

MEMO

To: Ashland County Board
From: La Pointe Town Board
Re: Law Enforcement Agreement
July 12, 2022

The attached draft is our proposal for a modified Law Enforcement Agreement between the County and Town. It covers the next five years: 2023-2027. It proposes yearly lump sum payments from the County to the Town: one payment for basic law enforcement services, one payment to contribute toward half the cost of a new squad.

As you may know, the County and Town have had an official Law Enforcement Agreement in writing since 1995. We have had unofficial agreements for longer than that. In the 1960s, for example, when the Town had only a part-time police department, the County committed one sheriff's deputy exclusively to Madeline Island on summer weekends.

Our formal agreement has been in place for decades because it works for both of us. Both the Town and County recognize that it is very difficult – and sometimes impossible – for the sheriff to respond quickly from the mainland to the island. In the best case, a deputy could get to La Pointe in an hour. In most cases, it would take far longer than that. And, as we all know, there are times of the day and times of the year when a squad and deputy could not reach the island at all. That is a risk that neither of our jurisdictions should take.

One statistic shows how effective our agreement is for both the Town *and* County. As you know, the sheriff responds to calls in Ashland County communities even if they have their own police department. In 2021, for example, sheriff's deputies responded to 510 calls in the City of Mellen according to CODY reports. Deputies responded to 1,186 calls in the City of Ashland. But in 2021, sheriff's deputies responded to exactly ZERO calls in La Pointe. This fact demonstrates how effectively the agreement allows the sheriff's department to focus exclusively on mainland communities, rather than having to spread resources even thinner.

Another fact to remember is that state statute does not require La Pointe to operate a police department. We can, but we do not have to. Under state statute, law enforcement ultimately is the responsibility of the sheriff's department. If the County and Town do not have an agreement, and the Town has to scale back (or eliminate its police department entirely), policing becomes a County responsibility. In that scenario, response times become a problem for your communities as well, not just for the island. If a deputy is tied up in La Pointe, it means mainland parts of the county don't have coverage. Or your communities will wait much longer for coverage. So, a decision to eliminate our agreement can have cascading effects across the region.

Overall, Town property owners pay \$630,000 a year for law enforcement coverage: \$380,000 that goes to the sheriff's patrol budget, \$250,000 for the Town police department. Our law enforcement agreement, beyond all its practical benefits, demonstrates a tangible recognition by the County of the tax contribution that Town property owners make. The Town is 2.7% of the County's population, but contributes 22.46% of the County's tax levy. The agreement's rebate is by far the most visible way that

residents and businesses on the island can see they get *something* of value for the \$2 million a year in property taxes they send to the County. Even after the rebate that supplements Town police department, the County sheriff's patrol still receives a subsidy of nearly a quarter-million dollars a year from Town property owners. That remains an arrangement that you should not ignore.

The sheriff tells us he believes the agreement should stay in place, because his department does not have the capacity to ensure a timely response to island residents and businesses. When asked directly, the sheriff said he cannot, under current conditions, station a deputy on the island during summer weekends – even for one shift a day – because he does not have the staffing. Yet data tells us that is the time when a law enforcement presence is needed most on the island. Last year, according to CODY statistics, more than 62 percent all police reports filed in La Pointe happened on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday. Last year, during the summer months of July, August and September, the “incident count” in La Pointe was 589. That is more incidents than any other town in the county during that quarter; in fact, it is 21 percent higher than the number of incidents in the next highest town. But because of the Law Enforcement Agreement between the County and Town, the sheriff does not have to worry about the island caseload at all, or about any diverting resources from mainland communities. Abandoning our law enforcement agreement, however, would shift that equation dramatically – to no one's benefit.

The bottom line is: We want our residents and visitors to be safe. We want your residents and visitors to be safe. We believe continuing the Law Enforcement Agreement is the best way to make that result more likely for all of us. We hope you agree.