



Eligibility of Public Safety Occupations for Enhanced Retirement Benefits

Compensation and Retirement Subcommittee,
House Appropriations Committee

Study resolution

- Review eligibility of public safety occupations for enhanced retirement benefits
 - review the risk and responsibility guidelines developed by JLARC in 2008
 - assess public safety occupations for enhanced benefits
 - review the appropriateness of extending enhanced benefits to additional occupations
 - estimate the cost of enhanced benefits for additional occupations

Study mandate: Resolution approved by Commission, November 7, 2022

JLARC was asked to review enhanced retirement benefits for additional occupations

Occupation	Estimated number of positions
DCR law enforcement ranger	100
DOC special investigator	29
DMV law enforcement officer	60
OAG Medicaid fraud investigator	6
VSP 911 dispatcher	140
Local 911 dispatcher *	3,100
Local juvenile detention specialist *	825
Local animal control officer *	490

** Number of positions is estimate. Several state occupations, including Fort Barfoot fire and rescue staff (~20 positions), were included in the study because they have relevant public safety responsibilities.*

Primary research activities

- Structured interviews
 - State and local public safety occupations not currently eligible for enhanced benefits
 - Staff at VRS, DHRM, and DCJS
 - Other state retirement systems
- Survey of managers of 28 state and local public safety occupations
- Analysis of workers' compensation claims data for state and local public safety occupations
- Literature review

In brief:

Responsibility and demand levels* vary for public safety occupations not receiving enhanced retirement benefits

Occupation	Responsibility level	Demand level
Fort Barfoot fire and rescue staff	4444	4444
DCR law enforcement ranger	4440	4444
Animal control officer	4440	4440
911 dispatchers (VSP & local)	4444	4000
Juvenile detention specialist	4400	4440
DOC special investigator	4400	4440
DMV law enforcement officer	4400	4400
OAG Medicaid Fraud Control Unit special investigator	N/A	N/A

4444 High 4440 Moderate 4400 Low 4000 Minimal

*Responsibility and demand levels are assessed relative to other state and local public safety occupations.

In this presentation

Background

Levels of Responsibility and Physical and Psychological
Demands of Public Safety Occupations

Additional Considerations

Enhanced retirement benefits allow employees to retire early from public safety occupations

- Some public safety jobs are more physically and psychologically demanding than for a general employee
 - Job duties become more difficult to perform as employees age
- Diminished job performance can jeopardize the safety of the public and fellow officers
- Enhanced benefits are provided for federal law enforcement to ensure a vigorous workforce that can meet the physical and psychological demands of the work*
 - Similar rationale for enhanced benefits generally recognized in Virginia

* “Retirement Benefits for Federal Law Enforcement Personnel,” Congressional Research Service, 2017

Enhanced retirement benefits are more generous than benefits for general state or local employees

- Earlier retirement with fewer years of service
 - Enhanced benefit plan: age 50 with 25 years of service
 - State employee plan: age 50 with 30 years of service*
- Higher multiplier resulting in larger monthly benefit
 - Enhanced benefit plan: 1.7% to 2.0%
 - State employee plan: 1.7%*
- Hazardous duty supplement
 - \$1,407 per month (FY23–24)

* Reflects State Employee Plan 1. Most general state employees now in the Hybrid Plan, which requires more years of service, has a lower multiplier (1%), and has a defined contribution component.

Several state and local public safety occupations currently receive enhanced retirement benefits

Enhanced benefit plan	Occupation
Virginia Law Officers' Retirement System*	DOC correctional officers
	DOC probation officers
	Campus police officers
	DWR conservation police officers
	DJJ correctional officers
State Police Officers' Retirement System	VSP troopers and investigators
Local political subdivision plans	Firefighters and EMTs**
	Sheriffs and deputy sheriffs
	Police officers**
	Local and regional jail staff

*Occupations with largest number of VaLORS members shown. Additional state occupations receive VaLORS benefits. ** If political subdivision chooses to provide enhanced retirement benefits.

In this presentation

Background

**Levels of Responsibility and Physical and Psychological
Demands of Public Safety Occupations**

Additional Considerations

Two guidelines should be used to determine whether enhanced benefits are appropriate

- Employees should have a high level of responsibility for ensuring the safety of others
- Employees should have physically and psychologically demanding jobs that are more difficult to perform as they age

Note: Having low or minimal levels of public safety responsibility or physical and psychological demands does not mean that occupations do not have important public safety roles.

JLARC staff used 3 criteria to assess the responsibility level of public safety occupations

Criteria	Description
Obligation to maintain public safety	Responsibility for enforcing criminal laws of the Commonwealth
Responsibility for emergency first response	Responsibility for responding to medical, fire, and other emergencies that threaten human life and safety
Impact on safety of others	Job performance regularly affects the safety of other employees and members of the public

JLARC staff used 6 criteria to assess the physical & psychological demands of public safety occupations

Criteria	Description
Workers' compensation claims	Job-related injuries and diseases resulting in paid workers' compensation claims
Personal assaults	Assaults with or without a weapon
Motor vehicle accidents	Accidents in or outside a vehicle
Fire-related incidents	Structural fires, wildfires, or controlled burns
Other accidents & chronic conditions	Lifting heavy objects, moving over hazardous terrain, chronic pain, cardiovascular disease, etc.
Mental health impacts	Mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression) caused by trauma

JLARC staff assessed the relative responsibility and demand levels of public safety occupations

- Responsibility and demand assessed by comparing each occupation to all others in the review
- All state public safety occupations and select local public safety occupations* included in review
- Assessments of responsibility and demand based on
 - Workers' compensation claims rate and benefit amounts
 - Survey responses from each occupation
 - Responsibilities articulated in the Code of Virginia and interviews with employees in occupations

*Local public safety occupations reviewed include those requested by the Senate Finance and Appropriations and House Appropriations committees as well as local police officers and deputy sheriffs.

Responsibility and demand levels vary for occupations receiving enhanced benefits

Occupation	Responsibility level	Demand level	Eligible for enhanced benefits
VSP trooper Local police VSP investigator Campus police	4444	4444	✓
Deputy sheriff DWR conservation police	4440	4444	✓
Capitol police	4444	4400	✓
VMRC police officer	4440	4400	✓
DJJ correctional officer	4400	4440	✓
DOC correctional officer DOC probation officer ABC special investigator	4400	4400	✓

4444 High 4440 Moderate 4400 Low 4000 Minimal

Fort Barfoot fire and rescue staff provide fire and emergency response at Fort Barfoot

- Fort Barfoot (formerly Fort Pickett) is used by the VA National Guard and the U.S. military for training and staging before deployments
 - Training includes live-fire exercises
- Fire and rescue staff respond to structural fires, wildfires, car accidents, and medical emergencies
 - Conduct controlled burns to reduce wildfire risks

Fort Barfoot fire and rescue staff have a high level of public safety responsibility

- Job performance has high potential to directly affect the safety of other staff and troops at the base
- Respond to calls for emergency assistance on a regular basis

Fort Barfoot fire and rescue staff face a high level of physical and psychological demands

- High potential for fire and other work-related injuries
 - Exposure to harmful chemicals
 - Working on hazardous terrain
- Moderate potential for motor vehicle accidents
- Face additional demands unique to a military base
 - Controlled burns needed because live rounds increase wildfire risk
 - Potential to encounter unexploded ordinance

Fort Barfoot fire and rescue staff have high responsibility and face high demands

Occupation	Responsibility level	Demand level	Eligible for enhanced benefits
VSP trooper Local police VSP investigator Campus police	4444	4444	✓
Deputy sheriff DWR conservation police	4440	4444	✓
Capitol police	4444	4400	✓
VMRC police officer	4440	4400	✓
DJJ correctional officer	4400	4440	✓
DOC correctional officer DOC probation officer ABC special investigator	4400	4400	✓
Fort Barfoot fire and rescue staff	4444	4444	

4444 High 4440 Moderate 4400 Low 4000 Minimal

Estimated cost of providing enhanced benefits for Fort Barfoot fire and rescue staff

- Estimated to increase DMA retirement costs 3.7% the first year
 - Represents an estimated increase of \$85,000

DCR law enforcement rangers enforce criminal laws at state parks and natural area preserves

- Conduct foot patrols and traffic stops, investigate reports of suspicious persons, respond to calls for medical assistance
- Enforce park rules related to parking fees, excessive noise, alcohol consumption
- Rangers have substantial non-law enforcement activities
 - Park facility maintenance and interpretive programs for the public

DCR law enforcement rangers have a moderate level of public safety responsibility

- Responsible for maintaining public safety by enforcing all criminal laws of the Commonwealth
- Rangers respond to calls for emergency assistance with a moderate frequency
- Job performance of rangers has moderate potential to directly affect the safety of other officers or the public

DCR law enforcement rangers face a high level of physical and psychological demands

- Encounter violent and threatening individuals more often than some other public safety occupations
 - Risk of confronting individuals alone without backup
- Encounter other physical demands more than other public safety occupations
 - Hazardous terrain or moving heavy objects
- Moderate rate of workers' compensation claims (6% of staff annually)*
 - High amount of benefits per claim (median of \$1,230)

**The average workers' compensation claim rate for all non-public safety state employees is 1.7% annually.*

DCR law enforcement rangers have moderate responsibility and face high demands

Occupation	Responsibility level	Demand level	Eligible for enhanced benefits
VSP trooper Local police VSP investigator Campus police	4444	4444	✓
Deputy sheriff DWR conservation police	4440	4444	✓
Capitol police	4444	4400	✓
VMRC police officer	4440	4400	✓
DJJ correctional officer	4400	4440	✓
DOC correctional officer DOC probation officer ABC special investigator	4400	4400	✓
DCR law enforcement ranger	4440	4444	

4444 High 4440 Moderate 4400 Low 4000 Minimal

Estimated cost of providing enhanced benefits for DCR law enforcement rangers

- Estimated to increase DCR retirement costs 21% the first year
 - Represents an estimated increase of \$807,000

Local animal control officers enforce state and local laws related to animals

- Respond to calls involving domestic or wild animals that are in danger or pose a danger
 - Frequently seize abused, neglected, or dangerous animals and take them to their locality's animal shelter
- Work with local police or deputy sheriffs at residences with known aggressive animals
 - Respond to domestic disturbances, conduct welfare checks, execute arrest warrants
- May also assist shelter staff with caring for and euthanizing animals, particularly in smaller localities

Animal control officers have a moderate level of public safety responsibility

- Moderate potential to directly impact the safety of the public and fellow officers
- Respond to calls for emergency assistance with moderate frequency
- Animal control officers typically have authority to enforce only animal-related laws, not all criminal laws
 - Officers in some localities do not have authority to make arrests

Animal control officers face a moderate level of physical and psychological demands

- Among the highest rates of workers' compensation claims (17 percent of staff annually)
 - But a minimal amount of benefits paid per claim
- High risk of encountering violent or threatening individuals and other physical demands
 - Risk of physical altercation with owners of animals being seized
 - Many injuries occur when restraining large or aggressive animals
- Relatively lower risk for motor vehicle accidents

Local animal control officers have moderate responsibility and face moderate demands

Occupation	Responsibility level	Demand level	Eligible for enhanced benefits
VSP trooper Local police VSP investigator Campus police	4444	4444	✓
Deputy sheriff DWR conservation police	4440	4444	✓
Capitol police	4444	4400	✓
VMRC police officer	4440	4400	✓
DJJ correctional officer	4400	4440	✓
DOC correctional officer DOC probation officer ABC special investigator	4400	4400	✓
Local animal control officer	4440	4440	

4444 High 4440 Moderate 4400 Low 4000 Minimal

Estimated cost of providing enhanced benefits for animal control officers

- Estimated increase in local retirement costs in first year ranges from 0.1% to 1.1%
 - Estimated first-year cost increase as high as \$181,000 for one large locality
- Estimated increase in local retirement contribution rate ranges from 0.02% to 0.10%

Based on 8 illustrative localities for which cost estimates were developed.

911 dispatchers answer emergency calls and dispatch first responders

- 911 dispatchers receive a broad range of calls
 - Medical emergencies, domestic violence, car accidents, fires, shootings, suspicious persons, suicides, etc.
 - Other calls are less serious or not appropriate for 911
- VSP 911 dispatchers receive calls from the public to #77 and calls transferred from local dispatch centers
- Dispatchers typically stay on the call until first responders arrive on the scene

911 dispatchers have a high level of public safety responsibility

- 911 dispatchers are often the first public safety employees to become involved in an emergency
- High potential for their job performance to impact the safety of 911 callers and other first responders

911 dispatchers face a high level of psychological demands, but minimal physical demands

- High risk for negative mental health effects due to nature of calls (e.g., involve violence or individuals in crisis)
- High to moderate rates of mental health related workers' compensation claims
- Dispatchers are not exposed to physical demands common to other public safety occupations
 - Direct encounters with threatening individuals, motor vehicle accidents, fire-related incidents

911 dispatchers have a high level of responsibility and face a minimal overall level of demands

Occupation	Responsibility level	Demand level	Eligible for enhanced benefits
VSP trooper Local police VSP investigator Campus police	4444	4444	✓
Deputy sheriff DWR conservation police	4440	4444	✓
Capitol police	4444	4400	✓
VMRC police officer	4440	4400	✓
DJJ correctional officer	4400	4440	✓
DOC correctional officer DOC probation officer ABC special investigator	4400	4400	✓
911 dispatcher (state and local)	4444	4000	

4444 High 4440 Moderate 4400 Low 4000 Minimal

Estimated cost of providing enhanced benefits for 911 dispatchers

- Virginia State Police dispatchers
 - Estimated to increase agency retirement costs 2.3% the first year
 - Represents an estimated increase of \$995,000
- Local 911 dispatchers*
 - Estimated increase in local retirement costs in first year ranges from 0.5% for one large locality to 25% for one small locality
 - Estimated increase in local retirement contribution rate ranges from 0.05% to 2.55%

** Based on 8 illustrative localities for which cost estimates were developed.*

Local juvenile detention specialists supervise residents in local juvenile detention facilities

- Local facilities often include juveniles accused of or found guilty of violent offenses
- Juvenile detention specialists supervise residents in all areas of facilities
 - Classrooms, living pods, common areas
- Detention specialists are not armed
 - Generally cannot use handcuffs or other devices to restrain violent residents

Juvenile detention specialists have a low level of public safety responsibility

- Responsibilities are focused on ensuring resident safety in their facility
 - Not responsible for enforcing criminal laws or responding to emergencies in the community
- Low potential for their actions to directly affect the safety of other staff or the general public
- Respond to calls for emergency assistance within the facility at a moderate frequency

Juvenile detention specialists face a moderate level of physical and psychological demands

- High rate of workers' compensation claims (13% of staff annually)
 - Moderate amount of benefits per claim (median of \$567)
- High risk of encountering violent or threatening youth
 - Workers' compensation claims often result from altercations with residents
- Lower risk for other physical demands
 - Motor vehicle accidents and fires

Local juvenile detention specialists have a low level of responsibility and face moderate demands

Occupation	Responsibility level	Demand level	Eligible for enhanced benefits
VSP trooper Local police VSP investigator Campus police	4444	4444	✓
Deputy sheriff DWR conservation police	4440	4444	✓
Capitol police	4444	4400	✓
VMRC police officer	4440	4400	✓
DJJ correctional officer	4400	4440	✓
DOC correctional officer DOC probation officer ABC special investigator	4400	4400	✓
Local juvenile detention specialist	4400	4440	

4444 High 4440 Moderate 4400 Low 4000 Minimal

Estimated cost of providing enhanced benefits for local juvenile detention specialists

- Estimated increase in local retirement costs in first year is approximately 1%
 - Amount of estimated first-year increase is as high as \$440,000 for one large locality
- Estimated increase in local retirement contribution rate in first year is approximately 0.14%

Based on 8 illustrative localities for which cost estimates were developed.

DOC special investigators conduct investigations related to DOC operations

- Most investigations involve inmates or staff at state prisons, including
 - Drug-smuggling and other contraband
 - Assaults
 - Inmate deaths
 - Gang activity
 - Inappropriate relationships between inmates and staff
- Investigations often require interviewing inmates and staff in state prisons

DOC special investigators have a low level of public safety responsibility

- Responsible for enforcing DOC-related laws and policies, not all criminal laws
- Low potential to directly affect the safety of the public or other officers
- Respond to calls for emergency assistance with minimal frequency

DOC special investigators face a moderate level of physical and psychological demands

- Moderate rate of workers' compensation claims (~6% of staff annually), but a high amount of benefits paid per claim
- Moderate level of physical demands overall

DOC special investigators have a low level of responsibility and face moderate demands

Occupation	Responsibility level	Demand level	Eligible for enhanced benefits
VSP trooper Local police VSP investigator Campus police	4444	4444	✓
Deputy sheriff DWR conservation police	4440	4444	✓
Capitol police	4444	4400	✓
VMRC police officer	4440	4400	✓
DJJ correctional officer	4400	4440	✓
DOC correctional officer DOC probation officer ABC special investigator	4400	4400	✓
DOC special investigator	4400	4440	

4444 High 4440 Moderate 4400 Low 4000 Minimal

Estimated cost of providing enhanced benefits for DOC special investigators

- Estimated to increase DOC retirement costs 1.2% the first year
 - Represents an estimated increase of \$814,000

DMV law enforcement officers enforce laws related to DMV operations

- Conduct investigations and enforcement activities related to
 - Use of fraudulent information to obtain driver's license, motor vehicle title, etc.
 - Violation of tax and fee payment laws (e.g., fuels tax)
 - Illegal sale of salvage vehicles or parts
- Common enforcement activities include
 - Conducting traffic checks of commercial and diesel vehicles
 - Seizing vehicle tags and plates obtained illegally

DMV law enforcement officers have a low level of public safety responsibility

- Officers have authority to enforce all criminal laws but focus on DMV-related laws
- Directly impact the safety of the public and other law enforcement officers with less frequency than other occupations
- Respond to calls for emergency assistance with relatively low frequency

DMV law enforcement officers face a low level of physical and psychological demands

- Low rate of workers' compensations claims (~2% of staff annually)
 - Low amount of benefits per claim (median of \$104)
- Low risk for personal assaults because they encounter violent or threatening individuals relatively less frequently
- Minimal risk for fire-related injuries

DMV law enforcement officers have low levels of responsibility and demands

Occupation	Responsibility level	Demand level	Eligible for enhanced benefits
VSP trooper Local police VSP investigator Campus police	4444	4444	✓
Deputy sheriff DWR conservation police	4440	4444	✓
Capitol police	4444	4400	✓
VMRC police officer	4440	4400	✓
DJJ correctional officer	4400	4440	✓
DOC correctional officer DOC probation officer ABC special investigator	4400	4400	✓
DMV law enforcement officer	4400	4400	

4444 High 4440 Moderate 4400 Low 4000 Minimal

Estimated cost of providing enhanced benefits for DMV law enforcement officers

- Estimated to increase DMV retirement costs 11% the first year
 - Represents an estimated increase of \$1.5M

OAG Medicaid fraud investigators only recently received law enforcement authority

- Investigate cases involving Medicaid provider fraud
- 2023 legislation (HB 1452) authorized OAG to hire investigators with law enforcement authority
- Previously, OAG relied on other agencies to perform most dangerous parts of investigations
 - Executing search warrants
 - Making arrests
- Premature to assess responsibility and demand levels of investigators

In this presentation

Background

Level of Responsibility and Physical and Psychological
Demands of Public Safety Occupations

Additional Considerations

Finding

Some public safety staff suggested in interviews that enhanced retirement benefits would improve recruitment and retention, but other strategies could address these challenges more directly.

Some public safety staff said enhanced benefits could help with recruitment and retention

- Public safety staff cited difficulty competing with occupations that offer enhanced benefits
- Indicated enhanced benefits could help with recruitment
- Public safety staff said psychological demands of working in occupation makes it difficult to stay in occupation long term
 - Example: 911 dispatchers indicated that there is often little or no time to process a traumatic call before taking the next one
 - Example: animal control officers said new staff not prepared for traumatic scenes (e.g., seeing deceased persons or animals)

Several strategies may help address recruitment and retention more directly

- Increasing salaries
 - Higher starting salaries for new employees
 - Larger and more regular salary increases for existing employees
- Signing and retention bonuses
- Larger health insurance premium subsidies
- Additional mental health supports
 - Additional paid leave
 - Downtime after traumatic events
 - Mental health supports provided immediately after traumatic events

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