

STATE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Testimony of Sheriff Kim Cole, Mason County

RE: SB 1003 (Sen. VanderWall)

09/28/2022

Good morning and thank you Chair Filler and all of you for your service to our great state.

My name is Kim Cole; I am the current President of the Michigan Sheriffs' Association and the sheriff of Mason County.

Mason County sets along the shores of Lake Michigan and is home to 29,000 year around residents. During the summer months we welcome well over 100,000 visitors and we are home to one of the State's most visited State Parks—The Ludington State Park. At any given time, there are **only** between two and four MCOLES certified deputies patrolling its 1,242 square miles.

In 2021, those deputies investigated 2,972 criminal complaints (and I can proudly report they had a 68% clearance rate) and wrote just over 6,000 police reports. These same deputies responded to 12,305 events through our 911 Center where they were the primary responding unit. These numbers do not include calls where they were back up cars to other agencies. This includes crashes, papers served through the courts, property checks, public service events and such.

In 2020, we had one fatality and two serious injury ORV crashes on our ORV trails.

Mason County is also a sportsman's paradise. We have beautiful Lake Michigan as our west county line and 77 inland lakes and streams. Because MCOLES certification is NOT required to patrol our state's waterways, I am able to provide over 60 hours per week for dedicated Marine Patrol duties. This is huge for me as sheriff because, with often only two or three certified deputies patrolling the roads, pulling one to put on our waterways would have serious implications to the safety of our citizens and visitors.

Mason County represents an average northern lower Michigan county. Sadly, we face the same challenges as our state's larger counties; homicide, sexual assault,

child abuse, domestic violence, and drug offenses are often charges seen filed by law enforcement with our county prosecutor.

My neighbor to the east, Lake County, has nearly 300 miles of designated ORV trails with hundreds more of State and Federal trails, all of which connects to trails in the surrounding counties. Two certified deputies are responsible for the safety of these trails with one, being only part time. Actually, Lake County has three certified deputies on the books for ORV patrol, but one has only worked three shifts this year because they work full time for another agency. You see, with many folks leaving law enforcement, often times those remaining, will pick up part time jobs with other agencies to help. Unfortunately, these “pick up” shifts are carried out on their days off from their full time job so finding such help is rare.

Senator VanderWall’s proposed bill would allow a sheriff to cross-train a winter snowmobile patrol deputy into one who can patrol ORV trails in the summer months. Keep in mind; many of these trails are used for both snowmobile and ORV riding. Familiarity with those trails affords better service, during both seasons, to those visiting the trails and safety for the deputies patrolling.

In addition, the forty hours of training required in Senator Vanderwall’s bill is the same threshold for Marine and Snowmobile patrols. This brings consistency and more uniformity in training standards for those working in Marine, Snowmobile and now ORV Patrol.

I hope you find this information useful and see the importance of keeping our certified deputies on the roads—patrolling and responding to citizens calls for service, which is where they belong while allowing us to keep our commitment to our citizens, by providing safety on the roads and trails at the same time.

Again, thank you for your time and your service to our great state.