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VIRGINIA LAW ENFORCEMENT SHERIFFS

Sheriffs from across the Commonwealth of Virginia with primary law enforcement responsibilities have united to seek much needed salary increases for their deputies. The Virginia Law Enforcement Sheriffs was formed this summer with a primary goal of “Working together to provide a livable wage for Law Enforcement Deputies.” Law Enforcement Sheriffs answer dangerous calls around the clock, often alone, involving dangerous felons with firearms, domestic disputes, and dangerous crimes in progress. 86 of the 123 sheriffs’ offices in Virginia provide primary law enforcement in their communities (*see attached map*).

Grayson County Sheriff, Richard A. Vaughan, was elected by the organization to serve a one-year term as the first President of the VLES. Vaughan served as President of the Virginia Sheriff’s Association (VSA), a similar organization, during the 2015–2016 term. Vaughan stated that he has passionately served in the VSA for the past 11 years in hopes of obtaining salary increases for deputies. When Vaughan was elected Sheriff in 2007, the starting pay for deputies was \$28,500. Today, starting salaries for deputy sheriffs is still below the livable wage of \$31,629. “It is a disgrace that our hardworking law enforcement deputies place their lives on the line daily and still qualify for public assistance and food stamps,” Vaughan said. “Obviously, the efforts of the VSA have not been effective, and we were compelled to form a new association to meet the specific needs of our localities.”

Vaughan cited the turnover rate for deputy sheriffs which is at an all-time high of 21%. The Virginia State Police and Municipal Police Departments are recruiting law enforcement deputies with attractive starting salaries around \$44,000 per year. “I don’t blame the deputies for leaving for more money and better benefits because they definitely deserve much more,” said Vaughan. The exodus of well-trained, hardworking deputies puts a financial hardship on localities because they must spend more time and

money to train new recruits. This also creates public safety and officer safety issues when there aren't enough deputies working to effectively answer calls for service.”

Many urban localities in Virginia are providing salary supplements to deputies which help retain experienced officers. For instance, the starting salary for a Corrections Deputy in Virginia Beach is \$41,683. The Virginia Compensation Board provides \$31,629 and the locality supplements their pay by 25%. Most Corrections Deputies are taking home more money than Law Enforcement Deputies due to these large local supplements. Of the 86 Law Enforcement Sheriffs across the state, only some are providing salary supplements. Nearly 20 localities in Virginia do not supplement deputy pay at all. This leaves a family of four qualifying for public assistance and food stamps. Since Virginia Law Enforcement Deputies carry out all essential law enforcement functions, their salaries should be comparable to officers employed by state law enforcement agencies.

The primary goal of VLES is to persuade the General Assembly to provide a 10% salary regrade for all Law Enforcement Deputies and require localities to provide a 20% salary supplement. VLES has retained Steve Baril, John “Lynwood” Butner, and James Hoffman of KVCF Solutions to help achieve this goal. KVCF Solutions, a government relations, lobbying, and political consulting firm, has over 50 years of combined experience before the Virginia General Assembly.

Sheriff Vaughan stated that the VLES wishes to continue working with VSA and other law enforcement associations to accomplish their goals. Of the 9,000 Deputies in Virginia, approximately 5,000 Corrections/Courthouse Security Deputies work for City Sheriffs. About 4,000 work for Sheriffs who provide primary law enforcement services in 86 jurisdictions. If we band together, we can make a difference for Law Enforcement Deputies who are struggling to make ends meet.

VLES is off to a good start, with over 800 members committed to the goal of better pay for Deputies. The VLES officers are: Grayson County Sheriff Richard Vaughan, President; Southampton County Sheriff Jack Stutts, Vice President; Brunswick County Sheriff Brian Roberts, Secretary; and Campbell County Sheriff Steve Hutcherson, Treasurer.