

# Understanding Trends in Law Enforcement Staffing

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# Monitoring law enforcement staffing is critical

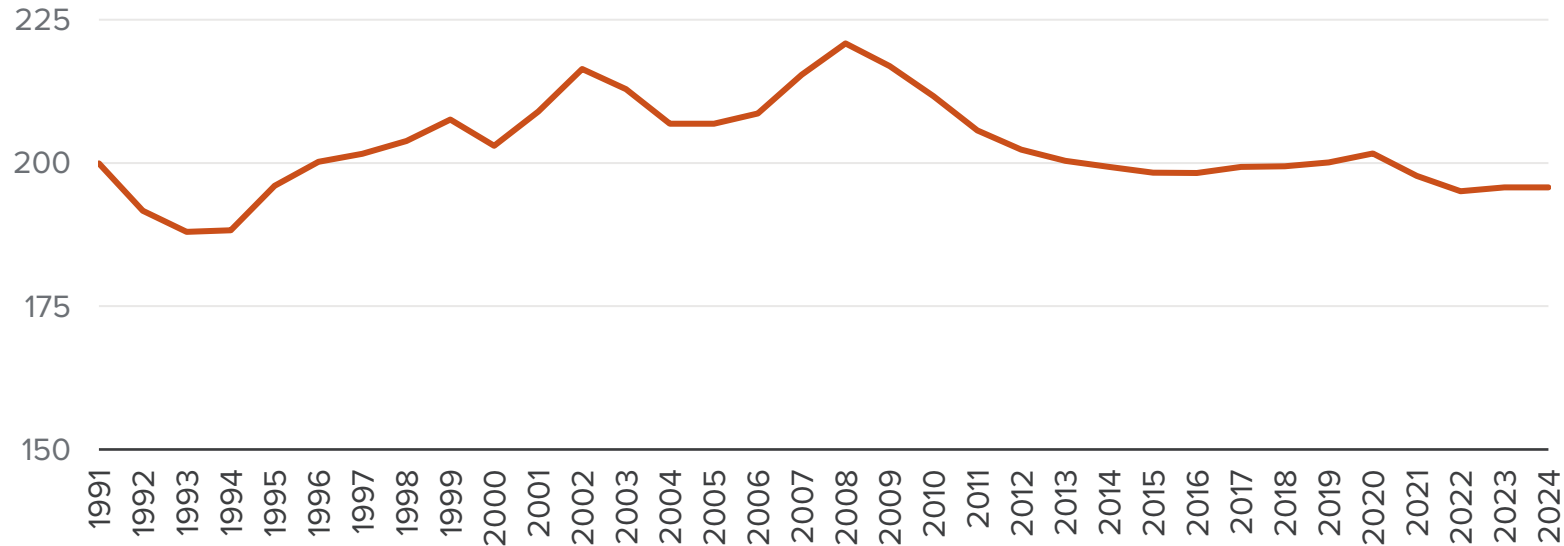
- Policing is a large public investment (\$28 billion in 2023)
- State, county, and local governments in California employ over 77,000 sworn officers with full arrest powers
- These officers maintain public and traffic safety through enforcement and deterrence
- Research shows that hiring additional law enforcement officers reduces crime, especially violent crime

# Agency size varies greatly

- Over 475 law enforcement agencies across California
- Most agencies are relatively small
  - 37% of agencies have under 25 officers
- But massive agencies exist as well
  - LA Police and Sheriff's Departments have nearly 9,000 officers
- Between 2019 and 2024, the number of officers fell by 3%

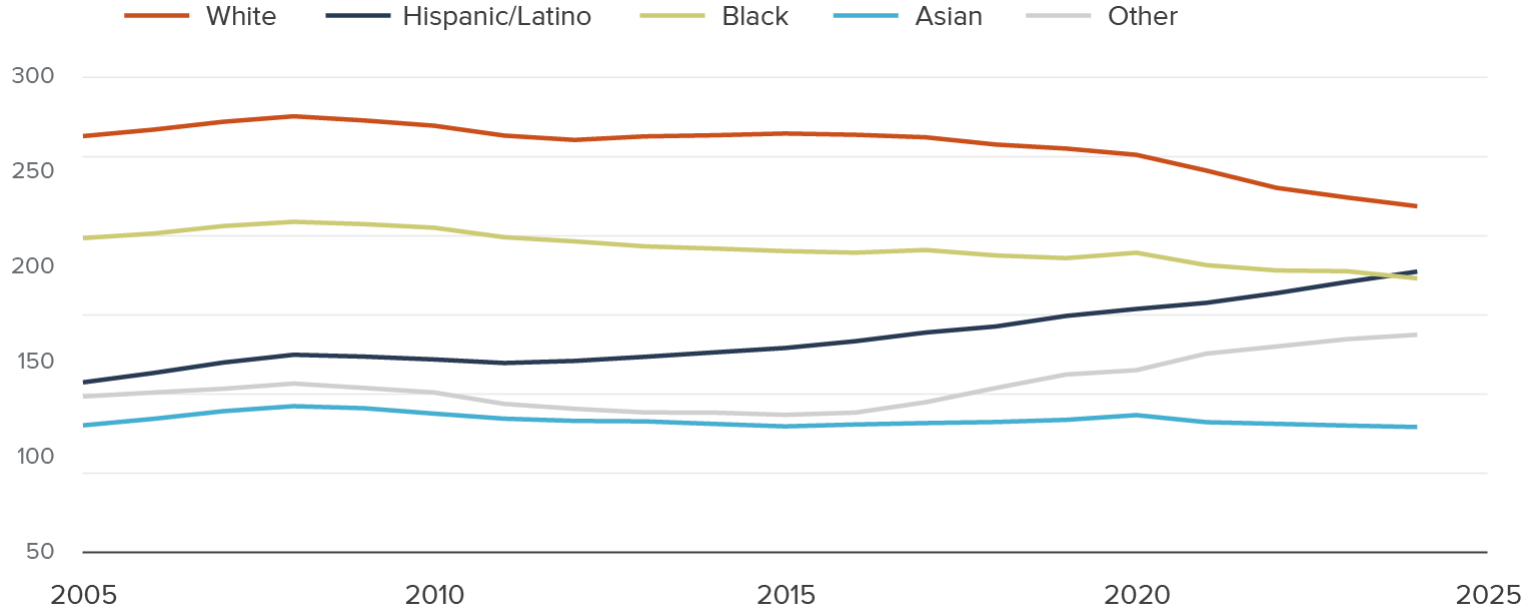
# Staffing reached a peak in 2008—then declined during the Great Recession and pandemic

Sworn officers per 100,000 residents



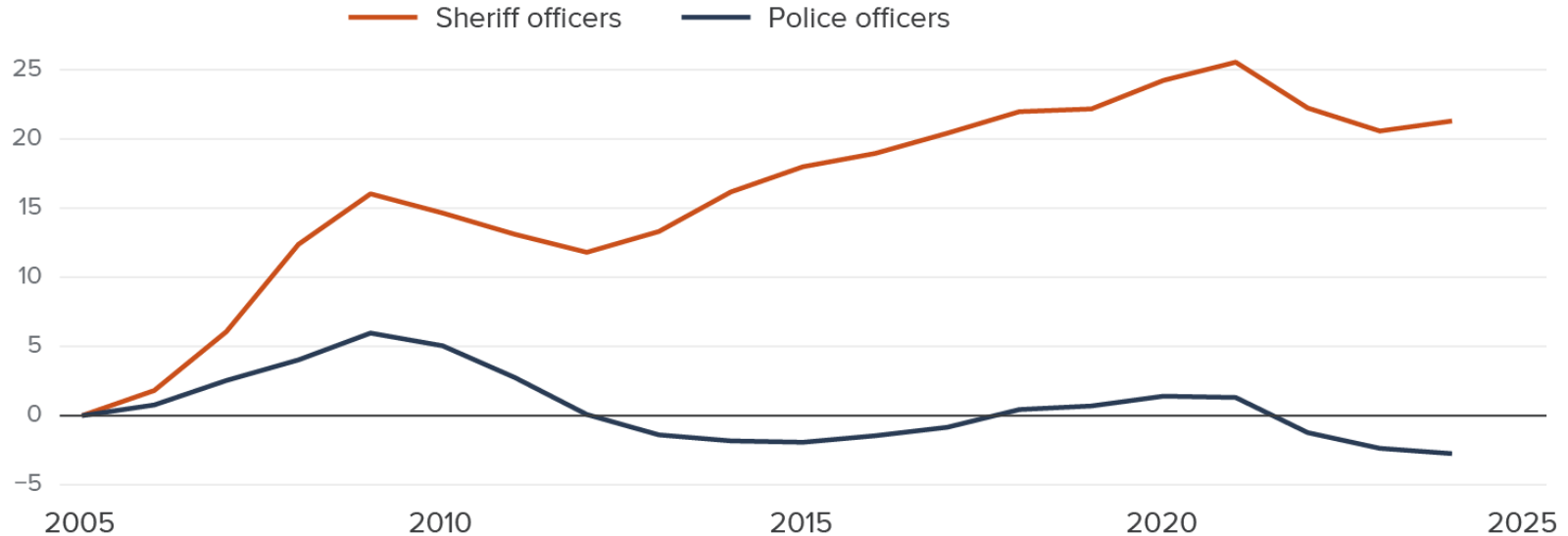
# Officer demographics have shifted

Officer staffing rate (per 100k)



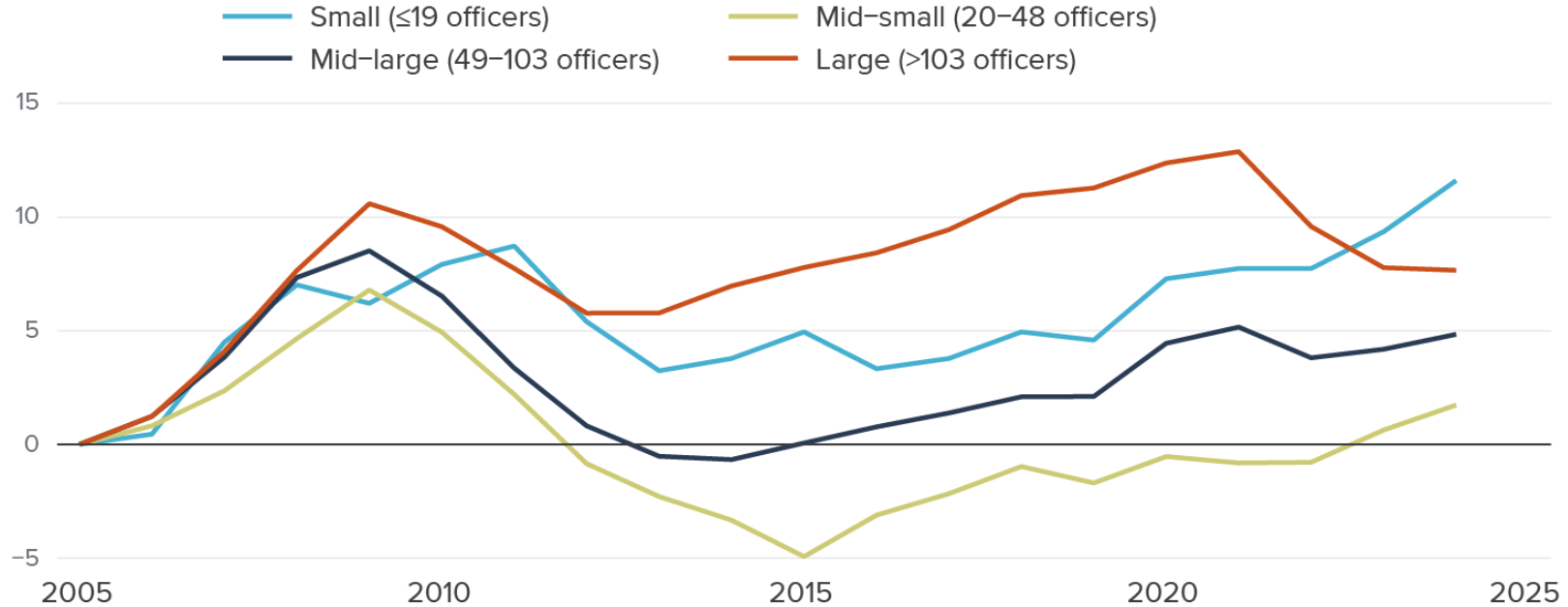
# Sheriff's departments have increased staffing while police departments have seen a decrease

Percent change in staffing from 2005



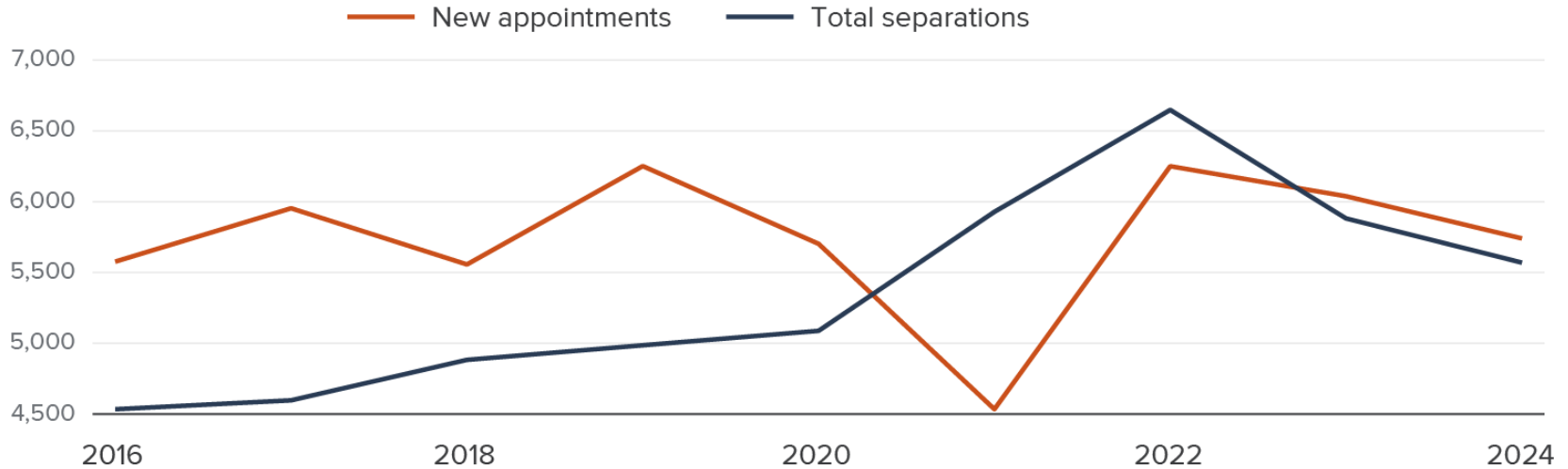
# After the pandemic, drops in officer staffing have been concentrated in larger agencies

Percent change in staffing from 2005



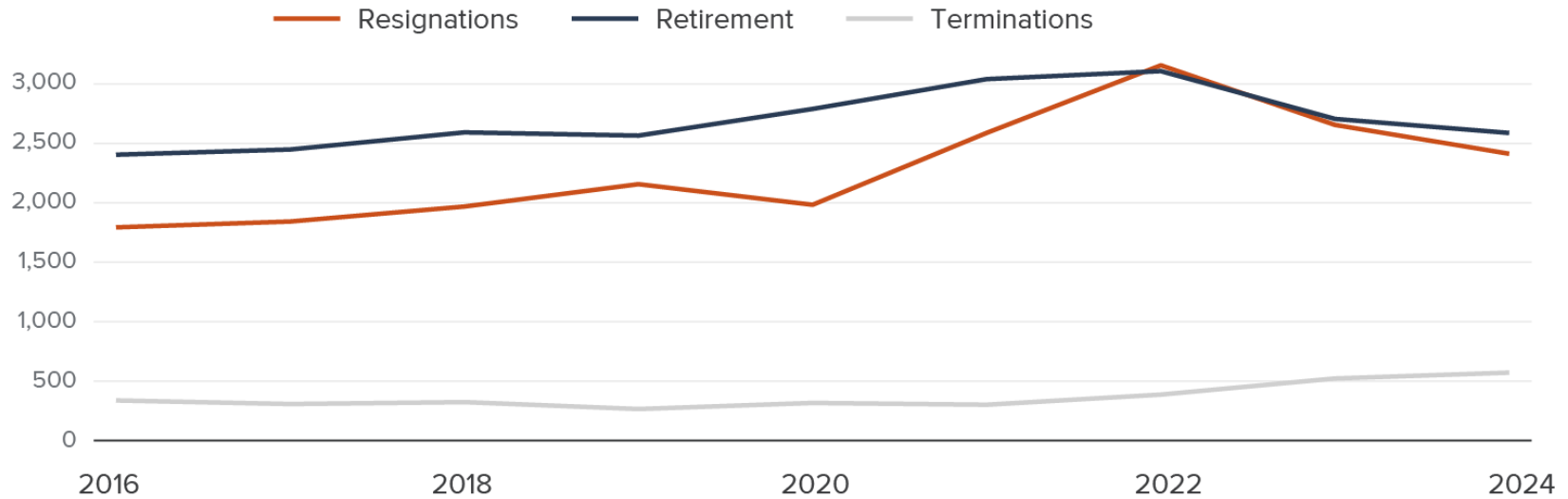
# After 2020, separations went up and hiring decreased temporarily

Number of officers



# The spike in separations was primarily driven by resignations

Number of separations



## **Between 2011 and 2023, officer base salary decreased while overtime increased**

- Average base salary went from \$116,000 to \$110,000
- Meanwhile, overtime pay grew from \$10,000 to \$25,000
  - Could be a sign of agencies using overtime to fill gaps in staffing
- Officer pay (both base and overtime) at non-rural agencies is greater than pay at rural agencies

# PPIC survey reveals more insights from agencies

- Survey asked about:
  - Recent trends in officer hiring, recruitment, and retention
  - Reasons behind any challenges or successes
- Better response rate from sheriff's departments (40%) compared to police departments (6%)
- Findings are more representative of sheriff's departments and smaller police departments

# Competition from other agencies is the most common problem in hiring and retention

- Unqualified applicants and pay were other top problems for hiring
- Pay and location were other top problems for retention
- Agencies have tried new outreach strategies and changes to employment and benefits to increase hiring
- Only a minority (30%) of agencies reported reducing services or response priorities because of staffing challenges

# Key takeaways

- Officer staffing is below pre-pandemic levels
  - Down 3% from 2019
- Officer demographics have shifted
  - Latinos now account for 40% of officers
- Retention has declined, and overtime has increased
  - Average overtime went from \$10k to \$25k
- Agencies listed several challenges in hiring and retention
  - Agency competition was the most common obstacle

# Looking forward

- Monitoring and understanding trends in officer staffing is crucial
- Economic conditions could reduce funding for additional officers
- Policymakers need to consider the range of agency sizes and types when considering possible policy solutions
- Help to increase cross-agency communications and collaboration could be an important first step

## Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.