

Q&A with Police Chief Al Chandler

BY JIMMY LAROUÉ
STAFF WRITER

The Suffolk News-Herald recently sat down with city Police Chief Al Chandler as he answered questions for about

two hours on a range of issues — his vision and goals for the Suffolk Police Department, the George Floyd killing and how that has affected policing,

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Q&A: Communication is key to fixing society

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decertification, the shortage of officers within the department, its increased use of technology in policing, challenges in dealing with mental health cases and more.

Chandler, who began working for the city's police department in 1999, became interim chief June 15, 2020, and on Jan. 6, he had the interim tag removed.

The interview was lightly edited for clarity and will appear as part of a series.

SNH: You're close to the three-month mark since the interim tag was taken off of you. Is there a difference for you now in having been the interim chief for so long versus now being the full chief?

Chandler: Well, obviously there's a difference in ... the fact that we can really start to move in a direction. As interim, really the function is to hold the wheel, to lead and guide until someone comes in and sets the vision. I knew it was going to be a full process and a fair process, so it was kind of no telling how it was going to turn out until it ended. So there were a lot of things that I could not really move forward on because there may be someone to come in with a different vision and different view. It is good to finally have that finality where we as an organization can begin to all move in the same direction.

SNH: Talk about the past three months since having the interim tag removed.

Chandler: It's been good. It's been fast and furious. We have a lot of work to do. We're in an interesting time in history where there are a lot of challenges to law enforcement, which that challenge almost makes it fun, because it's very difficult right now to attract people to this profession. It's very difficult to figure out exactly how to move forward, but I think the Suffolk Police Department is doing a good job, seeing the places that we can get better and developing plans of action to move forward in the right direction. We've had a very good history of really good leaders and visionaries who've gotten us up to this point and now as we are in this change of time, if you will, in law enforcement. Now we're moving forward in slightly different directions than law enforcement has moved.

SNH: When they

named you interim chief, it was at a time, not just in the city but just society in general, where there's a lot of upheaval, at a time we had heard about George Floyd in Minneapolis and other things that happened across the country and galvanized in a lot of calls for action, a lot of rallies, a lot of protests, including here in the city. What was that like coming into that in an interim capacity — maybe not being able to put your own stamp on things but seeing some things that, if you do get to be full chief, you could go ahead and do?

Chandler: I think what made my time of being interim different and very challenging was the fact that I couldn't afford to just hold the wheel. There were so many changes in law enforcement at large that we had to rise to the occasion. There were things that we really needed to look at and address.

The George Floyd incident changed policing forever, and I think at the end of the day, we're going to find out it changed policing for the good. Is it difficult? Yes. Did it come with some consequences that were not so good? Yes, it did. But change is often difficult. Even if you try to make something better, sometimes it feels a little worse before you can see the benefit.

What the George Floyd situation did for law enforcement was it shined a light on places like Suffolk, where you really do have a good police department that tries to do everything they can do to follow the rules. It showed that we still have places where we need a lot of help, and we had citizens that came up and that talked to us as an agency, and me personally, specifically, and said we want things in place to make sure that never happens here. And you can look back at our track record and see all the things that we put in place to try and make sure that we didn't have situations like this. But a lot of those things our citizens did not realize, or did not know.

Our robust body camera policy, chokeholds were a big conversation. I attended the Chesapeake Police Academy. I was hired onto the city of Suffolk in April of 1999. When I went to the police academy in 1999, chokeholds were automatic failures in defensive tactics. They were not accepted in 1999 by this department. So for over 20 years, we have had no chokeholds accepted in the city of Suffolk, but due to the national conversa-

tion, people didn't understand that. So that gave us an opportunity to educate people of the things that we had done over the years to make sure that these things don't happen in Suffolk.

SNH: Beyond that, what kind of other things were you able to educate people on that they may not have realized?

Chandler: We've had a chance to educate the public on a lot of what we do, a lot of who we are. One thing is the fact that the vast majority of the complaints that we investigate in our internal affairs division come from members of the Suffolk Police Department. We police ourselves. So among officers — officers and supervisors — we don't wait for citizens to say that we did something wrong. If we see that we did something wrong, it's always been, 'Hey, I've got to say something. That's the culture. The culture is, I can't allow this to happen and not say something.'

The vast majority of our complaints come from us, not from citizens — citizens complain, yes — and we don't get it right every time, but we try. One of the other really big things is that we are people, and people make mistakes. So we realize that we don't do everything correctly. We also realize that as human beings, for men and women of this agency, we have feelings, we have emotions, we have family members that care about us. We have fears, we have concerns, and all of those things, we have to try to harness to do this job effectively.

And oftentimes, citizens may not think of us as people. We are often the only entity of government that they feel that they have a chance to speak to. So we have to absorb someone that's angry with the Democrats, or angry with the Republicans, or angry with pro-choice, or pro-life or angry with civil unrest, angry with whatever is happening as far as the government is concerned. We are the only entity of the government that they have personal encounters with regularly. So we have to begin to try to absorb that.

But in that, I think it's important that our citizens know and understand that the men and women that are out there to protect and serve do have feelings, and we do have emotions, and no matter how professional we are, it's hard to hear how terrible you are and how horrible you are and it not get to you. Sometimes hearing that, citizens begin

to look at it from a different perspective.

SNH: Do you think that the more you have personal interactions with people even in tense situations, that they'll lead to a better relationship, if not a friendly one then at least one of mutual respect?

Chandler: Absolutely. I think communication and conversation is the key to fixing many of the woes of our society. We will not always agree, but when there is enough respect to know that, Officer Friendly is a good guy, she's a good lady, she's not making me happy right now, but we have a relationship, the general person, the normal person can accept negative information from someone they have a relationship with better than a stranger. So the more our citizens know and understand that this police department is theirs, they're not only part owners of this police department, they are part of this police department.

Our success is predicated on our relationship with our citizens. As we talk more with our citizens, as we communicate with them more, they have a better understanding of what the law is, and what our abilities are within that. So I think that's huge. I think it's huge for our officers to know and understand that oftentimes, we go into conflict and someone is not going to be happy with us at the conclusion of that event. If I have two citizens who disagree about a thing, we can try to bring them to some kind of common ground. But ultimately, someone may leave not happy with us in most of the things we respond to. And the more that we as officers take our personal opinions, personal feelings, out of the situation, the more the conversation is about the law and the legal system and not about us personally.

When you see a lot of this bad behavior, we can trace it back to many things. But often bad behavior — I'm talking about bad behavior from police officers — it's because the police officer got to a point where he took it, or she took it, personally. Those things happen.

Other things that are major contributing factors are just simply mistakes being made, and our mistakes can cost lives. So we have to train better, we have to prepare better, we have to make sure that every possible way we try to make certain that everything we do is as close to perfect as we can humanly get it.

Q&A with Police Chief Al Chandler Part II

BY JIMMY LAROUÉ
STAFF WRITER

The Suffolk News-Herald recently sat down with the city Police Chief Al Chandler, who had been the interim chief for more than a year before becoming the permanent chief in January.

He answered questions about a range of issues.

In this part, he addresses issues regarding the department's perception among the public, the decertification of officers, the use of technology in policing, a proposed new Suffolk Police training center in Whaleyville and mental health calls.

Part I of the interview appeared in the April 3 print edition and can be found at www.suffolk-news-herald.com. Part II of the interview appears here and was lightly edited for clarity.

SNH: In a sense, you can do things right 98% of the time, but the 2% you get something wrong, people get upset and then there's this idea that

there's a bias, or you're being careless, but even in that 98%, you know you can still do better.

Chandler: Here's one of the big differences that I carry over from this particular, what I'll call the George Floyd era, is, taking that same 98% of the time we get it right and 2% we get it wrong, dialing in and looking at that 2%, you realize that that 2% can cost somebody their life. That 2% can cost someone their freedom. That 2% can cost someone their job. That 2% can cost someone custody of their children. That 2% can change a life.

In the vast majority of cases, it really doesn't. It just hurts feelings, but in that, that erodes our citizens' belief that we're capable of making the big decisions that do change lives. So drilling down and trying to get that 2% down to 1%. And when we get to 1%, trying to get to a half percent, when we get to a half percent, try to get to a quarter percent. That is what makes a great organization.



Chandler

We may never get to 1%, but we should never stop trying.

SNH: And you're trying to make sure that people have an accurate perception of who you are as a department, what your values are and what you're aiming to do within the law that you're trying to uphold.

Chandler: Correct. One of the things that we try to show, and keep in mind is, let's take the George Floyd situation as a great for instance. The officer that created that situation, that committed

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those criminal acts against that citizen, irregardless as to what his background was, irregardless to anything else, we didn't do what we were supposed to do. We didn't do the right thing. And look what it caused. It caused a great deal of civil unrest and it caused a mistrust of police to grow.

One bad decision can cost us so much in this career, and we've got to keep that in mind. It didn't just cause civil unrest. It didn't just cause a mistrust of police; it actually caused people to no longer want to do this job. It caused people who would have wanted to do this job, very talented, very intelligent people who would like to do this job, to decide that they wanted to do something else.

Because many people question inside and outside of law enforcement, "Are we still the good guys? Are we still the heroes? Are we still the ones that are doing the right thing?" And we've got to get in front of that and say, yes, we absolutely are. And the fact that we have bad actors, the fact that we have people that make poor choices and bad decisions, likely won't change. But what can change is our response to these things. And of all the police officers that I know, of all the people in the business that I know personally, I have not found an officer, a person, a manager, a supervisor, to say that those actions were correct. I've not found anyone that will stand behind those actions. And that is not normal operating procedures in a vast majority of places. And we have to continue to say that. That is not the norm. That is not what we accept, and our citizens are going to know that by us continuing to show that, not just say it, but continuing to show that, hey, we're going to everything that we possibly can to avoid violent encounters.

We're going to train more; we're going to prepare more. I don't believe we will ever in this country get away from violent encounters happening because we have citizens that will do harm to police officers and others to forward their criminal actions. And it's our duty and responsibility to combat that. When we can do that in a non-tactical way, we should, every time, but if it requires a tactical conclusion, we should be fully capable and ready to bring it to a tactical conclusion and use only that amount of force necessary to effect that arrest, or neutralize that threat. That has to be how we operate every single day, in every single situation. That is always the goal.

SNH: You brought up something that people's perceptions of your department may not have anything to do with any action that your department undertook and with situations like the one with George Floyd and others affecting potential officers from becoming part of the profession or affecting the perception of police officers.

Chandler: And we look at those cases, those national cases that come out, and some that don't come out nationally. We talk about this and we look at our policies and we look at our actions and what we do, and how we respond to things, because there's always something to learn. There's always things that you can learn from the majority of these situations. We come to it, and we see, no, we've already put something in place to make sure that never hap-

pens. But occasionally, we may find something and say, "OK, well, we need to enhance our policy, or we need to advance our training."

We look at our training every single year to see what things we can do better, what new trends are out there. We look at our policies every single year to make sure that our policies are up to date and are relevant, and that we are keeping to our policies to make certain that that is the way we're operating. These are things that we do regularly because every situation, no matter how bad, we need to do what we can do to learn from it.

SNH: A lot has been made of the decertification of officers, and the fact that that process has been expanded, and Suffolk officers were among those decertified. How does that help with the trust factor — that there is a process and people understand that there will be a consequence for an officer's behavior whether it's something domestic that turned criminal, or something internal where there's an investigation they weren't truthful about?

Chandler: Well, our stance has not changed. The law has changed. But ever since I've been here, one of the rules that you knew, one of the things that you knew were definite and constant was, if you did not tell the truth, you would be terminated. There's no ifs, ands or buts about that. If you are caught not being truthful at the Suffolk Police Department, you will not keep your job and that has been proven at many levels within this department, historically.

What has changed is the Department of Criminal Justice Services has now said, "OK, with that information, now we're going to decertify people based on certain things." That has not changed our operating procedure because we were doing that anyway. If you came from another jurisdiction, anyone who wanted to transfer here from another jurisdiction, we're going to look and find out why they separated from that other jurisdiction. If it was for not telling the truth, if you committed certain crimes, then we weren't going to hire you anyway, so it never changed our actions. This was already put in place with us.

The expansion of DCJS, which I highly agree with, causes the Department of Criminal Justice Services to decertify people who commit these acts so they cannot get a job anywhere else.

SNH: Or at least in

Virginia.

Chandler: But I think these things are serious enough and egregious enough. I mean, the bottom line is police officers have to tell the truth. I have to know that the officers are telling the truth, and if I have questions on their credibility, then citizens are going to have questions on our credibility. Jurors are going to have questions on our credibility.

And ... as an officer, you spend years and years building your credibility in court, it can be one case, one day of testimony, that could destroy 10, 20, 30 years of credibility building by you not telling the truth. It is that serious, and we've got to hold that line. Now, that may be relaxed one day. It will not be relaxed as long as I sit in the chair.

SNH: Shifting from this to more Suffolk-centric issues that you have to deal with. You have the opportunity now, as the full chief, to lay out your vision for the department and for how you want it to operate. Talk a little bit about some of those things, the initiatives that will be a part of your vision as you go forward.

Chandler: So a huge thing for me is technological advances and force multipliers. Suffolk has some of the best equipment you can find in the area. I want to continue that. I want to make sure that we are on the cutting edge of technology. Our technological infrastructure, I want to continue to build and develop.

We are bringing in a smarter, more technologically advanced young officer. Just by the way of how young people communicate, the way of doing things is changing. The online reporting is a perfect example, where years ago that wouldn't have been a great thing, but now, a lot of citizens really prefer the online reporting where, if your trash can gets stolen, or some minor case, you can go online and input information and from there, you are able to report that criminal interaction without having to call a police officer in. When we get that information, if we find something that, hey, this is something that we've got to investigate here, we assign it to somebody to investigate. That helps us gain more information without actually having to send out an officer in many cases.

The Flock safety cameras are a perfect example. We can't have police officers everywhere, but the cameras can assist us to be able to tell the story in different places to be able to identify if a particular vehicle is a suspect of a partic-

ular crime passed this location or this location. The other cameras that we have, that we're requesting, that we're planning to get, as far as red-light cameras, as far as school bus cameras to catch people going past the school bus when the school bus is stopped, speed cameras in the school zones and in work zones.

We have a lot of schools in our city, and to have a police officer working traffic every day at each one of those schools is just not possible. This allows us some opportunities to utilize technology as a force multiplier. So now I can be dealing with all of these different areas and I can put one or maybe two officers in charge of reviewing each one of these violations, and we multiply our effectiveness.

Looking at technology from all different kinds of ways, one of the things that has been a vision of mine, I'm seeing it come to pass now, is for us to have our own training facility, a location where we can do training — and we do a great deal of training already; we have a training room here and we have roll call/training room in each one of our buildings, but that's for in-class training, but those are multipurpose areas. We've acquired a location in Whaleyville where we're actually going to be able to have training. We have purchased a system called the MILO system, which is basically a large octagon — it's about the size of a room, and the officer is able to walk into this system, and it has screens basically all the way around, putting that officer in, basically, a virtual game, if you will.

SNH: Like a simulator.

Chandler: A simulator. That's exactly what it is. And we are able to work on things such as de-escalation, such as lethal decision-making, which weapon needs to be utilized. Is there a better choice? Is there a way out? Is there an ability or a way to not utilize force? And, a big thing in that training is the preparation for the potential for force encounters.

I believe in my heart of hearts, if an officer is ready, increasing our readiness is a big thing that I want to do. Are we good? Yes. We are a good department, but good is the enemy of great. I want us to reach greatness, and reaching greatness requires us to be better, to be better trained, to be better with readiness, to be better with equipment, to be better all the way around. That's a tall order, but I know we can do it.

Mental health is a big thing, as far as my platform, what I want to see change, what I want our department

to do. I think we do a great job responding. I really do. I think our officers do a really good job. I watch a lot of videos of our officers after the fact to see how we have handled situations. And I am very pleased that the care that we take with our mental health population, the care and concern that we regularly show not just with the person in mental health crisis but even with the families and supports around them, getting a mental health consultant with our department — I know a lot of other places are looking at going out and responding, and, OK, a mental health person needs to do this.

One of the things that I think may be lost on a lot of people is when things become a force encounter, those mental health professionals back out, and the police are still there to handle any type of force encounter. My thought process, my belief is, we need to be dealing with these mental health crises before police are called. And our consultant is specifically focusing on just that, trying to provide family members with options and alternatives and connecting them with resources before we get called.

So if you're dealing with a citizen that oftentimes will stop taking their medication, and that will cause behaviors, then let's talk to that, maybe the caregiver. Let's talk to the person, the roommate, whoever is there and say, "Hey, are you contacting the people that can help them with that prior to them getting to a point where they're so dangerous," that there are people that care for them that can't handle them. If we can get them services prior to that, then you usher the police out before they ever get there because generally, in a mental health situation that we respond to, we're the last resort.

In many, many cases, things have gotten so bad that those who may care for that individual or live with that individual, near that individual, are now afraid because it's gotten to a point where somebody could get hurt and that's when we come in. So the probability of it being a violent encounter is so much higher because it's gone so far. If we can interrupt that beforehand, then you usher the police out of that system.

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Q&A with Police Chief Part III

BY JIMMY LAROUÉ
STAFF WRITER

The Suffolk News-Herald recently sat down with the city Police Chief Al Chandler, who had been the interim chief for more than a year before becoming the permanent chief

in January.

Chandler, who will formally be sworn during a ceremony at 6 p.m. April 25 in the King's Fork High School auditorium, answered questions about a range of issues.

In this part, he addresses issues regarding the depart-

ment's perception among the public, the decertification of officers, the use of technology in policing, a proposed new Suffolk Police training center in Whaleyville and mental health calls.

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Q&A: Mental health cases time-consuming for officers

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Part I and II of the interview appeared in the April 3 and 6 print editions. Part III appears below and was lightly edited for clarity.

SNH: With mental health, you've said it's about being proactive in trying to provide services or having the means for people to access services before it gets to that last resort where your officers are having to step in.

Chandler: And we're being proactive with that, so we're being proactive with identifying citizens that find themselves frequently in crisis and trying to develop plans of action to assist them in getting the help that they need so the police don't have to keep getting called.

SNH: You've talked before about how there's a lot of time involved with mental calls and that an officer is going to be occupied in that situation, and that's when mental health professionals step back and you're what's left.

Chandler: The mental health piece is the number one largest drain on law enforcement in Virginia right now. This is an incredible undertaking. The number of mental health calls for service that we respond to far exceeds what happened in the past, and the amount of hours that we have to stay with these people is crippling to our agency, as well as others, just hours and hours and hours, days we are having to stay with people in mental health crisis because there is a shortage of beds in Virginia. And the fact that we have to stay with some people for up to three days is crippling to our agency, so we're trying to find ways to work through that. And there's some legislation that's being worked on in Richmond concerning that, but that is the number one issue that we have to deal with right now.

SNH: Can you give a more tangible way of how it's increased in terms of the time that your officers have to take on it?

Chandler: The last report that I received is the average mental health call, we took all mental health calls that we have, and the average is 9 hours and 34 minutes.

SNH: I don't think anybody would realize that.

Chandler: Correct. There are some that may be two or three hours. There are some that are 72 hours where we are stuck at the hospital for 72 hours. I have to supply a police officer, and this can be multiples. So sometimes we may have two, we may have three in the hospital at any given time. So when you see officers sitting in the emergency room, sometimes they're with people in a mental health situation, and this takes an officer off the street, literally, for an entire shift, sometimes two shifts, three shifts, four shifts, five shifts, until we can find a bed. Wherever that bed is in Virginia, we're then required to get them there in most cases. So if that's in Staunton, I have to take an officer and take them to Staunton. If it's a female or juvenile, it has to be two officers,

so this incredibly affects our coverage at a time when, obviously, we're short officers, but that is the part.

SNH: But you don't have a choice in that regard.

Chandler: That is our legal responsibility. So now they do have a civilian alternative, but we're not finding that to be useful to us very frequently. We are getting the benefit of some assistance from the civilian company, but not nearly as much as we would like to see. We try to request it as much as possible, and hopefully it'll get to be more, but those are just challenges that we have, and that's a place that I really want to work with. Another one is officer wellness, making sure these officers are taken care of because a healthy, happy officer is going to provide better service.

The pay study, pay plan that we hope will be fully implemented is going to be helpful in making certain that officers understand that the city really does appreciate and respect the professionals that they are. The credentials that many of these offices hold are amazing. We have many officers who are masters at their crafts, have all types of certifications, have degrees, two-year degrees, four-year degrees, master's degrees, working on doctoral programs. And that is an illustration of the level of officer that we're getting.

We're getting some really, really intelligent people. We always have. Suffolk has just got that history. People that decide to get out of this business, oftentimes they have a great deal of options because we're looking for the best and the brightest and we have absolutely some of the best and brightest personnel that you can find, just some of the ideas that come up, some of the ways that we do things, and this is what we're looking to cultivate.

I don't want to train subordinates. I want to train replacements. I want to train people who are ready to step up to the next position. I want to make sure that we keep a force that knows and understands how to lead because we're all leaders. What we're leading is what's different, to be able to take care of the family. One of the functions of the mental health consultant is to be able to not only provide resources to our citizens, but provide resources to our officers. It's really hard to come out and deal with somebody else's problem when you're dealing with a child that has issues, or a wife that has issues, or you have your own issues. These are still people that have regular problems and issues and circumstances like everybody else, so to be able to provide them a resource where they can confidentiality go and receive information is very important.

SNH: Getting back to the mental health piece, how many calls involving mental health do you handle in a year?

Chandler: Off the top of my head, I'm not sure. I would be very comfortable in saying eight to 10 a week at minimum. It's probably much more, many more than that, but I would be very comfortable saying at least eight to 10 a week. It's very likely to be more. This is something that we deal with very frequently. If

we go a shift without an ECO (emergency custody order), that's a great day. And you know, it's just happening, and it happens quickly, and we have to do what we have to and we're going to do it, but it's really a challenge.

SNH: Related to traffic, you said you're trying to leverage technology to help you a lot.

Chandler: It's a number of things. I think one of our challenges is we get a great deal of traffic compliance. And we can't be everywhere at the same. We would love to. You look at Route 58 as a great example. Route 58 has several points where we know speed is a factor. Can I put an officer on all six of those different areas of 58 every day, all the time, so when you ride past, you'll see an officer?

Route 58/Whaleyville Boulevard is another. Those are places that we have what's called directive patrols, where we direct officers that they have to spend a certain amount of time in their shift to go, whether it be per day or per week, that, 'Hey, I want you out here and I want you doing proactive police work, traffic enforcement.' With everything else going on it's hard to get that.

And we still write tickets, and we write a lot of tickets. The challenge is being able to answer all the calls for service and continue to provide a quality service, not rush through the call for service, but provide good service and still get back to those traffic-related concerns. One of the things back to technology that we put in place, and I'm not taking any credit for this because my predecessor did this. We have speed boxes, and some of them are obvious. You can see it's got the board on the side. Some of them you won't even notice as you ride past and they gauge the speed. They actually give us a report of what the speeds are in that area along with the times of most frequency of speeding.

SNH: You get whatever data that's available to you, time, date and speed.

Chandler: What time are people speeding the most, what are the speeds that we are seeing, and then we dispatch our personnel based on that information. Sometimes we come back and find out, no, we don't have a speed problem here. It's a 35 mph zone and the 85th percentile of speed is 37 mph. That's not a good use of resource-

es, two miles over. But if it's the same 35 mph and we see it's 42 mph, 45 mph, then yes, we're going to put someone out there and we're going to affect that situation. So those are things that we try to do to utilize our staffing better, but there are just a lot of locations.

There are a lot of people that are going too fast and I've heard many things. I've heard people say, "Well, we need to ask the state police for help." The state police are short people. The state police have a great amount of ground to cover. I was talking to some citizens, and I was talking about (Interstate) 95 and they said, "Well, yeah, they have a reputation all over the East Coast, and you know that if you go through Emporia, they're going to write you a ticket." You know what you see when you go to Emporia? Cars pulled over getting tickets, because people are still speeding. So yes, we can make an impact. We definitely can make an impact, and we should, but that's not going to stop people from speeding. It's going to slow some people down, but some people are going to continue to speed. So we want to get out there and we want to impact that traffic the best we possibly can, and I think we could do better with that, with more staffing and more time. But we are trying to make those effects, but that is why we are asking for the additional technology to even impact those things.

SNH: What is your staffing level supposed to be, what you're asking for, and how the compensation study could help with that?

Chandler: We are staffed for 200 police officers. We currently have 165, so we're 35 officers short at this moment. Now that is a significant number. What we've tried to do to absorb that number is take a little from everywhere, so everybody takes a bit of the bite of the apple as opposed to just being uniformed patrol, or the detective bureau takes all of it. That's been hard. We still operate, but one of the things that is going to help, I believe, is the compensation. The compensation, I hope, will be effective, but it's not easy pulling in people. It's not easy at this moment because this is a very dangerous job and obviously, with the legal battles as far as the protections of police officers, who can be sued and how easy it is to sue a police officer.

All those things go into it because in order

to effectively do this job, you have to have some protections, and if you're doing what you're supposed to do, society will protect you. Legislators are working to answer those questions and make that better. But here, what we're trying to do is ensure that we have the best technology, ensure that we have the best situation. And I believe we do. We are working really hard to make sure that our officers have the very best that we can provide them because finding good quality police officers is really hard.

With the inflation, the wage hikes are going to be helpful, but also making sure that officers know that, "Hey, if you come to Suffolk, we do a good job of taking care of our people." We've relaxed the tattoo policies, for instance. We are working right now on streamlining the hiring process so it doesn't take so long to get a person hired. We can't afford to be in such a hurry to hire someone that we hire the wrong people. But we're looking at the places that we can do better or more efficiently, and we found some places that we believe will impact that.

That will be a help, something that I have called Recruitment 100. And that is that 100% of our officers recruiting 100% of the time, not just our officers, officers and staff. Wherever you go, whatever you do, this is what I continue to preach, you are recruiting for the Suffolk Police Department. When you're at that restaurant and that man or woman provides great service, you say, "Hey, have you ever thought about being a police officer?" We are offering our staff bonuses for people that they refer to the police department. We're offering a bonus to those who come and get hired here. \$2,500 for new hires and \$4,000 for people who are already certified. That is for police officers and for communications operators.

To talk to our friends and families, to talk to our Facebook friends, to talk to people that we know that are interested in being in the business, people that we know are about to come out of the armed forces and say, "Hey, have you considered law enforcement?" I know this great place called the Suffolk Police Department, that you might be a good fit," and to bring good people, the right people, smart people, that we can teach and train and have the right heart to be able to take good care of our citizens.



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