



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## Office of the Governor

Terrance C. Cole  
Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security

February 5, 2024

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** The Honorable Glenn Youngkin, Governor of Virginia  
The Honorable L. Louise Lucas, Chair, Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Luke E. Torian, Chair, House Appropriations Committee  
Ms. Janet L. Lawson, Director, Department of Human Resource Management  
Mr. Michael Maul, Director, Department of Planning and Budget

**FROM:** The Honorable Terrance C. Cole, Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security

  
Signature

**SUBJECT:** Interim Report on the Allocation and Impact of Virginia State Police Sworn Recruitment, Retention, and Pay Compression Funding

Pursuant to Item 431 E of Chapter 2, Virginia Acts of Assembly, 2022 Special Session I, I am respectfully submitting here an interim report on the allocation and impact of Virginia State Police (VSP) recruitment, retention, and pay compression funding. The work conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the funding, whether pay issues are a factor in low applicant interest and retention, and whether additional compensation adjustments met the intended goals are complex issues and require the review of additional information to ensure all aspects are thoroughly evaluated to best serve the men and women of the Virginia State Police. The factors that should be considered for additional examination (if available) include metrics measuring the effectiveness of the initiatives implemented to encourage recruitment and retention, the experience level and regional distributions of applicants, current onboard staffing levels, and vacancies, and the impact of compensation adjustments implemented. Such important issues of recruitment, retention, and funding of this critical agency require more in-depth analysis of data available and evidence-based recommendations.

VSP professionals make tremendous sacrifices and put themselves in harm's way on a daily basis to serve and protect the Commonwealth, so it is necessary to do additional data collection and evaluation to properly inform future decisions on VSP recruitment, retention, and pay compression funding.

The Secretariat and the VSP plan to submit the full report to the General Assembly by May 2, 2024, and welcome discussion on the interim report.

## **INTERIM REPORT**

### **Executive Summary**

The Department of State Police (VSP) was legislatively directed to submit this report to assist policymakers in evaluating the effectiveness of the targeted pay increases appropriated in 2022 in reducing the sworn vacancy rate. In preparing its report, VSP evaluated current and historical vacancy rates, trooper application volume, hiring data, employee turnover, and retirement and other employment separation data. The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

- The \$21.7 million appropriated to VSP for targeted pay increases in FY23 were based on the recommendations of a legislatively empaneled Workgroup consisting of VSP, the Department of Human Resource Management, and the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission. This Workgroup was directed to develop a \$20 million plan to respond to sworn recruitment and retention issues at VSP. Establishing a \$20 million target, as well as time constraints, limited the Workgroup's ability to fully assess and respond to market factors to ensure trooper salaries were competitive in the regional market.
- Despite these limitations, the funding of a sworn pay package for VSP was highly successful in halting the steep rate of increase in sworn vacancies. This flattening of the curve has helped VSP to forestall the looming threat to operational effectiveness posed by the escalating vacancy rate.
- The primary factor in stabilizing VSP's vacancy rate is reduced sworn employee turnover. Since the Workgroup report, the non-retirement separation rate fell to slightly below the historic average of 2.9%, and retirements dropped precipitously to less than half of the pre-2022 average.
- In contrast, the number of trooper applicants has only increased slightly and remains far below historic norms. Hiring, meanwhile, has recovered from a dramatic decline in 2021 but remains well below the level needed to fill trooper basic schools. This is true despite numerous innovative and proactive measures VSP has taken to improve recruiting and retention rates.
- The combination of improved turnover, driven largely by deferred retirements, and low application volume present a risk of resurgent vacancies by 2025 if VSP cannot increase applicant volume before those who delayed retirement decide to exit the workforce.

## **Background**

Chapter 1, Virginia Acts of Assembly, 2021 Special Session II, directed the Department of State Police (VSP) to establish a workgroup with the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) and the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to conduct “a comprehensive study to document the current issues that create barriers to the Department’s ability to recruit and retain qualified and diverse law enforcement personnel.” The Workgroup’s remit included “issues of pay compression among the various levels of the existing law enforcement workforce [and] competition with other employers for individuals with the same preferred qualifications and skill sets” and called for “a detailed plan for implementing a compensation program that responds to the issues and problems outlined in the report.”

The Workgroup’s key findings<sup>1</sup> included the following:

- VSP’s vacancy rate had been on the rise for several years and had increased to a level that was hindering its ability to conduct core functions.
- This vacancy rate was attributable to three trends over the preceding five years: (1) a 40% decrease in the number of trooper applicants, (2) a doubling in the percentage of applicants who declined an offer of employment or discontinued the hiring process, and (3) a 39% increase in turnover of tenured sworn employees.
- The decline in trooper applicants was attributed, at least in part, to a below-average starting salary within the applicable market.
- The reasons for the increase in turnover could not be measured because of the voluntary nature of employee exit surveys. However, VSP leadership was keenly aware of the morale problems associated with severe pay compression within the sworn ranks.

In response to these problems, the Workgroup recommended a series of compensation actions totaling \$24.3 million in the first year. These pay actions included (1) raising the starting trooper salary to \$51,500, (2) eliminating pay compression through the use of a pay chart that compensates each sworn employee based on rank and tenure, and (3) providing an education incentive to those who attain a college degree (this portion was not funded by the General Assembly).

A significant driving factor in the Workgroup’s recommended starting trooper salary was that the budget language establishing the Workgroup instructed it to recommend a \$20 million compensation plan to address VSP’s recruitment and retention issues. The Workgroup recognized that \$20 million was insufficient to accomplish the intended result. Therefore, while containing costs to the extent possible, the Workgroup recommended raising the starting trooper

---

<sup>1</sup> The full report can be found here: <https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2021/RD529/PDF>.

salary above the average for large, local police agencies in Virginia but below that of the other Mid-Atlantic state police agencies.

This starting pay increase was deemed to be sufficient, given the time and cost constraints. Nevertheless, it stopped short of what was needed to position VSP to compete in the broader market. The Workgroup's recommendation raised starting trooper pay above the average among large, local police agencies in Virginia, while acknowledging that those agencies, "are significantly smaller and the scope and scale of their responsibilities is typically more narrow" and recognizing the significant retention challenges VSP faces because of factors such as promotions often requiring moving to different areas of the state. The Workgroup also conceded that the proposed starting salary was below that of the five regional state police agencies it used as comparators.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, the General Assembly appropriated \$21.7 million to accomplish the first two Workgroup recommendations and further increased starting pay to \$52,788 (withholding half of the 5% raise given to state employees in the FY23 budget). This starting salary was increased again as a result of a raise provided to all state employees on June 10, 2023. The starting salary is now \$56,536 as a result of the 2% statewide raise in December 2023.

#### Allocation of Funding

The Workgroup report recommended an appropriation of \$22.5 million<sup>3</sup> funded by the General Assembly to increase starting trooper pay and to address pay compression. This amount was to be divided as follows:

1. An across-the-board pay increase of 7.7% which cost an estimated \$13.3 million.
2. Fixing pay compression, which had become rampant among more tenured employees, which cost an estimated \$9.2 million.

Consistent with Item 431 E of Chapter 2, Virginia Acts of Assembly, 2022 Special Session I, VSP allocated the appropriated funding to implement the Workgroup's recommended compensation plan exactly as set forth in Appendix E of the Workgroup report, but the amounts were adjusted in the FY23 budget in two ways which led to only \$21,656,250 million being the actual appropriated amount:

1. Because Item 483 provided funding for all sworn employees to receive half of the 5% statewide pay raise, the salary figures in Appendix E of the report were increased by 2.5% upon implementation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, the Workgroup cited differences in the size of these state police agencies, along with "other factors" as precluding any attempt to match the salaries they offer. An unstated factor in the Workgroup's report is that it simply lacked the time and data to conduct a full regional market analysis.

<sup>3</sup> This amount differs from the \$24.3 million mentioned previously because the education incentive was not funded by the General Assembly

2. The total sum was prorated for eleven months, because the budget was not effective until after July 1.

The aggregate salary adjustments (including fringe benefits) shown in Figure 1 (below) included the total for the across-the-board pay raise and pay compression. Pay compression, such as when one employee of higher rank and longer tenure earns less than his or her junior subordinate, increases over the course of a career and can be amplified by each promotion. As a result, and consistent with the objectives of the Workgroup and the General Assembly, much of the approximately \$9 million for pay compression was required to correct pay inequities at the ranks of special agent and above. This was done in accordance with the Joint Workgroup’s recommended pay chart that provides for a consistent and equitable distribution of employees of 10% at each rank and 1.4% at each year of service.

Figure 1. Aggregate Total Salary Adjustments (including fringe) by Rank in FY 2023

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Aggregate Total Salary Adjustment (w/ fringe)</b>	<b>% of Aggregate Salary Adjustment (w/ Fringe)</b>	<b>Number in Rank<sup>4</sup></b>
Trooper I	\$942,739	4.1%	142
Trooper II	\$3,854,856	16.8%	555
Senior Trooper	\$3,349,494	14.6%	376
Master Trooper	\$656,079	2.9%	96
Special Agent	\$3,095,922	13.5%	230
Senior Special Agent	\$780,110	3.4%	78
Sergeant	\$4,525,892	19.8%	203
First Sergeant	\$2,889,276	12.6%	113
Lieutenant	\$1,526,151	6.7%	53
Captain	\$862,379	3.8%	28
Major	\$265,239	1.2%	6
Lieutenant Colonel	\$133,433	0.6%	5

Each employee’s pay increase was exactly the amount required to achieve the Joint Workgroup’s recommended pay chart distribution. This resulted in some employees, who were more compressed, receiving larger raises than others. For this reason, while Figure 2 shows the average salary adjustments by rank, not each employee at the rank level actually received that amount; some could have received more, and some could have received less. Those with greater pay compression received larger raises.

<sup>4</sup> Number in rank is number of employees actually filling positions in those ranks on the date of the pay plan implementation.

Additionally, the percentage increase column in Figure 2 is not representative of a percentage increase per employee because each individual employee received a different pay increase depending on whether and to what extent they suffered pay compression. Higher percentages are seen at higher ranks because compression stems largely from employees taking different pathways to promotion and employees who suffered pay inequities saw them compounded with each successive statewide increase. The smaller percentages are seen at the trooper level because troopers suffer minimal pay compression. Most pay compression is caused when employees take competitive promotions above the rank of trooper before they are eligible for career progression increases or when they skip a rank in the competitive promotional process.

As a result of the funding, the starting trooper salary increased from \$47,833 to \$52,788 (10.4%). Within the existing workforce, pay increases varied depending on the extent of pay compression. The average total increase was 14.5%.

Figure 2. Average Salary Adjustments by Rank in FY 2023<sup>5</sup>

Rank	Avg Salary after Chart Implementation NOVA Area	Avg Salary after Chart Implementation Non-NOVA Area	Avg Salary after Chart Implementation All Pay Areas	Aggregate Total Salary Adjustment (Without Fringe)	Number in Rank	Avg Salary Adjustment on Per Person Basis (All Areas)	% Increase (All Areas)
Trooper I	\$66,835	\$53,218	\$55,136	\$800,875	142	\$5,640	11.4%
Trooper II	\$76,467	\$60,915	\$63,886	\$3,732,554	555	\$6,725	11.8%
Senior Trooper	\$94,238	\$77,852	\$81,164	\$3,293,727	376	\$8,760	12.1%
Master Trooper	\$123,442	\$100,123	\$104,253	\$876,701	96	\$9,132	9.6%
Special Agent	\$105,948	\$85,571	\$89,204	\$2,732,203	230	\$11,879	15.4%
Senior Special Agent	\$133,894	\$110,546	\$113,839	\$874,892	78	\$11,217	10.9%
Sergeant	\$121,090	\$95,454	\$99,748	\$3,661,254	203	\$18,036	22.1%
First Sergeant	\$148,624	\$110,918	\$114,255	\$2,337,076	113	\$20,682	22.1%
Lieutenant	\$159,438	\$125,631	\$128,183	\$1,242,799	53	\$23,449	22.4%
Captain	\$187,989	\$142,997	\$146,210	\$697,822	28	\$24,922	20.5%
Major	N/A	\$152,107	\$152,107	\$206,176	6	\$34,363	29.2%
Lieutenant Colonel	N/A	\$182,824	\$182,824	\$123,481	5	\$24,696	15.6%

### Effect on Sworn Staffing Levels

With an authorized sworn staffing level of 2,188, VSP is, by a significant margin, the largest law enforcement agency in Virginia. However, with a mission that encompasses primary policing across the vast majority of the Commonwealth's 42,000 square miles, providing invaluable specialized assistance and resources to local police and sheriff's departments, and serving as the Commonwealth's primary bulwark against threats of civil unrest, even a relatively small vacancy rate can impact public safety. As discussed in greater detail in the next section, VSP's sworn vacancy rate has ranged from near zero to more than 13% during the past 12 years. While this

<sup>5</sup> Average salary after chart implementation numbers includes the full 5% statewide pay raise for those who received that instead of the 2.5% raise, Number in rank is number of employees actually filling positions in those ranks on the date of the pay plan implementation.



may be in line with the average in many other state agencies, VSP has a unique workforce where vacancies present unique challenges.

Unlike most agencies, where vacancies are typically widely disbursed among different roles, the vast majority at VSP are in the front-line trooper role. At any given time, VSP's front line vacancy rate is twice the overall vacancy rate. However, even doubling the rate understates the reality. Unlike most roles in state government, where employees are typically available to perform their primary duties the vast majority of the time, VSP's ability to schedule troopers for patrol duties is diminished by things like:

- Court, training, special and specialty assignments, and equipment maintenance consume more than 25% of a trooper's time. This leaves less than 75% to be divided between patrol availability, report writing, and administrative duties.
- Troopers have a higher risk of injury than most other jobs in state government. This results in a greater rate of employees who are unavailable while on short term disability.
- VSP removes troopers from duty when they have been involved in the use of deadly force until the investigation is complete. The VSP does this even when it is clear that the use of force was not excessive because the process includes a post-shooting investigation evaluation of their mental readiness to return to work.
- VSP likely has more troopers in the workforce who are in the National Guard or Reserves. Reservists are not available to be scheduled during their weekend training, two weeks of annual training, and whenever they are called up to active duty.

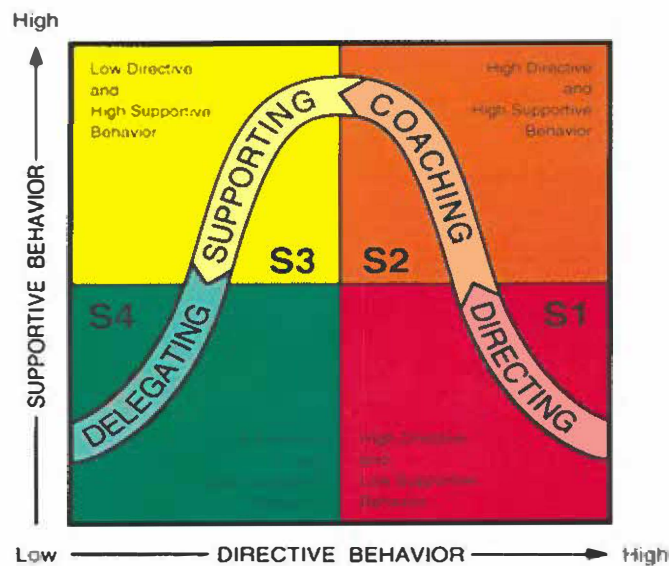
Taken together, these factors illustrate the scarcity of troopers available for patrol duties as the vacancy rate rises. Understanding the importance of maintaining adequate sworn staffing at VSP, and due to the criticality of their mission, VSP has not assumed that salary increases alone would be sufficient to address the growing number of vacancies. Rather, the VSP remained proactive, developing and implementing new programs to adapt in a challenging environment. For example, the following changes have been made within the past five years to increase applicant interest, better prepare applicants, retain existing workforce, and reduce agency vacancies.

- Recruitment Unit – This unit was restructured and placed under the Training Division in an effort to improve communication and coordination at every phase in the process. This move also provided applicants more access to the recruiters at the Academy, and the overall Recruitment Unit's emphasis was changed from processing of applicants to building relationships with applicants by increasing the contact between applicants and the recruiter during the hiring process.
- Future Trooper Training Program (FTTP) – Over the previous ten basic schools, the top four reasons trainees were quitting the Academy were (1) immaturity, (2) lack of life experience and coping skills, (3) failing to meet performance standards, and (4) medical issues. As such, the FTTP was created to engage applicants during the hiring process in

order to secure their commitment to becoming a trooper, and help prepare applicants mentally, physically, and emotionally to successfully complete basic training.

- **Academy Mentor Position** – Many of the trainees in recent Academy classes have never experienced conflict, disappointment, adversity, and/or loss. It is the trooper mentor who identifies struggling trainees and helps them to not overreact, take one step at a time, and overcome their fears and struggles. This program has been successful in reducing attrition during basic schools.
- **Implementation of Phases of Training** – Over the last five years, it was observed that many of the younger trainees were struggling to adjust to the complexities being taught during a basic school curriculum. As such, a new training model was adopted, designed to create a crawl/walk/run approach to aid inexperienced trainees in their journey from trainee to trooper. This training model is purposeful and research-based, designed to develop trainees in the Training Division’s Five Tenets of Training: leadership development, critical thinking, stress management, communication, and teamwork.

**Figure 3: Situational Leadership® II Model**



- **Core Values Training** – Most police academies focus on the teaching of “hard” skills, such as classroom and practical training on policy, legal, motor vehicle code, firearms, driving, and officer survival. However, to build on the five tenets of training, and to aid in the development of trainees’ “soft” skills, VSP brought in hand-selected instructors to talk about the importance of emotional intelligence, integrity, initiative, and overcoming adversity. These topics are not only taught in the curriculum, but are also included in trainees’ performance evaluations, as trainees are expected to show proficiency in these subjects.



- TRIP Program – The Trooper Referral Incentive Program (TRIP) was established on the notion that “everyone” is a recruiter. This program incentivizes existing employees to refer someone to apply for the position of trooper. If the referral applies and graduates from the Academy, the employee is paid \$1,250 per referral (\$1,500 for a trooper rehire), up to three per year. In 2021, only 8% of all applicants came from the TRIP program; however, these referrals accounted for 29% of the students attending a basic school. To date, this program has been the most successful at identifying qualified applicants who ultimately graduated from the Academy.
- Hiring Bonus – Hiring bonuses of \$5,000 are being offered to any applicant who applies, graduates basic training, and successfully completes the field training program. This bonus is funded through an appropriation of American Rescue Plan Act funds. To date, 88 employees have qualified for the hiring bonus and another 83 are scheduled to receive it upon completion of basic school and field training.
- Changes to the Hiring Process – Prior to 2022, trooper applicant testing was a centralized process that required all applicants to travel to Richmond to take the written and physical test on a single date. In an effort to boost opportunities for applicants to begin the hiring process, the initiation of the hiring process and some of the testing requirements were moved online.
- Pulsar Digital Marketing Campaign – In 2022, the Department partnered with Pulsar Advertising to create a campaign to generate qualified leads to the VSP website. Pulsar utilized banner ads, high impact interstitial ads, IP matching, and site retargeting to target prospects. The marketing campaign lasted for 20 days and cost \$25,000. The advertising messages were viewed on over 2.3 million devices, with 90,000 of them clicking through to the Department’s recruiting website. This click-through percentage was slightly higher than the industry average. VSP does not yet have the technological capability to associate clicks to eventual applications, but that technology is in development with anticipated delivery in 2024.
- New Recruitment Slogan – In 2020, the Training Division worked with NDP, a creative and media agency, to come up with a recruitment slogan that would inspire and motivate people to join the Virginia State Police. Through surveys, NDP worked to capture why men and women were choosing a career in law enforcement, and more specifically, why new recruits chose the Virginia State Police. Overwhelmingly, new recruits identified professionalism, the ability to make a difference, and viewing law enforcement as a calling rather than a job as primary reasons they joined the Virginia State Police. As such, the slogan, “*Challenge Yourself to Make a Difference*” was selected as a call to action, and is now found on the VSP website, recruitment vehicles, and job postings.

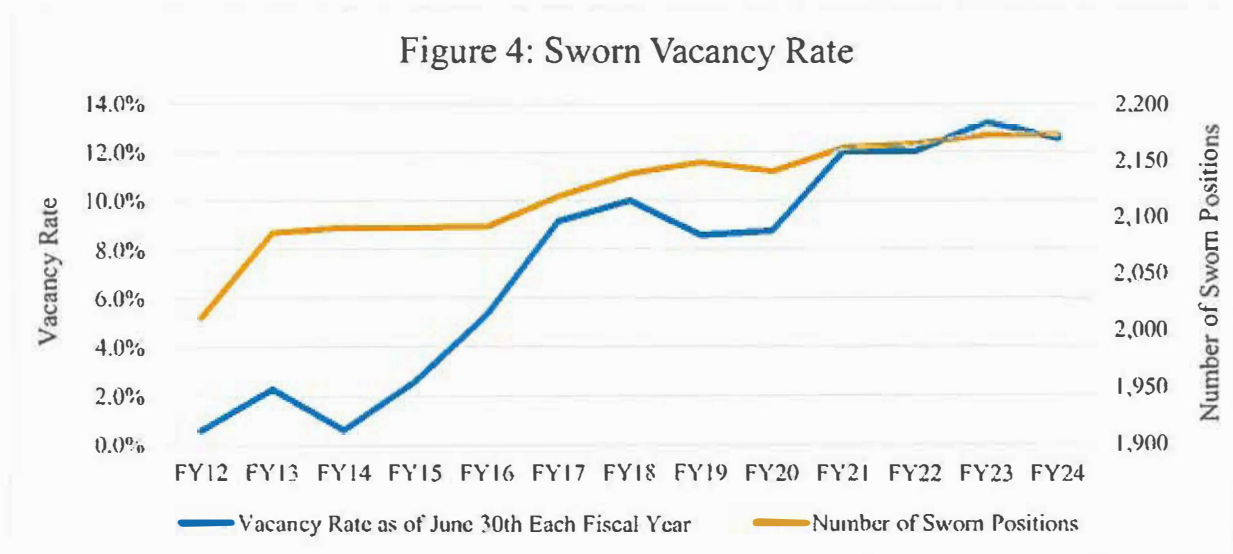
- Staff and Leadership Employee Development (SLED) Program – Started in 2021, SLED is a formal mentoring program that involves all four bureaus in the agency. It is designed to improve the participants’ working knowledge of all available resources and enhance their confidence through hands on experience. To date, the Department has run 3 cohorts with a total of 97 participants, and 17 of those have since been promoted.
- Wellness Officer – In 2023, the Department saw a need to create a Wellness Officer position that would be tasked with developing comprehensive wellness programs to address the mental, physical, and emotional needs of employees, many of whom are repeatedly exposed to critical incidents. The overall goal is to proactively reach VSP personnel and provide them with resiliency tools that will not only allow them to be successful in the Academy, but also allow them to have a long and rewarding career. In February of 2023, this position was filled, and the coordinator is actively developing comprehensive wellness programs and engaging personnel.
- New Retention Initiative – The Training Division held an optional orientation session for the 140<sup>th</sup> Basic Trooper Session that started on July 25, 2023. This initiative involved family members who were invited to attend and learn about the Academy and the Department. The session was intended to prepare trainees and their families for the stress of the Academy, the upcoming separation during the Basic School, and the effects of a career in law enforcement on family life. The VSP Wellness Program Manager spoke about strategies for handling stress and how families can manage their own stress, while supporting their trainee. Training Division staff discussed the history of the Department and family dynamics, among other topics, and held a question-and-answer session. To date, the attrition in this class is down 24% from the 139<sup>th</sup> Basic school.
- Creation of a Cohort A (Full Basic) and Cohort B (lateral) – In an effort to attract more qualified candidates, the Department created an abbreviated basic training option (Cohort B) and added it to the traditional basic training (Cohort A). This program enables applicants who are DCJS certified to attend an abbreviated school that is only eight weeks long, instead of attending an entire 28-week basic school. The first Cohort B starts on December 28, 2023.
- Dispatcher to Trooper Program – As a means to identify qualified applicants early on, the Department is working to create a program to target and recruit high school graduates to become dispatchers as a feeder program to the trooper schools. While working as a dispatcher, the agency would work with a community college to provide online courses to the employee with the end goal of having these dispatchers attend the basic academy when they turn 21 years old. After graduating Trooper Basic, participants of the program would not only become troopers, but obtain their associate degree as well. This program is still in development.

- **Trainee Internship Program** – This program would serve to provide intermediate employment to trooper applicants who have completed phase I and II of the three to nine month hiring process pending the start of the Academy. The goal of the program would be to onboard prospective applicants faster, ultimately securing their commitment to the Department, as well as giving applicants the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the agency as not only a recruiting tool, but also as a retention tool. This program is scheduled to be piloted in early 2024.
- **New Website** – The Department is working to procure a new state-of-the-art website platform that will maximize marketing tactics, create modern web page designs, use updated digital graphics, establish uniformed branding techniques, and maximize video with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of applicants that engage the hiring process.

All of the above changes were made by VSP in the last five years in order to identify, attract, train, and retain the most diverse and qualified applicants for the position of trooper. These changes have enhanced the ability to properly prepare and retain applicants, but external factors contributing to the overall decline in interest in law enforcement as a profession make it impossible to isolate these programs’ impact on the number of trooper applicants.

*Sworn Vacancy Rate*

The Department’s sworn vacancies reached a historic high of 345 on January 20, 2021, not including 58 trooper trainees who were enrolled in basic school at the time. When counting trooper trainees as sworn employees, the resulting 287 vacancies remains a historic high that has only been revisited once—on June 30, 2023. As Figure 4 indicates, the previous 12 years has been marked by a nearly constant increases in VSP’s sworn vacancy rate, and there has been improvement in halting this steep rate of increase in overall vacancies.

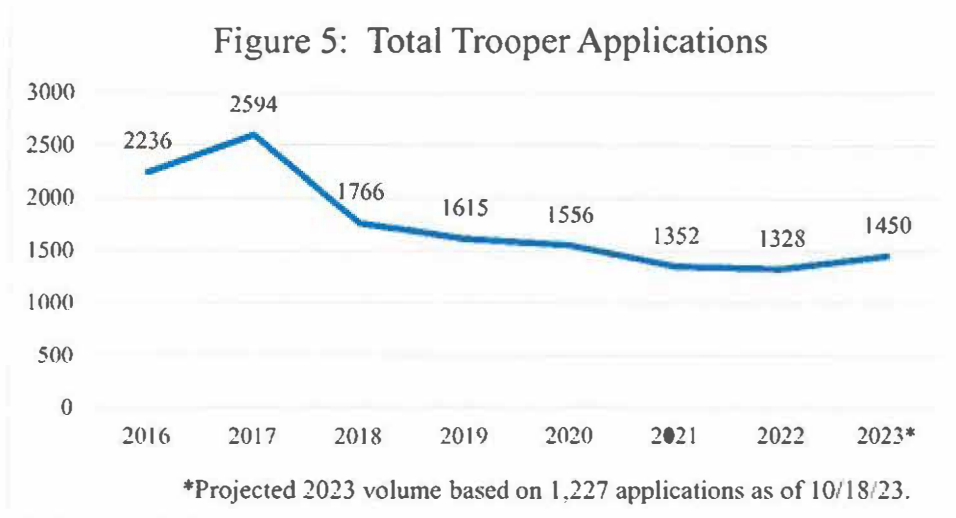


In understanding this chart, it is helpful to note that various factors, including General Assembly pay actions and economic conditions, can affect the vacancy rate. However, the flattening of the curve from FY22 to the present is likely due in large part to the combination of an 8% raise in FY22 and the funding of the sworn pay chart in FY23. The downward trend in FY24 is based on slightly more than two months of data, so caution is urged in interpreting it as a trend.

While an examination of the vacancy rate can provide an overall sense of direction, it offers no insight into the relative influence of new hiring and existing employee retention. To understand these factors, hiring data and turnover data must be considered separately.

*Trooper Hiring Trends*

The vast majority of trooper hiring occurs twice per year when basic schools commence. Depending upon when a candidate submits his or her application in relation to the scheduled basic school start date, the time from application to hiring may be anywhere from three to nine months. As such, hiring trends tend to lag market factors by several months. Figure 5 depicts application volume by calendar year.<sup>6</sup>



This chart forecasts a 9% increase in trooper applications in 2023. A straight-line projection from 1,227 applications as of October 18, 2023, would actually result in over 1,500 applicants in 2023; however, history suggests a slight reduction in applicant volume in November and December. This modest increase marks the first uptick in application volume since 2017.<sup>7</sup>

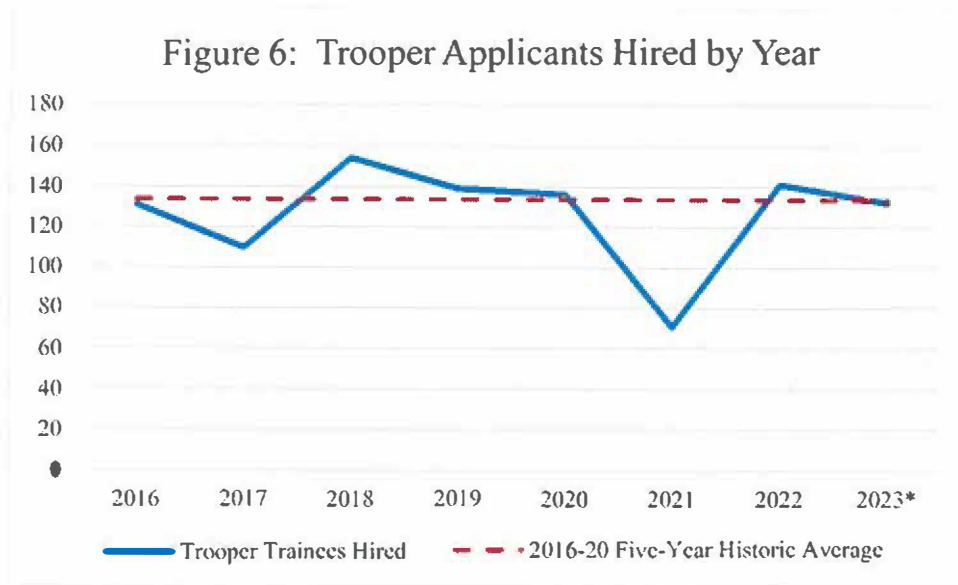
While even a slight increase in application volume is beneficial, VSP actually needs in excess of 2,500 applications in order to fill two basic school classes to total capacity of 168 trainees because the vast majority of applicants voluntarily withdraw from the application process. During the years 2015-19, 74% of people who submitted a trooper application did not attend

<sup>6</sup> Calendar, rather than fiscal, year is used here because VSP’s historical applicant data was tabulated by calendar year.

<sup>7</sup> Starting trooper pay increased by \$6,793 on July 1, 2017.

candidate testing. Among serious applicants, an additional 77% did not meet the minimum hiring standards because they were not physically, mentally, or morally fit for employment.<sup>8</sup> As such, less than 7% of all applicants are qualified to start a basic school.

Figure 6 shows the actual number of trooper trainees hired from 2016-2023, including a projected 25 trooper trainees who will be hired for the lateral cohort of the 140<sup>th</sup> Basic Session in December 2023.<sup>9</sup>



As the data in Figure 6 indicates, VSP has oscillated near an average of 134 trooper applicants hired each year. In 2018 there was a correction from an earlier low after the FY17 raise to starting salary. The year 2021 marked a new low, likely due to a combination of social and economic factors. Hiring recovered in 2022, due at least in part to VSP running a lateral school in October to capitalize on the higher starting salary provided by the FY23 appropriation, which became effective in August 2022. This extra school allowed VSP to recover from 2021's lows more quickly, but the pool of potential lateral candidates is small, so running standalone lateral schools on an annual basis is not a viable option.

### *Trooper Retention Trends*

Unlike hiring, which is a lagging indicator, anticipated pay increases can have a positive impact on employee retention. This is because VSP's existing workforce closely monitors proposed General Assembly pay actions. Over the past several years, as it became clear that policy makers

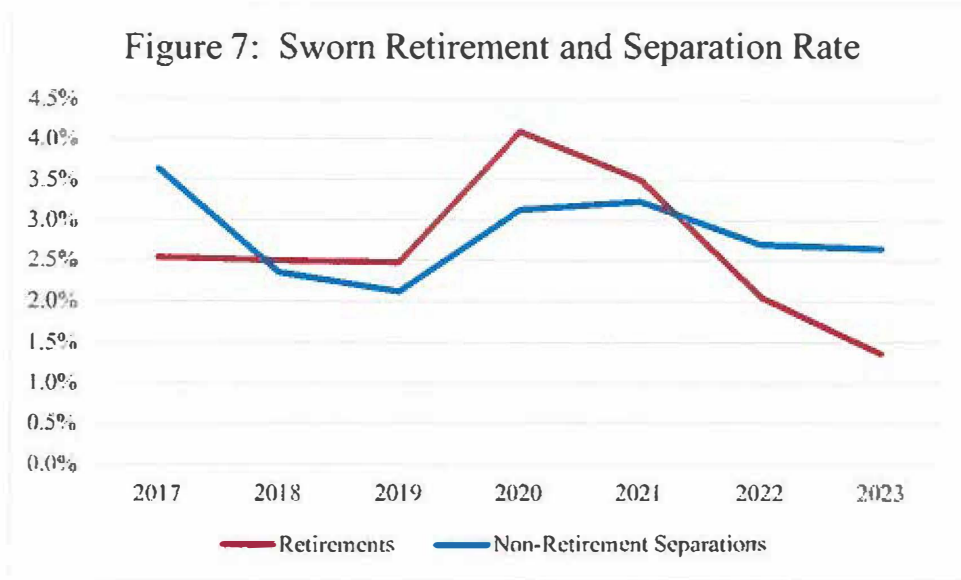
<sup>8</sup> VSP hires every minimally qualified applicant and invests in training those who enter with marginal aptitude so that they can become exceptional troopers. However, the VSP cannot hire those whose backgrounds suggest they are unfit for the job due to integrity issues, recent patterns of exceedingly poor judgment or antisocial behavior; unable to pass the Department of Criminal Justice Services work performance test; or legally disqualified from employment.

<sup>9</sup> Because applicants for this cohort are current DCJS certified police officers who are far along in the application process, the VSP can estimate their number with reasonable accuracy.



were increasingly concerned about VSP’s growing vacancy rate and proposals for a compensation fix gained traction, some sworn employees delayed retirement or chose not to leave for other opportunities.

Figure 7 shows the retirement and separation (including resignations, alternative placements to non-sworn positions, involuntary terminations, and long-term disability) rate from 2017-23. The 2023 retirement data is likely final for the year, as VSP does not anticipate additional retirements prior to January 2024. Any changes in other separations for the remainder of the calendar year will likely be too small to affect the overall trend.



This chart provides clear evidence that the FY23 pay increases had a positive impact on sworn employee retention. The non-retirement separation rate fell to slightly below the historic average of 2.9%, and retirements dropped precipitously to less than half of the pre-2022 average. Overall, the improvements in sworn turnover in 2022 and 2023 have allowed VSP to retain 58 employees that it otherwise likely would have lost.

Given that the improvements in application volume and hiring since 2022 have been more modest—essentially just halting the previous downward trajectory—it is safe to conclude that improved retention has been the driving force in keeping VSP’s vacancy rate from increasing further in the last two years. While this is certainly positive news, it is probably temporary. The employees who deferred retirement when the new pay plan was enacted are all members of the State Police Officers’ Retirement System (SPORS) Plan 1, which measures average final compensation based on the highest 36 months of creditable compensation. As a result, many will decide to revisit their retirement plans within the next year-and-a-half. This may result in a rebound effect, where pent-up retirement demand causes a surge in vacancies by 2025. If unaddressed, this has the potential to once again destabilize VSP’s sworn workforce and disrupt their ability to meet the Commonwealth’s demand for public safety services.

In summary, the data reveal the precipitous drop in trooper application volume has leveled off and will slightly increase in 2023. Hiring, which is a lagging indicator, has recovered from its 2021 low, but remains at sub-optimal levels. Meanwhile, retention, driven mostly by deferred retirements, has improved substantially. This has resulted in stemming VSP's losses but places us in a precarious position going forward.

### **Next Steps**

Recognizing the looming threat of resurgent vacancies, additional analysis is needed to determine the effectiveness of the initiatives put in place to improve VSP's ability to recruit and retain qualified officers and whether pay issues continue to hold VSP back. While the data mentioned in this interim report depicts a decrease in the sworn vacancy rate from FY 23-24, a slight increase in total trooper applicants, and a decrease in non-retirement separation rate and the retirement separation rate, there needs to be a better understanding of the nuances of these measures including geographic and rank distributions and retention, whether those changes are attributable to the salary adjustments, VSP's compensation level and structure relative to local and federal police agencies, and whether market aligned compensation adjustments are necessary and which ones would be appropriate.

Additional analysis on the effectiveness of the VSP recruitment, retention, and pay compression funding and recommendations on future funding allocations and uses will be provided to the General Assembly by May 2, 2024. The additional analysis to be considered includes:

- Data on key metrics used to measure the impact of the various initiatives aimed at improving recruiting and retention.
- Information on the desired results of each of the initiatives and whether those results, qualitative or quantitative, were achieved.
- Data on employment levels such as number of troopers by rank, by region, by functional area, and distribution of the number of people in sworn and civilian positions and how these numbers have changed over time.
- Additional information on vacancies including the regional distribution of vacancies and at what rank levels vacancies and turnover are most prominent.
- Background on the methodology for how the appropriated and on-board number of positions is determined and how the appropriated number has changed over time.
- Context on what information is used to understand reasons for separation and opportunities those that separate are leaving to pursue.
- Compensation comparisons with federal law enforcement agencies and other government entities that VSP competes with.