



CITY OF CAÑON CITY

City Council

City Council Chambers
128 Main St., Cañon City, CO 81212
(719) 269-9011 • www.canoncity.org

GENERAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
August 6, 2025
6:00 p.m.

AGENDA

- 1. CALL TO ORDER:** City Council Chambers
- 2. ROLL CALL:** COUNCIL MEMBERS DENNEHY, MELONI, SCHMISSEUR, STEIN, TRACY, WORTHINGTON, MAYOR PRO TEM HAMRICK, MAYOR TROUTMAN.
- 3. DISCUSSION:**
 - A. CCPD Recruiting/Retention Initiatives**
- 4. ADJOURN:** The next regular meeting is scheduled for September 3, 2025.

Posted pursuant to code on Thursday, July 31, 2025.
Cindy Foster Owens, City Clerk



CITY OF CAÑON CITY

City Administrator

P.O. Box 1460 • 128 Main Street
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(719) 269-9011 • www.canoncity.org

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: Ryan Stevens, City Administrator
PREPARED BY: John W. Schick
DATE: 08/06/2025
RE: CCPD Recruiting/Retention Initiatives

SUMMARY:* This matter is being presented to the Vision Committee to assist the Police Chief in determining agency initiatives to enhance the recruitment and retention efforts of the police department. Additionally, if adopted in whole or in part, it is reasonable to believe that the measures can demonstrate a level of concern, care, and compassion on behalf of the Police Department and the City, which can undoubtedly have a positive impact on team members' morale and welfare.

The chief proposal to be recommended among all these programs is the Sabbatical Leave initiative. It has long been recognized in the field of mental health, based on more than just anecdotal evidence, that law enforcement personnel experience adverse health effects from their work as police officers. A recent review of internal data revealed that job stress was the primary reason our team members reached out to peer support mentors. A broad scope, but considering staffing levels, it could encompass greater-than-normal exposure to critical incidents and/or the increased volume of individual calls for service.

The following are some of the proposed initiatives I would like to consider.

- Sabbatical Leave Program
- Fuel Reimbursement Program
- Housing Options
 - In City Rent/Mortgage Stipends
 - Down Payment Assistance
- Experienced Officer Signing Bonuses

REVIEWED BY Yes No
LEGAL?

RECOMMENDED Guidance/Feedback
ACTION:

of attachments 1



CITY OF CAÑON CITY

**John W. Schick
Chief of Police**

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Cañon City, CO 81212
(719) 276-5600 • Fax: (719) 276-5607

To: Ryan Stevens, City Administrator

From: **Chief J. W. Schick Jr.** *J.W. Schick Jr.*

Cc:

Date: *15 July 2025*

Subject: Proposal for New Wellness Benefit for Police Personnel – Sabbatical Program

The Concern Over Law Enforcement Mental Health

It has long been recognized in the field of mental health, and not just anecdotally, that law enforcement personnel experience negative health effects on police officers. Still, via extensive research, law enforcement officers, especially those who have worked in the field for an extensive time, suffer from mental health disorders. Based on this research, the risk to the mental health of the police officer is an increasing concern, which affects their overall welfare. One such study, a 2024 report conducted through the Department of Health Education and Behavioral Sciences, Mahidol University, and published by the National Institute of Health, concluded that “the number of police officers suffering from mental illnesses is becoming a significant public health concern. Police officers are more likely to experience mental health problems than the general population.”ⁱ This same recent study confirms earlier research that police personnel experience psychological health disorders at a rate significantly higher than other professions. The report found that “one in every seven police officers worldwide suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, and one in every ten struggled from other mental illnesses. When compared to the general population, police personnel have approximately twice the prevalence of PTSD and depression (20% vs 7% to 9%) and are associated with a lower quality of life.”ⁱⁱ Based on these studies, preemptively addressing the causal factors is critical to any organization that employs police personnel.

Officers are subjected to extraordinary circumstances not experienced by members of general society. “Officers see the worst of humanity daily; no one calls the police when things are going well. Exposure to such repeated crises can influence perception, cause bias, and, ultimately, impact decision-making.”ⁱⁱⁱ While “police officers generally carry out their sworn duties and responsibilities with dedication and valor … some stresses are too much to take, and every officer has their breaking point. For some, it may come in the form of a particularly traumatic experience, such as a gruesome accident or homicide, a vicious crime against a child, a close personal brush with death, the death or serious injury of a partner, the shooting of a perpetrator or innocent civilian, or an especially grisly or large-scale crime.”^{iv} As such, “police officers are often in situations where life-changing decisions must be made.”^v On a more personal front, a

2021 study by Violanti and Steege further showed that compared to the general public, police officers “face a 54 percent higher risk of dying by suicide.”^{vi} Along the same line, it has been found that, on average, a 50-year-old police officer will “live only 7.8 additional years while a U.S. white male for the same period was expected to live an additional 35 years.”^{vii} In other words, the damage incurred to the psyche of police officers from line-of-duty trauma is not limited to the person of the officer; indeed, it is not only officers who pay a great price for such horrific experiences, but their personal relationships and the communities they serve are often adversely, even permanently, impacted when those professionals are no longer psychologically well-balanced.

At least concerning the psychologically hazardous situations that officers encounter in the field, there are certain internal aspects of their workplaces. One such internal variable that has “best explained mental health problems in police officers is a lack of social support within the organization. For these professionals, the perception of support from peers and superiors is essential.”^{viii} While organizations cannot control the type of calls for service or the situations and conditions to which their officers might be exposed during responses to such calls, they can influence the internal factors related to working conditions and the preventive services offered to employees. Thus, “the use of effective mental health promotion programs can assist in reducing police officers’ psychological problems.”^{ix}

Proposal for New Police Officer Benefit: Sabbatical Program

Based on research findings regarding the mental well-being of officers, as well as my confirmatory observations and experiences over the last 35 years in the law enforcement field, I propose a new mental health benefit for Cañon City officers, called the ***Sabbatical Program***. I learned of this new support approach from Chief Jeff Worley of the Fairplay Police Department. However, the idea is the brainchild of Paul Wegner, Chief of Police for the Paynesville Police Department in Minnesota. Due to high turnover, cynicism, and officer health issues – many of which can be attributed to the national surge of anti-police attitudes that has prevailed since 2021 – Chief Wegner faced a significant challenge in meeting the community's policing needs. What he realized was that he was facing a mental health crisis in his agency that was magnified on a national level. Thinking “outside the box,” Chief Wegner instituted a simple, yet powerful wellness benefit designed to address the psychological and physical health needs of his officers. While still in its nascent stage, the Sabbatical Program is showing promising results, as reflected in the positive outlook of its members.

I recently consulted Chief Wegner about his pioneering idea. Armed with his insight, I offer this simple program to the city for consideration as an added benefit for police members. The essentials of the new benefit follow:

- Every five years of initial service and every three years thereafter, officers will take 160 consecutive hours of time off (in essence, four weeks of duty time, equivalent to 168 patrol hours) based on their hiring date.

- The 160-168 hours of Sabbatical time are assigned as administrative leave (paid) and are not deducted from the officer's PTO bank. Instead, these hours will be taken from the hours the officer would have worked during their sabbatical period. (As radical as the notion sounds, officers will be paid for four weeks they did not work.)
- Sabbatical time cannot be used in conjunction with PTO, sick leave, leave under the Family Medical Leave Act, or as accommodation.
- Before taking a sabbatical, arrangements will be made with the District Attorney's Office, the local municipal court, and other pertinent entities to ensure that the officer will not be available during their Sabbatical Leave when they are off.
- No communication, including electronic, concerning work matters, will be directed at the officer during the Sabbatical.
- The above arrangements are made to allow officers to disconnect entirely from work and its related stressors, focusing on faith, family, friends, hobbies, or any other healthy interests that may lie within.
- Although the Department will not mandate how an officer spends their Sabbatical time, they will be encouraged to use it for healthy, non-work-related pursuits.
- An individual shall be entitled, upon return from Sabbatical, to be restored to the position held by the employee with the same terms and conditions of employment when the Sabbatical time commenced.
- The Police Department of the City of Cañon City prohibits retaliation against employees who utilize or request Sabbatical time.

(Note: To prevent all officers from using their Sabbatical in a single year, creating a scheduling nightmare, our current staff will use their first Sabbatical on a tier-based system. In the first tier, senior sergeants are eligible for the benefit every three years thereafter. The second tier, comprised of veteran officers, will be able to use their Sabbatical in two years and every three years thereafter. Our most inexperienced officers, in the third tier, will have the benefit first available to them in three years. Each tier of officers' next Sabbatical will occur in the next three years. All officers employed after the institution of the new benefit shall be allowed to use it for the first time based on the fifth year following their respective hiring dates.)

The new benefit's most significant financial and practical merits for the City of Cañon City are that it does not affect the PD budget (except in rare instances of compensatory or overtime), does not add dollars to the budget, and may only necessitate a temporary adjustment to the schedule.

Benefits to the City and Our Community

In addition to the above advantages, our officers, the city, and the community we serve also benefit from numerous advantages. Amongst these are:

- Recruitment of new employees—In an era when police work is not always considered a viable or desirable career, the benefits the City and Department currently offer are pretty attractive. The addition of a Sabbatical Program would significantly increase the appeal of working for Cañon City. (Chief Wegner told me that after he established the program,

his department started receiving inquiries from people interested in working for Paynesville PD, inquiries his agency had not received before.)

- Retention of current staff—While more significant wages can lure officers away from their current departments, CCPD's general benefits and relatively competitive wages are two key factors in our current retention strategy. I believe that the added benefit of the Sabbatical Program would only enhance the desire to stay with CCPD.
- Mental and physical health enhancement – This new Sabbatical Benefit is specifically designed to mitigate mental health concerns for our officers and enhance their resilience. And, of course, mental health has direct ties with our physical health, thus potentially reducing medical problems amongst our employees and minimizing medical or early retirements. Importantly, healthy officers possess more positive attitudes and make better decisions. Therefore, the risk of violating the rights of our citizens due to overreaction, fatigue, or apathy may be reduced.
- An authentic concern shown for employees—A committed step like this confirms to our officers that the city genuinely values their overall well-being, which adds significantly to their job satisfaction.

Conclusion

While the results of the Sabbatical Program from Paynesville and other police agencies offering this benefit are “not in” yet (and may not be for decades), there exists *prima facie* evidence that organizations that care for their employees and take substantial steps to promote their good health have healthier, happier, and more satisfied workers, who remain employed benefitting those they serve on a long-term basis. It stands to reason, then, that professions that expose their members to the kinds of mental and physical hazards that law enforcement officers experience would significantly improve the hardiness of those members through appealing preventative measures and safeguards against debilitating psychological conditions and their associated physical disorders. The “no-brainer” about the new benefit is that it costs the City very little in terms of dollars and cents but could yield a return that benefits Cañon City and its officers immeasurably.

References

ⁱ Santre, S. (2024). "Mental Disorders and Mental Health Promotion in Police Officers." *Health Psychology Research*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10875161/#:~:text=Public%20safety%20personnel%20were%20found,rate%20of%20psychological%20health%20problems.&text=One%20in%20every%20seven%20police,struggled%20from%20other%20mental%20illnesses>.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jaeger, S. (2023). "The Impact of Life Experiences on Police Officers." *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/perspective/perspective-the-impact-of-life-experiences-on-police-officers>.

^{iv} Miller, L. (1999). "Law Enforcement Traumatic Stress: Clinical Syndromes and Intervention Strategies." *The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, Inc*, https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/media/document/ci_police_stress_and_interventions-508.pdf.

^v Jaeger, S. (2023).

^{vi} Lawrence, D., Dockstader, J., Solomon, K., Schlosser, L., Willis, J. (2024). Law Enforcement Deaths by Suicide. *CNA*, <https://www.cna.org/reports/2024/03/law-enforcement-deaths-by-suicide>.

^{vii} Violanti, J., Hartley, T., Gu, J., Fekedulegn, D., Andrew, M., Burchfiel, C. (2013). Life Expectancy in Police Officers: A Comparison with the U.S. General Population. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4734369/#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20the%20YPLL%20was,CI%3A%205.8%2D37.7>.

^{viii} Santre, S. (2024).

^{ix} Ibid.

Worley, J. (2024), Sabbatical Program for Officers, White Paper.