

June 1, 2015

Honorable Pat Edwards, Chair
Nassau County Board of County Commissioners
96135 Nassau Place, Suite 1
Yulee, Florida 32097

Dear Chair Edwards and Board of County Commissioners:

In accordance with Section 30.49 Florida Statutes, enclosed please find the Nassau County Sheriff's Office Certified Budget request for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2015 and ending September 30, 2016. I consider these proposed expenditures reasonable and necessary for the proper and efficient operation of the Nassau County Sheriff's Office.

The attached certified budget includes a 2.5 percent salary adjustment in personnel services, which is the same percentage that is proposed for Nassau County Firefighters, however, this increase will be off-set by the projected increase in health insurance costs provided by the County.

I am requesting additional funds to increase the starting salaries of our Communications Officers (Dispatchers) to help us retain those who we hire, train and invest in, as well as a slight increase in overtime dollars budgeted for special events that we provide additional security for, such as the Northeast Florida Fair, Shrimp Festival, beach patrol, and other emergencies and incidences that occur unexpectedly. I am also requesting additional funds as a result of an increase in agency retirement contributions mandated by the Florida Legislature, which were increased this year and a small increase in inmate health care services, which we are mandated to provide as part of our responsibilities for the care, custody, and control of inmates at the Nassau County Jail & Detention Center.

As Nassau County continues to grow (and we can see this growth from the new construction projects that have been planned, recently completed or are underway) we must plan ahead and be ready for this influx of new residents and commercial property and not be caught up in a crisis situation. During 2014, Nassau County's population increased about 1 percent and statistics recently released by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement indicates our Crime Rate increased 2 percent over the previous year. I am not requesting an increase in patrol personnel this budget year, however, I am in the process of developing a 10-year plan where we will phase-in at least eight new patrol deputy positions (two per squad) and two investigators over the next ten years in order to keep the budget manageable, but not be in a situation where we need to add several new positions all at once.

During 2014, we responded to more than 128,000 calls for service and are currently utilizing 24 marked patrol vehicles with over 100,000 miles on the odometer. Six of these marked patrol cars have over 150,000 miles on them and one is a 2006 Chevrolet Tahoe with over

248,000 miles. When we are responding to emergency calls from citizens our vehicles need to be dependable, reliable and safe for our deputies. Driving an emergency patrol car is different than driving a regular vehicle under normal everyday conditions.

Within the Sheriff's Office budget is funding for services which are the statutory responsibility of the County, but which the County has entrusted to the Sheriff's Office to provide. The most costly of these is the Corrections function, including running the jail. Keep in mind just over \$5.5 million dollars or 31 percent of our budget is the direct responsibility of the Board of County Commissioners. The remaining 69 percent of the Sheriff's Office budget covers law enforcement and court services, as well as their associated support units.

The Nassau County Sheriff's Office has the unique responsibility of providing for the safety and security of our residents, visitors, and employees; the safety and security of our two courts; the safety and security of our schools; and the care, custody, and control of inmates within the Nassau County Detention Facility. We respond to all law enforcement calls for service countywide and we provide additional assistance within the city of Fernandina Beach when requested. We provide patrol and other essential services to the entire unincorporated area of the County and we also provide law enforcement services to the town of Callahan and the town of Hilliard. We provide 911 operations 24 hours a day 365 days a year to provide emergency and public safety assistance as well as dispatch for all law enforcement & fire/rescue personnel within Nassau County. We also oversee the daily operations of Emergency Management.

We are the frontline protectors of our homeland security. No other agency or Constitutional Officer within Nassau County has this unique and critical responsibility. My job is to make sure the Sheriff's Office has the necessary tools, equipment, personnel and resources available in order to do the job and keep all of us safe and secure.

Crime is not a statistic or predictable element of society. As an agency, we do not start each day knowing what we will face, and exactly what resources will be required to address those situations. To illustrate, the number of weapon-related calls for service has increased, which requires deploying additional deputies to the scene.

We can't put crime on hold while we create and deploy what we need. We can't contain crime to one area so we can use efficiencies to address it. We can't demand or assume that today's crime will be of the same nature as yesterday. Crime is constantly evolving, therefore, we have to be everywhere, and we have to be able to deploy all our resources with speed and effectiveness. Our Specialty Units have to change focus as the nature of crime changes and our training expands to provide new skills for new situations. Our equipment, weapons and technology must keep up with the demands of the impact of crime, along with the functions of the Jail, security of the courthouses, courts and evidence processing.

We are currently operating with 1.23 sworn patrol deputies per 1,000 residents, which is well below the state and national average. We can't afford, nor is it safe, to operate with less.

The first responsibility of government is to protect its citizens; all else is secondary. I firmly believe that public safety should be our community's top priority and I am committed to

providing the best and most efficient law enforcement services possible with the resources provided by our taxpaying citizens.

Sincerely,

Bill Leeper, Sheriff