

Office of the Sheriff

LOB #217:

COURTS PHYSICAL SECURITY

Purpose

The Constitution of Virginia, Article VII, paragraph 4, Virginia Code §§53.1-119 and 53.1-120; establishes mandates and guidelines for the establishment and operation of the Sheriff's Office in the areas of Courthouse security and facility/perimeter security. The Court Security Branch provides security to all judges and courtrooms in Fairfax County to include the courthouses in the City of Fairfax and the Towns of Herndon and Vienna.

Description

This operation provides security for all the courthouses and courtrooms in Fairfax County to include the City of Fairfax and the Towns of Herndon and Vienna. This takes into account the protection of all judges, special justices during mental commitment hearings and court employees; the safety of all those with business before the courts and the general public; the security of all prisoners and the Fairfax County Public Safety Center; fingerprinting and other duties as they arise. Contract personnel perform the monitoring and inspection of persons entering the Courthouse through magnetometers and x-ray equipment. Should problems arise, deputy sheriffs are called to handle the situation.

Some of the specific services of this line of business include ensuring the orderly operation of each of the courts by maintaining a safe space among the judges, litigants and visitors. It also includes making sure persons held in custody are prepared and escorted to the courtrooms on time. Deputies also assess the risk of conflict after a court decision and sometimes find it necessary to escort litigants to their vehicles. Judges can determine the appearance of the accused and their manner of restraint in the courtroom. Therefore, the Sheriff's Office may have to provide a haircut and proper attire for the accused before a hearing and also hide or remove restraints before the jury sees him or her.

Benefits

The Courthouse is filled with tension -- the risk of going to jail, being fined, losing custody, losing a settlement with combative neighbors, or the threat of release of someone from jail that is seen as a serious personal risk. These tense situations are mixed with the conducting of normal business in the land records office, clerk of the courts office, the law library and other areas. The Sheriff's Office provides all services mandated and/or deemed essential to ensure that all residents can conduct their business in a safe and orderly manner within and around each jurisdiction's courthouse. Judges must feel confident that they can ask questions and render decisions without fear or prejudice. As a result of the physical security the Sheriff's Office provides, the residents of Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax and the Towns of Herndon and Vienna know they are safe and secure accessing the range of services available in the Fairfax County Courthouse. These services include access to the civil, criminal and circuit courts; marriage licenses; birth/death certificates; land records; probation and parole services; and a public law library.

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Mandates

Virginia Code §§ 53.1-119 and 53.1-120 establish mandates and guidelines for the establishment and operation of the Sheriff's Office in areas including, but not limited to, Courthouse security and facility/perimeter security.

It is noteworthy that the Code of Virginia does not mandate the provision of courtroom security for civil courtrooms. However, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors has consistently determined that security within these individual courtrooms is an essential service. The Sheriff's Office staffs up to 18 civil courtrooms with 22 sworn personnel.

Trends and Challenges

FY 2015 brought reductions in two metric areas. The number of court cases heard decreased by 90,776. Also, the number of prisoners escorted between the courts and jail decreased by 1,966. In addition to these reductions, there was a decline in the average daily population of 120 for FY 2015.

New positions in court security are not needed unless the number of judges increases. With the number of cases down, no immediate growth is expected. However, the impact of a potential new and separate mental health docket is unknown.

The duties of those responsible for physical security continue to grow because of urbanization, more visitors to the Courthouse (even though the number of court cases went down) and natural and man-made threats within the Courthouse and surrounding area. As a result, it has become progressively challenging to maintain a high level of efficiency and timely response to events at the Public Safety Center. Certain duties, such as parking and traffic enforcement, perimeter patrol and uniformed presence on the grounds have been difficult to handle at the current staffing level of five positions. To help address this situation, the Sheriff's Office has requested two deputy sheriff positions for physical security as part of the Public Safety Staffing Plan.

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #217: Courts Physical Security			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$7,284,390	\$7,315,851	\$7,540,956
Operating Expenses	306,926	279,089	289,361
Total Expenditures	\$7,591,316	\$7,594,940	\$7,830,317
General Fund Revenue	\$4,060,260	\$3,888,136	\$4,148,652
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$3,531,056	\$3,706,804	\$3,681,665
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	81 / 81	81 / 81	81 / 81
Total Positions	81 / 81	81 / 81	81 / 81

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Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Prisoners escorted to and/or from court	24,082	21,566	19,600	19,600	19,600
Escapes during escort to/from courts	0	0	0	0	0
Visitors utilizing the court facilities annually	1,088,691	805,241	830,795	830,795	830,795
Court cases on the docket heard annually	490,492	510,857	420,081	420,081	420,081
Wilful injuries to judges, jurors, court staff or public	6	0	0	0	0
Incidents of willful damage to any court facility	0	0	0	0	0

The key performance measurement objectives associated with this LOB include:

- To achieve zero escapes of prisoners being escorted under the custody of court security personnel.
- To realize zero incidents in which any person is physically harmed due to lapse in security while in, or in the vicinity of, any Courthouse in Fairfax County.
- To realize zero incidents of willful damage to any court facility.

The Fairfax County Courthouse has the largest and busiest visitor population of any of the facilities staffed by the Sheriff's Office. In FY 2015, the number of visitors to the court facilities was 830,795, with a total of 420,081 court cases heard. Deputies ensure a safe and secure environment, but it is not without personal risk. During FY 2015, deputies escorted 19,600 prisoners to court with no escapes. Moreover, incidents involving physical harm were prevented through good communication and proactive measures by staff. In addition, there were no willful injuries or incidents of damage to courthouse facilities.

During FY 2009 and FY 2010, in an effort to contain costs, courthouse security provided by the Sheriff's Office was reduced. Specifically, the Facility Security Section went from 20 deputies down to five. Prior to the reduction in staff, this section was responsible for, and always took a proactive approach toward, security for the 52-acre Fairfax County Public Safety Center, with intent to reduce crime, manage emergencies and thwart any acts of terrorism toward visitors and employees. Although the Sheriff's Office is still responsible for addressing issues within the complex, the primary focus is now on situations occurring within the Courthouse itself. Despite the challenges associated with providing security in the Courthouse and throughout the Public Safety Center, the Sheriff's Office continues to provide the highest degree of safety to the residents of Fairfax County. It should be noted that two additional Courthouse Facility Security positions are requested in the Public Safety Staffing Plan due to the growing concern for the agency to be proactive in physical security control threats in the wake of the major staff cutbacks and the growing volume of duties and risks.