

The Costs of Police Overtime in Charleston

By Sara Whitaker

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Introduction

In March 2023, the Charleston City Council approved a \$111.6 million budget for the 2024 fiscal year.¹ Once again, the city dedicated one-fifth of its budget (\$23.0 million) to uniformed Charleston Police officers for wages, benefits, pensions, insurance, and equipment.² Of the \$12.3 million budgeted for wages, \$2.6 million was allocated for overtime pay.³

High overtime spending is not new for the Charleston Police Department (CPD). Since fiscal year 2020, CPD officers have claimed \$9.1 million in overtime wages.⁴ Each year, officers have logged thousands more hours of overtime than the previous year. In fiscal year 2023, officers claimed a total of 78,004 additional work hours.⁵

This year, Charleston lawmakers allocated more general fund revenue to police overtime than to economic and community development efforts or the public library. In fact, police overtime exceeded the allotments to the Coordinated Addiction Response Effort (CARE) Office, the Mayor's Office of Economic and Community Development, the public library, the public art office and projects, and all city festivals combined.

This moment offers the public a chance to ask questions about the cost, size, and oversight practices of the city's largest agency.

¹ "Municipal Budget July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024," City of Charleston, 6, available here: <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/City-of-Charleston-Budget-FY-2024.pdf>.

² City of Charleston, "Fiscal Year 2024 Budget," 119-121 (Note: an additional \$1.5 million is allocated to civilian police personnel).

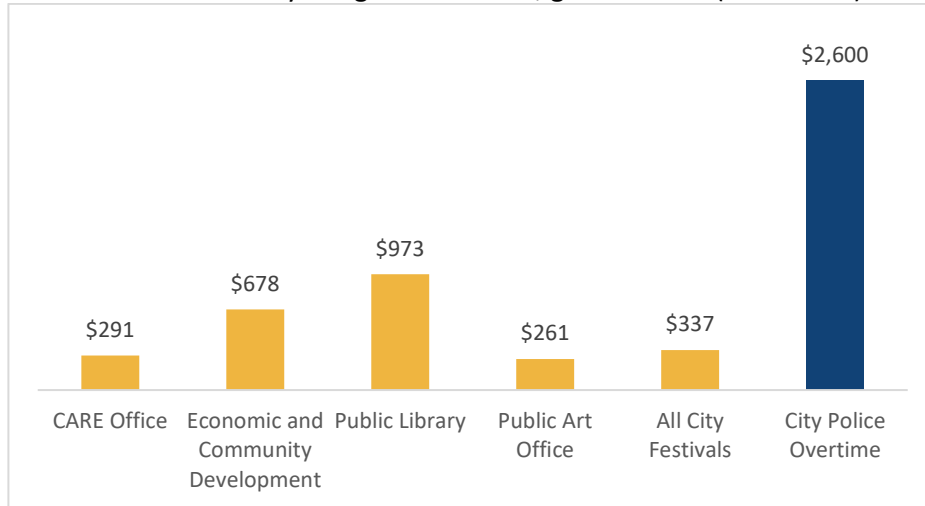
³ City of Charleston, "Fiscal Year 2024 Budget," 120.

⁴ WVCPB analysis of Charleston Police wages for fiscal years 2020 through 2023, available here: "City of Charleston Police Uniform Fiscal Year 2020 Wages," https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/police_wages_by-fy20.pdf; "City of Charleston Police Uniform Fiscal Year 2021 Wages," https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/police_wages_by-fy21.pdf; "City of Charleston Police Uniform Fiscal Year 2022 Wages," https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/police_wages_by-fy22.pdf; "City of Charleston Police Uniform Fiscal Year 2023 Wages," https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/police_wages_by-fy23.pdf.

⁵ City of Charleston, "CPD Wages in Fiscal Year 2023."

Figure 1: Charleston Police Overtime Budget Exceeds Combined Funding for Other Priorities

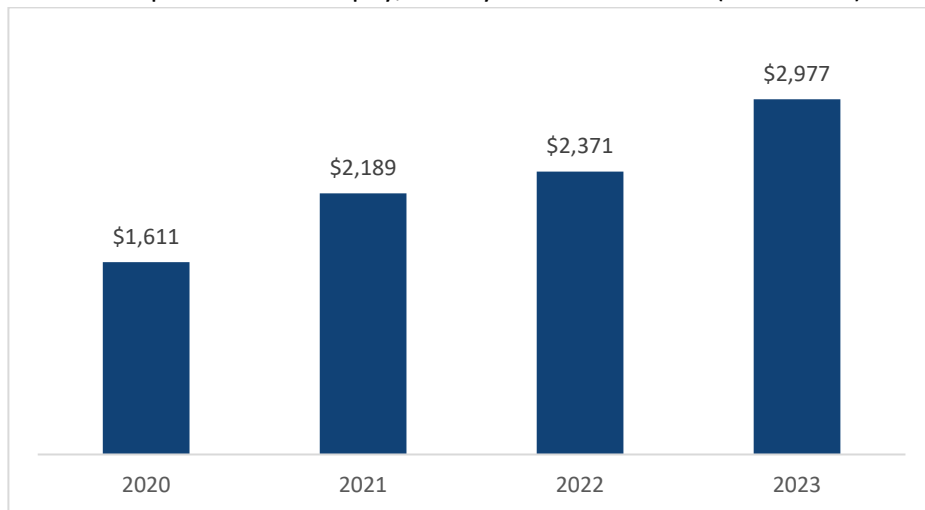
FY 2024 Charleston city budget allocations, general fund (thousands)



Source: FY 2024 Budget, City of Charleston

Figure 2: \$9.1 Million in Overtime Pay

Charleston police overtime pay, fiscal years 2020 – 2023 (thousands)



Source: WVCBP analysis of CPD wages, FY 2020-2023.

Are Police Underpaid?

One may wonder if all this overtime is necessary because Charleston Police officers are underpaid.

In July 2023, Charleston Police advertised a \$53,000 starting salary.⁶ This base salary, which has increased by \$8,000 in the last two years,⁷ is roughly the same as the median *household* income in Charleston (\$54,101).⁸

⁶ Charleston, WV Police Department, "We are Testing for Probationary Patrolman," July 25, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=599904608984816&set=a.161709639470984>.

⁷ Charleston, WV Police Department, "We're hiring!" June 9, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/ChasWVPolice/posts/2799240277033459>.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, July 1, 2022 (V2022) – Quick Facts: Charleston city, West Virginia, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/charlestoncitywestvirginia/PST045222>.

The July job posting also highlighted a \$15,000 signing bonus for certified officers, which means an officer could earn \$68,000 in his first year on the job. Plus, CPD employment comes with additional benefits that include health insurance, access to an employee wellness center, and a pension after 20 years of employment that can be accessed at age 50.

In January 2023, Charleston's mayor called on the City Council to ensure that all city employees earned no less than \$15 per hour.⁹ The mayor described her position in a radio interview: "Do I think the highest paid members of our city government should get paid more? Nope, sure don't. But for the guys and gals working on the back of the trucks and working out in the sleet and snow and the cold, do I think we should look at their salary, you bet I do."¹⁰

Ultimately, the City Council passed only small pay increases for the city's lowest earners and delayed a \$15 minimum wage until fiscal year 2027.¹¹ The same budget approved \$310,000 in pay raises for CPD officers, none of whom earn less than \$23 per hour.¹²

Lack of Oversight

CPD is not shy about promoting overtime pay to potential job applicants. The same social media post advertising a \$53,000 base salary also highlights "Overtime Opportunities."¹³ During a 2021 CPD hiring push, one news article reported, "Police said there are almost unlimited opportunities for overtime."¹⁴

The CPD *Policy & Procedures Manual* is silent on procedures for tracking and approving overtime hours.¹⁵ The manual provides no cap on the number of hours in a row an officer can work. Nor is there a limit on consecutive work days. The CPD Manual does mandate officers "give a full day's work for a full day's pay."¹⁶ According to an August 2023 statement from then-chief Tyke Hunt, CPD's overtime work is "reviewed and approved by a supervisor of higher or equal rank."¹⁷

Last year, 49 Charleston Police officers claimed at least 600 hours of overtime.¹⁸ Seventeen officers claimed more than 1,000 extra hours of work – the equivalent of 20 overtime hours every week.

⁹ Lori Kersey, "Goodwin Proposes \$15 Minimum Wage for City Workers, Housing for Mental Health Providers," *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, January 4, 2023, https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/kanawha_valley/goodwin-proposes-15-minimum-wage-for-city-workers-housing-for-mental-health-providers/article_c9500035-891b-523a-b115-b22aa22a98e1.html.

¹⁰ Chris Lawrence, "Goodwin Discusses Raising Pay of the Lowest Paid," *WCHS News Network*, January 9, 2023, <https://wchsnetwork.com/goodwin-discusses-raising-pay-of-the-lowest-paid/>.

¹¹ Lori Kersey, "Charleston City Council Approves \$112 Million Budget," *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, March 21, 2023, https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/kanawha_valley/charleston-city-council-approves-112-million-budget/article_55b75289-5550-55a5-8101-b9513330b524.html.

¹² "Police uniform list rank 5.26.23 (002) REDACTED.pdf" provided by Tiffany Redman, email message to author, June 5, 2023, available here: <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CPD-Uniform-Police-Hourly-Wage.pdf>.

¹³ Charleston, WV Police Department, "We are Testing for Probationary Patrolman," July 25, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=599904608984816&set=a.161709639470984>.

¹⁴ Jeff Morris, "Charleston Seeks Police Recruits, Offers Cash Incentive for Certified Officers," *WCHS*, June 10, 2021, <https://wchstv.com/news/local/charleston-seeks-police-recruits-offers-cash-incentive-for-certified-officers>.

¹⁵ *Charleston Police Department Policy & Procedures Manual*, https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CPD-Policy_Procedure_Redacted2021.pdf.

¹⁶ "Policy 13.3.12: Giving a Full Day's Work for a Full Day's Pay," *Charleston Police Department Policy & Procedures Manual*, https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CPD-Policy_Procedure_Redacted2021.pdf.

¹⁷ City of Charleston, West Virginia Police Department, "Press Release," August 11, 2023, <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CPD-Media-Release-August-11-2023.pdf>.

¹⁸ City of Charleston, "CPD Wages in Fiscal Year 2023."

One officer stood out, taking home \$329,000 in overtime wages over the last four years.¹⁹ Each year, he claimed an increasing number of overtime hours, leading up to 2023, where he claimed 2,546 hours of overtime. In other words, this officer reported working seven extra hours per day, in addition to his full-time job, for 365 days straight. In fiscal year 2023, this officer took home \$175,572 – more than the chief of police (\$119,267),²⁰ the mayor (\$125,000),²¹ and the governor (\$150,000).²²

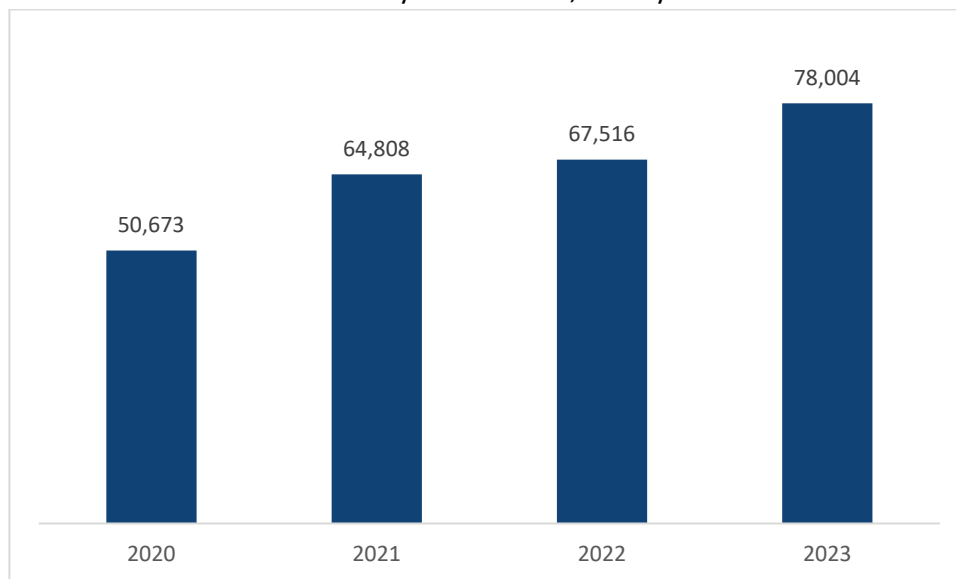
CPD's high-ranking officers are the most enthusiastic claimers of overtime. In July 2023, there were 40 officers with a rank of Sergeant or higher.²³ In fiscal year 2023, those officers claimed a total of 29,336 overtime hours – averaging 733.4 hours per officer.²⁴ By comparison, the 141 officers in the lower ranks of corporal or patrolman, claimed a total of 48,668 hours for an average of 345.2 hours per officer.

There are no formal rules governing overtime use. And CPD's high-ranking officers set an example of claiming hundreds of extra hours per year.

The result: Charleston Police officers have consistently taken more overtime pay than the city has budgeted. In fiscal year 2021, CPD overtime was \$319,557 over budget.²⁵ In fiscal year 2022, CPD overtime pay was \$494,679 over budget.²⁶ In fiscal year 2023, CPD overtime pay was \$734,152 over budget.²⁷

Figure 3: More and More Overtime Each Year

Total overtime hours claimed by CPD officers, fiscal years 2020 – 2023



Source: WVCBP analysis of CPD wages, FY 2020-2023.

¹⁹ WVCBP analysis of CPD wages, FY 2020-2023.

²⁰ City of Charleston, "CPD Wages in Fiscal Year 2023."

²¹ City of Charleston, "Fiscal Year 2024 Budget," 10.

²² West Virginia Code § 6-7-2(b).

²³ "Copy of July 2023 Rank List.pdf," provided by Tiffany Redman, email message to author, July 26, 2023, available here: <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Copy-of-July-2023-Rank-List.pdf>.

²⁴ WVCBP analysis of City of Charleston, "CPD Wages in Fiscal Year 2023."

²⁵ "Municipal Budget July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021," City of Charleston, 113, <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/City-of-Charleston-Budget-FY-2021.pdf>; City of Charleston, "CPD Wages in Fiscal Year 2021."

²⁶ "Municipal Budget July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022," City of Charleston, 116, <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/City-of-Charleston-Budget-FY-2022.pdf>; City of Charleston, "CPD Wages in Fiscal Year 2022."

²⁷ City of Charleston, "Fiscal Year 2023 Budget," 116; City of Charleston, "CPD Wages in Fiscal Year 2023."

The Overtime Paradox: Paying More for Less

There is evidence that working more hours can harm officers and the people they serve.

One study compared the work hours of two sets of officers within the Phoenix Police Department. While one precinct worked four 10-hour shifts per week, the other precinct worked three shifts of 13 hours and 20 minutes.²⁸ Officers working the longer shifts experienced significant reductions in the quantity and quality of sleep, concentration, and cognitive processing.²⁹ At the same time, those officers saw significant *increases* in fatigue, reaction time, and citizen complaints.³⁰ It's no surprise that the officers in the study overwhelmingly preferred the shorter shift length and that the study authors found "no apparent advantages but considerable liabilities" associated with longer work days.³¹

It is notable that this is not an overtime study, but instead a study of long days. What happens to an officer's performance when he works long days – nearly every day of the year?

Fatigue sets in. For police officers, chronic fatigue is linked to higher rates of on-duty injury,³² absenteeism,³³ and metabolic syndrome, which can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.³⁴

In July, an Oceana officer at the end of a 12-hour shift, left his police dog in his car while he went into the station to complete paperwork.³⁵ The officer, who had been up for more than 24 hours, fell asleep while in the station. When he woke up, the temperature outside had risen, and his dog had died inside the car.³⁶ The officer resigned, and the local prosecutor asked the West Virginia State Police to investigate.

There is a danger for the community being policed, too. One study set out to understand how officer fatigue influenced implicit racial bias.³⁷ Unlike explicit bias that an individual claims, implicit bias describes the "subtle and largely unconscious or semiconscious attitudes that influence behavior."³⁸ The study found implicit racial bias was not a fixed trait and "[o]fficers who were more sleep restricted displayed greater anti-Black bias."³⁹

²⁸ Leonard B. Bell et al., "Effects of 13-Hour 20-Minute Shifts on Law Enforcement Officers' Sleep, Cognitive Abilities, Health, Quality of Life, and Work Performance: The Phoenix Study," *Police Quarterly* 18, 3 (2015): 295, <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2015-Effects-of-13-hr-Shifts-on-Law-Enforcement.pdf>.

²⁹ Bell et al., "Effects of 13-Hour 20-Minute Shifts," 294.

³⁰ Bell et al., "Effects of 13-Hour 20-Minute Shifts," 294.

³¹ Bell et al., "Effects of 13-Hour 20-Minute Shifts," 332.

³² Desta Fekedulegn, "Fatigue and On-Duty Injury Among Police Officers: The BCOPS Study," *Journal of Safety Research* 60 (2017): 1, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6311701/pdf/nihms-1002822.pdf>.

³³ Samantha Riedy, "Fatigue and Short-Term Unplanned Absences Among Police Officers," *Policing* 43, 3 (2020), 2, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8205509/pdf/nihms-1652745.pdf>.

³⁴ John M. Violanti et al., "Atypical Work Hours and Metabolic Syndrome Among Police Officers," *Archives of Environmental & Occupational Health* 64 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1080/19338240903241259>.

³⁵ Brandon Eanes, "Local K-9 Officer Dies After Being Left in Hot Car," *WVNS*, August 10, 2023, <https://www.wvnstv.com/top-stories/k-9-officer-reportedly-dies-after-being-left-in-hot-car/>.

³⁶ Jeff Jenkins, "State Police to Investigate Death of Oceana K-9 Officer," *MetroNews*, August 10, 2023, <https://wvmetronews.com/2023/08/10/state-police-to-investigate-death-of-oceana-k-9-officer/>.

³⁷ Lois James, "The Stability of Implicit Racial Bias in Police Officers," *Police Quarterly* 21, 1 (2018): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611117732974>.

³⁸ James, "Implicit Racial Bias in Police," 31.

³⁹ James, "Implicit Racial Bias in Police," 46.

These findings are particularly worrisome for a high-overtime department with a history of disproportionately arresting Black people.

In the mid-2010s, Charleston police statistics revealed that Black people were arrested at 2.5 times the rate as white people.⁴⁰ Although Black residents made up 11.8 percent of Charleston's population, Black people made up 28 to 30 percent of CPD arrests.⁴¹ In 2016, CPD announced a series of measures to reduce this racial disparity in arrests, including body cameras, anti-racism trainings, and monthly public reports on arrest demographics.

Seven years later, CPD continues to disproportionately arrest Black people. An analysis of CPD's monthly public reports from the first half of 2023 shows that Black people accounted for 26.5 percent of all arrests and citations, despite representing 14.2 percent of the city's population.⁴²

Too Few Officers – Or Too Many?

Some may wonder if Charleston spends so much on police overtime because there are not enough full-time officers.

But a comparison to other police departments in the region reveals that CPD's 165-officer department is double or triple the size of departments serving cities larger than Charleston (population 47,129).⁴³

Spring Hill, Tennessee has a population of 55,800 – 8,000 more residents than Charleston. One of the fastest-growing cities in the country, Spring Hill has 46 uniformed officers, less than one-third of the Charleston police force.⁴⁴

Cuyahoga Falls and Newark are Ohio cities of 50,000 residents (3,000 more residents than Charleston). Cuyahoga Falls employs 74 uniformed officers.⁴⁵ Newark Police Department has 75 uniformed officers.⁴⁶

Huntington, West Virginia, a city of 45,746 people, has 92 uniformed officers.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Hoppy Kercheval, "Charleston Police, Community Leaders Work to Avoid Trouble Before it Happens," *MetroNews*, October 6, 2016, <https://wvmetronews.com/2016/10/06/charleston-police-community-leaders-work-to-avoid-trouble-before-it-happens/>.

⁴¹ Erin Beck, "Charleston Police Announce Plan to Improve Race Relations," *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, October 4, 2016, https://www.wvgazette.com/news/legal_affairs/charleston-police-announce-plan-to-improve-racerelations/%20article_b78675a4-d3af-5108-b5ba-4bac03077bbc.html.

⁴² Analysis of "CARE Reports" from January through June 2023, provided by Doug Paxton in emails to author.

⁴³ City of Charleston, "July 2023 Rank List"; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, July 1, 2022 (V2022) – Quick Facts: Cuyahoga Falls city, Ohio; Spring Hill city, Tennessee; Newark city, Ohio; Charleston city, West Virginia, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/cuyahogafallscityohio,springhillcitytennessee,newarkcityohio,charlestoncitywv/virginia/PST045222> (accessed August 15, 2023).

⁴⁴ "Large Southern Cities Lead Nation in Population Growth," *United States Census Bureau*, May 18, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/subcounty-metro-micro-estimates.html>; Author phone call with Margaret Derryberry of the Spring Hill Police Department, August 15, 2023.

⁴⁵ Author phone call with Sergeant Schmidt of the Cuyahoga Falls Police Department, August 15, 2023.

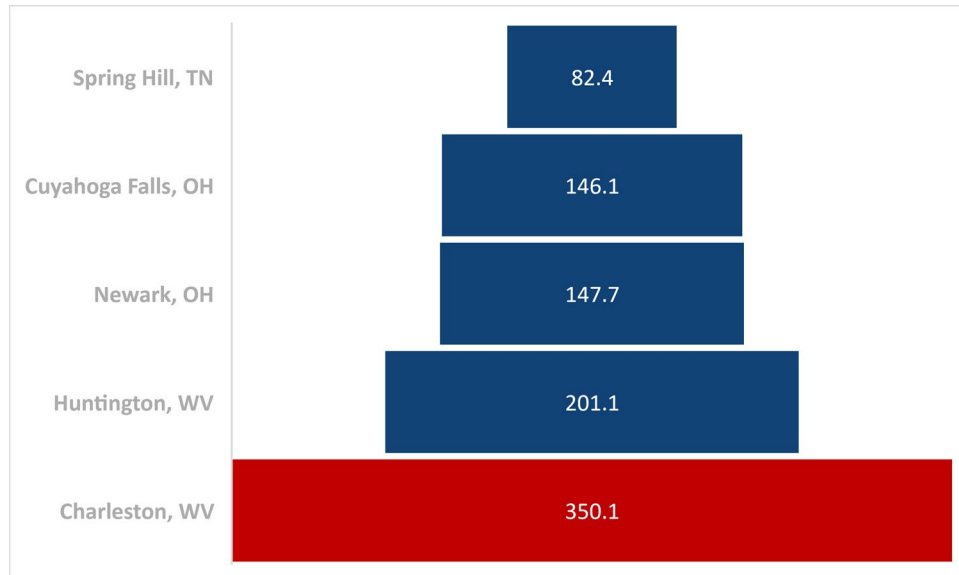
⁴⁶ Author phone call with Becky Holtz of the Newark Police Department, August 15, 2023.

⁴⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, July 1, 2022 (V2022) – Quick Facts: Huntington city, West Virginia, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/huntingtoncitywestvirginia/PST045222>; Author phone call with Bethany Veach of the Huntington Police Department, August 23, 2023.

And CPD is not the only law enforcement agency based in Charleston, which also serves as the headquarters for the Kanawha County Sheriff's Office, the West Virginia State Police, and the West Virginia Capitol Police.

Figure 4: Charleston Police Staffing Out of Line with Like-Sized Cities

Number of officers per 100,000 residents in Charleston and Appalachian cities



Source: WVCBP analysis of U.S. Census population data and number of police officers for Charleston, WV, Huntington, WV, Spring Hill, TN, Cuyahoga Falls, OH, and Newark, OH.

Charleston has twice – or in the case of Spring Hill, triple – the number of officers serving similarly-sized cities. To bring CPD staffing in line with cities like Newark and Cuyahoga would require Charleston to reduce the number of uniformed officers from 165 to 70. Even if Charleston staffed its police department at the same higher rate as the Huntington Police Department, there would be no more than 95 officers.

Where Did the Excess Policing Go?

The public is primed to believe that most police work is responding to major crimes: homicide, sexual assault, robbery, and felony assault. But according to CPD's annual summary, there were 153 total reports of these offenses in 2022 – slightly down from the pandemic years.⁴⁸ Property offenses – such as larceny, breaking and entering, and motor vehicle theft – have remained flat over the last three years.⁴⁹

Property incidents and major crimes represent a fraction of how Charleston Police officers spend their time. As CPD officers were claiming more and more overtime, they were also issuing more citations for low-level offenses. Recent Charleston Municipal Court dockets show citations are regularly issued for misdemeanors such as: driving with an expired vehicle registration, driving with an expired inspection sticker, being in a public park after certain hours, trespassing, possession of a controlled substance, and riding a bicycle on a sidewalk.

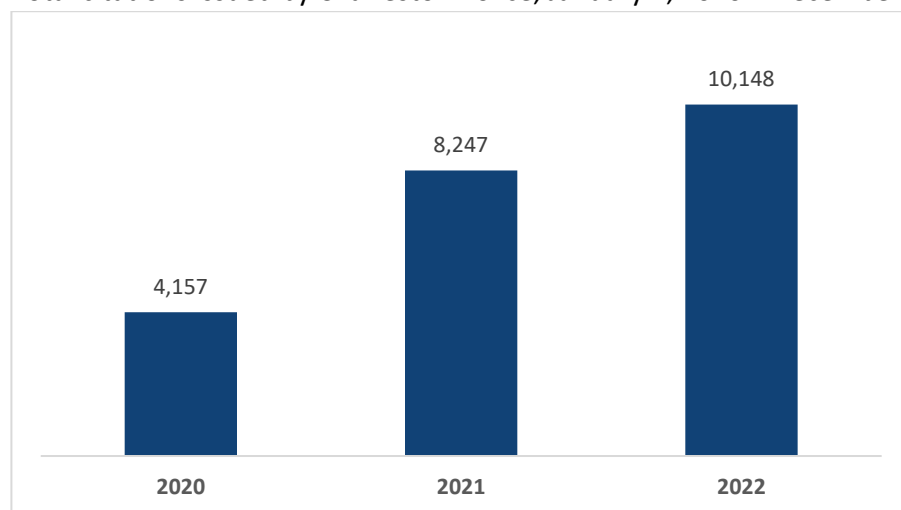
⁴⁸ "2022 Year End Report," Charleston, WV Police Department (Last refreshed: 01/12/2023), 1, <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2022-Year-End-Report.pdf> (Murder: 11 – down 8 percent since 2020; Sexual Assault: 45 incidents – down 4 percent since 2020; Robbery: 40 incidents – down 33 percent since 2020; Malicious wounding: 57 incidents – down 40 percent since 2020).

⁴⁹ "2022 Year End Report," 1. In 2022, CPD recorded 2,246 incidents of Burglary/Breaking and Entering, Larceny, Breaking and Entering of an Automobile, and Motor Vehicle Theft. In 2021, CPD recorded 2,162 incidents. In 2020, CPD recorded 2,316 incidents.

In 2020, the Charleston Police Department issued 4,157 citations.⁵⁰ The next year, citations nearly doubled to 8,247.⁵¹ By 2022, citations issued totaled 10,148.⁵² And as citations grew, so did arrests. In 2022, CPD made 5,742 adult arrests – 1,704 more arrests than were made in 2020.⁵³

Figure 5: Increasing Enforcement of Low-Level Offenses

Total citations issued by Charleston Police, January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2022



Source: CPD, “2022 Year End Report,” 2.

When issuing a citation (sometimes called a “ticket”), a Charleston officer has the discretion to avoid a physical arrest by giving a verbal warning or a summons to appear in court at a future date.⁵⁴ These alternatives to arrest are critical since research shows that only a few days behind bars can have a devastating impact on a person.⁵⁵

A person jailed to wait out their court date is more likely to lose their job.⁵⁶ Even years later, that person is less likely to be employed and will earn less than those who were not jailed.⁵⁷ After incarceration, a person is

⁵⁰ CPD, “2022 Year End Report,” 2.

⁵¹ CPD, “2022 Year End Report,” 2.

⁵² CPD, “2022 Year End Report,” 2.

⁵³ CPD, “2022 Year End Report,” 2.

⁵⁴ “Policy 21.7.6: Alternatives to Physical Arrest,” *Charleston Police Department Policy & Procedures Manual*, https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CPD-Policy_Procedure_Redacted2021.pdf (“In some cases, when the offense is of a minor nature, a criminal summons may be issued, a verbal warning given or other action may be taken.”).

⁵⁵ Pamela Metzger et al., “Ending Injustice: Solving the Initial Appearance Crisis” (Dallas, TX: Deason Criminal Justice Reform Center, September 2021), 21, <https://www.smu.edu/-/media/Site/Law/Deason-Center/Publications/Public-Defense/Initial-Appearance-Campaign/Ending-Injustice-Solving-The-Initial-Appearance-Crisis-FINAL.pdf> (accessed June 10, 2022).

⁵⁶ Tiffany Bergin et al., “The Initial Collateral Consequences of Pretrial Detention: Employment, Residential Stability, and Family Relationships,” 1-2, <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2022-CJA-The-Initial-Collateral-Consequences-of-Pretrial-Detention.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Will Dobbie, Jacob Goldin, and Crystal S. Yang, “The Effects of Pretrial Detention on Conviction, Future Crime, and Employment: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges,” *American Economic Review* 108, no. 2 (February 2018): 227, <https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/aer.20161503> (accessed June 28, 2022).

10 times more likely to experience homelessness.⁵⁸ A person jailed pretrial is at risk of losing their children.⁵⁹ The 10 percent of West Virginia kids who have experienced the trauma of a parent behind bars, are more likely to suffer economic hardship, chronic physical and mental illness, and behavioral challenges.⁶⁰ All this harm spills out into the community, unmeasured by crime statistics, but felt by families, employers, landlords, schools, and service providers.

CPD's selective enforcement of low-level offenses was on display during Charleston's annual Sternwheel Regatta festival. The day before the festival kicked off, CPD officers descended on multiple city parks to cite people for being present after public hours.⁶¹ The park ordinance gives officers "the discretion to either issue a citation or make an arrest."⁶² Nonetheless officers arrested 16 unhoused people for violating park curfew, knowing those people would remain jailed until the municipal court reopened a week later.⁶³

Not everyone experienced this type of policing. A few days later, after midnight, regatta-goers congregated in Haddad Riverfront Park, singing, and drinking alcohol. This time, police asked the festival participants to quiet down, "but no one was arrested or made to leave the park."⁶⁴

As it turns out, the Regatta park raids represented only one day of an 18-month CPD campaign to increase enforcement of park curfew violations, littering, and jaywalking.⁶⁵ Enforcement during that 18-month period was 2,600 percent higher than the previous three-and-a-half-year period.⁶⁶

There is evidence that aggressive enforcement of minor offenses does not lead to a reduction in major crime. In 2014, the New York Police Department initiated a work slowdown to protest alleged "anti-police" sentiment from the mayor and the community.⁶⁷ For decades, NYPD officers had engaged in "systematic and aggressive enforcement of low-level violations" under the premise that those strategies deterred the seven

⁵⁸ Lucius Couloute, "Nowhere to Go: Homelessness Among Formerly Incarcerated People" (Northampton, MA: Prison Policy Initiative, August 2018), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html> (accessed June 16, 2022).

⁵⁹ Eli Hager and Anna Flagg, "How Incarcerated Parents are Losing Their Children Forever," *The Marshall Project*, December 2, 2018, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/12/03/how-incarcerated-parents-are-losing-their-children-forever>.

⁶⁰ "A Shared Sentence: The Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration on Kids, Families, and Communities (Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, April 2016), 5, <https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-asharedsentence-2016.pdf> (accessed June 7, 2022); Vincent J. Felitti et al., "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (May 1998): 245, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8) (accessed August 15, 2016); Rebecca Vallas et al., "Removing Barriers to Opportunity for Parents with Criminal Records and Their Children: A Two-Generation Approach" (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, December 2015), 3, <https://americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CriminalRecords-report2.pdf> (accessed June 8, 2022); Nazgol Ghandnoosh, Emma Stammen, and Kevin Muhitch, "Parents in Prison" (Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project, February 2021), 1, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Parents-in-Prison.pdf> (accessed June 7, 2022); David Murphey and P. Mae Cooper, "Parents Behind Bars: What Happens to Their Children?" (Bethesda, MD: Child Trends, October 2015), 2, <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-42ParentsBehindBars.pdf> (accessed June 7, 2022).

⁶¹ Kyle Vass, "Pre-Regatta Park Arrests Highlight Police Targeting of Unsheltered People in Charleston, W.Va.," *Dragline*, August 18, 2023, <https://dragline.substack.com/p/pre-regatta-park-arrests-highlight>.

⁶² Charleston, W. Va., "Hours of public access to city parks; penalties," § 82-122 (2023).

⁶³ Vass, "Pre-Regatta Arrests Highlight Police Targeting of Unsheltered People."

⁶⁴ Vass, "Pre-Regatta Arrests Highlight Police Targeting of Unsheltered People."

⁶⁵ Vass, "Pre-Regatta Arrests Highlight Police Targeting of Unsheltered People."

⁶⁶ Vass, "Pre-Regatta Arrests Highlight Police Targeting of Unsheltered People."

⁶⁷ Oliver Laughland, "NYPD Work Slowdown Not Official But 'Understandable', Says Union President," *The Guardian*, December 31, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/dec/31/nypd-slowdown-arrests-de-blasio-union-chief>.

categories of “major crime”: murder, rape, robbery, felony assault, burglary, grand larceny, and grand theft auto.⁶⁸

During the seven-week slowdown, researchers observed precipitous reductions in the issuance of criminal citations and the use of street detentions known as “stop, question, and frisk.” Arrests for non-major crimes – including drug offenses – dropped significantly. This slow-down in low-level enforcement aimed “to demonstrate the city’s dependence on the NYPD.”⁶⁹

The data told another story. When police pulled back from enforcing minor offenses, the city also experienced a decline in major crime reports.⁷⁰ The decline even extended beyond the 7-week slowdown, resulting in roughly 2,100 fewer reports of major crime.⁷¹ In this case, an intentional reduction in aggressive enforcement resulted in a safer city.

The \$9.7 Million Question

A lack of oversight has incentivized police officers to claim an increasing number of lucrative overtime hours. Charleston has a low number of serious crime incidents. At the same time, Charleston has many more police officers than other, larger cities. The result is aggressive and costly enforcement of low-level offenses. If instead, Charleston staffed its police department at the same rate as Huntington, the city could save \$9.7 million per year.⁷²

Police are often called to manage problems that government has given up on. For instance, a CPD officer may be called to confront a person in crisis – because the mental health infrastructure has failed. A downtown business owner will call 911 about the unhoused woman sleeping on the corner – because the city council has given up on a day shelter. This list goes on and on.

But what if the city of Charleston chose not to give up, but instead to invest in what prevents harms and what makes our communities better places to live? That is the \$9.7 million question.

With those resources, Charleston could:

- Transform vacant lots into green spaces and community gardens, which are linked to lower property and violent crime.⁷³
- Invest in transitional and supportive housing, which have been shown to increase employment and to reduce public health and crime costs associated with homelessness.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Christopher M. Sullivan and Zachary P. O’Keeffe, “Evidence That Curtailing Proactive Policing Can Reduce Major Crime,” *Nature Human Behavior* 1, 10 (2017): 730, <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2017-Evidence-that-Curtailing-Proactive-Policing-Can-Decrease-Major-Crime.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Sullivan and O’Keeffe, “Curtailing Policing Can Reduce Major Crime,” 730.

⁷⁰ Sullivan and O’Keeffe, “Curtailing Policing Can Reduce Major Crime,” 733.

⁷¹ Sullivan and O’Keeffe, “Curtailing Policing Can Reduce Major Crime,” 735.

⁷² Staffing CPD at a rate of 201 officers per 100,000 residents, would reduce Personal Services costs from \$21.6 million to \$11.9 million – a savings of \$9.7 million, based on expenses described in City of Charleston, “Fiscal Year 2024 Budget,” 119.

⁷³ S. Scott Ogletree et al., “Urban Greenspace Linked to Lower Crime Risk Across 301 Major U.S. Cities,” *Cities* 131 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103949>.

⁷⁴ Elior Cohen, “The Effect of Housing First Programs on Future Homelessness and Socioeconomic Outcomes,” Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Research Working Paper no. 22-03 (March 2022), <https://doi.org/10.18651/RWP2022-03>; Barbara Burton, David E. Pollio, and Carol S. North, “A Longitudinal Study of Housing Status and Crime in a Homeless Population,” *Annals of Clinical Psychiatry* 30, 4 (2018), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30372505/>.

- Provide accessible 24/7 public restrooms.⁷⁵
- Build mental health crisis response teams, shown to reduce police confrontation and save local government resources.⁷⁶
- Reduce pedestrian injuries and deaths by adding speed humps to residential streets.⁷⁷
- Tackle gun violence through proven community-led intervention strategies.⁷⁸

Every dollar spent on police overtime or aggressive enforcement of low-level offenses is a dollar not invested in making a community feel safe and inviting.

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⁷⁵ West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, “Fact Sheet: Five Public Restrooms for 241,330 West Virginians,” March 2023, <https://wvpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SB-540-WVCBP-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Rob Waters, “Enlisting Mental Health Workers, Not Cops, In Mobile Crisis Response,” *Health Affairs* 40, 6 (June 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.00678>.

⁷⁷ June M. Tester et al., “A Matched Case-Control Study Evaluating the Effectiveness of Speed Humps in Reducing Child Pedestrian Injuries,” *American Journal of Public Health* 94, 4 (2004), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448312/pdf/0940646.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Sheyla A. Delgado et al., “The Effects of Cure Violence in the South Bronx and East New York, Brooklyn” (New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, 2017), https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1436&context=jj_pubs.