that are foundational to creating and reinforcing optimal work environments. As a Service, we have forged ahead in many drivers such as teamwork, job suitability and supervisor-level management.

Since becoming Chief Sheriff in 2013, I have committed to understanding and improving employee engagement and have made it one of my key priorities. Together we made a difference in our organization, but much work remains as we create an inclusive environment that supports all employees in their staff experience and career aspirations.

To learn more about what we can do to continue to improve your experience within BCSS, we've engaged Dr. Richard Brown of the Corporate Management Services Division of our ministry to help us. To begin the process, all Sheriff Service staff at all levels will be asked to complete this survey. Understanding our challenges and building on our strengths will be critical as we create a more resilient, healthy work environment that benefits us all. Your participation in this process is key and we want you to have your say.

I look forward to the research Dr. Brown and his team will be conducting and sharing the results with all of you.

Sincerely,
Paul Corrado

This survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

If you are using assistive technology programs (such as JAWS or Dragon), please use your navigation keys/commands to complete the survey. You can use the keyboard space bar on the "Back", "Reset", "Next" and "Submit" buttons to navigate through the survey. To complete the survey using a plain text version, select the "Go to plain text version" hyperlink at the top of the screen.

Protecting your information:

This survey is anonymous. No comments will be attributed to any individual; only summarized themes will be shared with management. Please do not include personal information about yourself or others in your responses. All data from this survey is collected and managed in accordance with the provisions of PIA AG/SG19023, sections 26 (c.) and (e.) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Research Ethics. This survey is administered by the BC Justice Sector's Business Research & Diagnostics team on behalf of the BC Sheriff Service. If you have any questions or concerns regarding data use, privacy or confidentiality issues, please email BusinessResearch@gov.bc.ca.

About You

1. What is your primary role in the Branch?
2. What region do you currently work in?

About Your Work Environment

3. What do you see as the main problems currently impacting your work environment? *(Please include as much detail as possible and describe the impact on you and your colleagues. Please do not use one- or two-word answers like 'Pay' or 'Management' as such responses do not provide sufficient information to help us really understand your concerns. The more information and detail you provide here, the more effectively we can align subsequent research to identify long-standing issues within the Service.)*
4. In your opinion, what should be done to best resolve the problems you identified in the previous question? *(Please include as much detail as possible so that we can fully understand your solutions to the main issues you have identified.)*
5. Are you actively seeking alternative employment away from the BC Sheriff Service?
6. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group to further discuss your work environment issues and brainstorm possible solutions?

If respondent answers “Yes” to question 6 they will see the following two questions:

- a) Would you be willing to travel within your region to participate in a focus group?
- b) Would you be willing to work paid overtime to participate in a focus group?

Appendix 2: BC Sheriffs Data Portal

BC Sheriff Service Focus Group Research Anonymous Comment Submission

Thank you for participating in one of our recent focus group sessions. If you felt unable to share all of your thoughts or comments during the session, please use the anonymous submission box below. YOUR SUBMISSION IS COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS.

The Business Research & Diagnostics team fully understands your need to be assured of the safeguards in place to protect your identity while completing this survey. The information we are asking you to provide may be sensitive; sharing this information without a full understanding of the safeguards in place may make some respondents feel uncomfortable.

In order to fully protect the anonymity of your responses, the following measures have been put in place:

- This survey is administered independently by the Business Research & Diagnostics group at Corporate Management Services Branch. It is hosted on a secure server inaccessible to anyone within your branch;
- No personal information will be collected, used or disclosed;
- The survey software does not link responses to IDIR log-on information, and does not track your Internet Protocol (IP) address;
- The survey uses 256 bit SSL encryption between your computer and our server, the same encryption used for online banking;
- Raw data is read only by the researcher for the purpose of identifying common themes and causal factors, and is not otherwise shared;
- This survey is completely Internet accessible and does not need to be completed from a government-issued device.
- This survey can also be completed using the TOR Internet Browser, a specialized web browser that routes data through a series of international proxies to mask both the identity and location of the user, but cannot be used on government VPN.
- This survey can also be completed using any commercially provided VPN service, such as Express VPN, Nord VPN, Surfshark VPN, etc.

Protecting Your Information:

All data from this survey is collected and managed in accordance with the provisions of Privacy Impact Assessment AG/SG19023, section 26 (c) and (e) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Research Ethics. If you have any questions or concerns regarding data use, privacy or confidentiality issues, please email businessresearch@gov.bc.ca.

What else do you think our research team needs to know?

Appendix 3: Focus Groups by Administrative Division and Research Protocol

Focus Groups by Administrative Division

The research team conducted **23** in-person focus groups and **12** virtual focus groups with employees in all regions and all ranks of the organization.

Project Activity	Focus Group Location	Date	Number of Focus Groups
Region 5: Northern Region	In-person Prince George	2022-10-15	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person Terrace	2022-10-22	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-18	Sergeants x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-26	Staff Sergeants x1
Region 4: Interior Region	In-person Kelowna	2022-10-24	Deputy Sheriffs x2
	In-person Kelowna	2022-10-25	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person Kamloops	2022-10-27	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person Kamloops	2022-10-28	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-20	Sergeants x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-25	Staff Sergeants x1
Region 3: Fraser Region	In-person Abbotsford	2022-11-01	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person Abbotsford	2022-11-02	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person Surrey	2022-11-14	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person Richmond	2022-11-14	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person Surrey	2022-11-15	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person Port Coquitlam	2022-11-17	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person New Westminster	2022-11-18	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-17	Sergeants x1
Virtual via Teams	2023-01-24	Staff Sergeants x1	
Sheriff Provincial Operations Centre (SPOC)	In-Person SPOC HQ	2022-11-22	Deputy Sheriffs x1
Region 2: Vancouver Coastal Region	In-person Vancouver Law Courts	2022-11-23	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-person 222 Main St.	2022-11-25	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-17	Sergeants x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-24	Staff Sergeants x1
Region 1: Vancouver Island Region	In-person Campbell River	2022-12-07	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	In-Person Nanaimo	2022-12-08	Deputy Sheriffs x1

Project Activity	Focus Group Location	Date	Number of Focus Groups
	In-person Victoria	2022-12-09	Deputy Sheriffs x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-16	Sergeants x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-20	Staff Sergeants x1
Sheriff Provincial Programs	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-19	Staff Sergeants x1
	Virtual via Teams	2023-01-25	Sergeants x1
Sheriff Management Team (SMT)	In-person Surrey Leadership Conference	2022-11-07	Inspectors x2
	In-person Chilliwack SMT Meeting	2022-02-08	Superintendents x1

Focus Group Research Protocol

Speaking points and Research Questions

Introduction:

- We are from the Business Research & Diagnostics Team with Corporate Management Services Branch. We are independent from BC Sheriffs; we work for the Justice Sector, but we have an independent research and consulting role.
- As professional researchers, we are governed by the Canadian Tri-Council Policy on Ethical Conduct for Research.
- Anonymity – we will not ask your names, or identify you in any way, to management or executives. Our notes will document your observations and suggestions, but not you.
- You are also expected to respect your colleagues’ anonymity.
- There will be no retribution for sharing your comments today. There may be things you would not want to say directly to a supervisor or manager, but you feel are important issues to be addressed to improve this workplace. This is the place to share them.
- If at any point following this session, you feel that you are facing retribution because of something you said today, you can contact us directly, and we will take your complaint very seriously. We will report it to your executives and even the Deputy Minister.

Purpose of this session:

- This research is being conducted to explore attrition and retention issues within the BC Sheriff Service, and as a follow up to the falling scores on the Work Environment Survey.
- The main objectives are to gain a thorough understanding of why employees leave the BC Sheriff Service and gather information about what changes would be necessary to improve retention.
- Our research findings will be shared with your executives, but we will make sure to remove any information that may identify individuals.
- This is the information gathering stage. Eventually, we will be working with executives to create an action plan to create change.

Reminders:

- This is not a complaining session. This is not just about your personal situation. We want to find out what the problems are in the system that are putting pressure on your group of staff.

- Your leaders are committed to consulting with you and making changes to your work environment. However, this will not be accomplished overnight. You may not see immediate results from this session.
- Please try to focus on providing constructive and realistic suggestions.
- If there is something you want to share with us, but are not comfortable doing so in this venue, please reach out to us directly via email or phone, or use the bit.ly/bcsheriffs data portal that has been established to collect such information. This data portal is completely anonymous and can be accessed through any Internet enabled device, and supports the use of VPN or the TOR browser for additional protection.

Focus Group Questions:

1. What do you see as the major issues impacting job satisfaction in the BC Sheriff service?
Possible probing questions:
 - a) *Can you provide more details?*
 - b) *How are those issues impacting you and your colleagues?*
 - c) ***If discussion on pay goes on too long:*** *We understand that pay is a big issue for the Sheriff Service. We have a lot of information about that from the Work Environment Survey and the Sheriff survey we recently conducted, plus what you have told us here today. We only have a limited time here to gather information that we don't have. Are there any other issues apart from pay that we need to know about?*
2. Based on what you've told us here today, what do you see as the most effective way to address these problems?
3. We only have 10 minutes left in our session today. Is there anything else you think our research team needs to know about, or that you would like to tell the Deputy Minister directly?

Appendix 4: Structured Interview Questions

Note that the following structured interview template was used for the *Court of Appeal of British Columbia, Supreme Court of British Columbia, Provincial Court of British Columbia, Court Services Branch, the British Columbia Prosecution Service* and the *BC Bar Association*.

BC Sheriff Service Qualitative Research Initiative

Interview Questions: External Stakeholder

Interview Questions:

1. In what way do you interact with the BC Sheriff Service?
2. How would you generally characterize your interactions with the BC Sheriff Service? Are these interactions positive, negative, disorganized, inconsistent etc.?
3. In your opinion, is the BC Sheriff Service able to meet the needs of your office?
4. Do you have any concerns about the BC Sheriff Service as it is currently structured, managed or operated?
5. How do you think BC Sheriff Service's relationship to your office could be improved?
6. Is there anything else you think we need to know or consider as our team conducts its review of the BC Sheriff Service?

Note that the following structured interview template was used for the *Court Services Branch Assistant Deputy Minister, the Chief Sheriff* and the two *Deputy Chief Sheriffs*.

BC Sheriff Service Qualitative Research Initiative

Interview Questions: ADM, Chief Sheriff & Deputy Chief Sheriff

1. What do you see as the main issues affecting the BC Sheriff Service?
2. How long have these issues been going on, and what have been the barriers to fixing them (both internal and external)?
3. What are the risks of not resolving the issues you have identified?
4. In an ideal world, what two immediate solutions would you implement to resolve the issues within the BC Sheriff Service?
5. How would you describe the role of the BC Sheriff Service today?
6. In your opinion, what do you think the role of the BC Sheriff Service should be in the future?
7. Is there anything else you think we need to know or consider as our team conducts its review of the BC Sheriff Service?

The template used for the two Sheriff Services *subject matter experts* included in the structured interview process can not be shared, since the questions asked of each individual would make their identity readily apparent.