

CITY OF BOZEMAN TESTIMONY
Jim Veltkamp
House Judiciary Committee
2-22-2023

Good morning, Chair Regier and Judiciary Committee Members, My name is **Jim Veltkamp (V-E-L-T-K-A-M-P)**, the City of Bozeman's Police Chief. Thank you for the opportunity today to testify in **SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 624** on behalf of the City of Bozeman.

Montana Code Annotated 3-6-303 currently requires municipal police chiefs to appoint one or more sworn police officers or sworn reserve officers as court officers to their respective municipal courts. Considering budget issues and the cost of hiring officers, the lack of authorized sworn officers most municipalities face, and the difficulty agencies are having finding qualified candidates, this requirement has become increasingly burdensome on municipal police departments. House Bill 624 would expand the staffing options police chiefs have to fill this critical role for their courts. It would expand the current definition of special services officers to include unsworn, full time, paid members of a law enforcement agency. It would then authorize municipal police chiefs to assign one or more as court officers.

Passage of this bill would be beneficial in a variety of ways. First, it would save municipalities money, since the cost of equipping, training, and paying a special services officers is substantially less than that of a sworn police officer. Second,

it would expand the applicant pool to attract those interested in a new and unique opportunity. Third, it would create an opportunity for those interested in becoming sworn officers to gain valuable experience. Fourth, it would allow these staff members to become more proficient at a specific set of assigned duties. Finally, it would keep the sworn police officers out in the community performing more appropriate duties.

As police chief, I have a duty to look for ways to work more efficiently, make better use of our resources, and ensure officers and staff are assigned to appropriate duties. This bill will help municipal police agencies take a step toward that goal.

This bill has the support of the Montana Association of Chiefs of Police.

Thank you Chair Regier and members of the Committee for hearing my testimony **SUPPORTING HOUSE BILL 624** today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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Please insert any questions you would like Members of the Committee to ask below here. These questions should provide opportunity for you to expand on your original testimony or make additional points.

1. How would agencies ensure these Special Services Officers are trained appropriately to handle the duties?

2. What specific duties would the Special Services Officer perform?
3. How are municipalities currently handling this issue?