



**Jeffrey R. Gahler**  
Sheriff

# Harford County Sheriff's Office

## Office of Media and Public Relations

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## NEWS RELEASE

### Sheriff Gahler Works to “fix” Broken Salary Structure

**For Immediate Release**

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*[January 30, 2017, Bel Air, MD]* Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler issued the following statement Monday afternoon, addressing the broken salary structure that is currently plaguing the agency and impacting all aspects of public safety operations. The Harford County Sheriff's Office is now facing challenges related to hiring, retention and promotion, to a degree that is disconcerting at best and a threat to the delivery of the expected level and quality of law enforcement and correctional services at worst. During his campaign, Sheriff Gahler made it clear that he understood Sheriff's Office personnel at all levels and ranks do a very difficult job, one that requires great skill, extensive training, long suffering, and dedication of purpose. Year after year their jobs have only become increasingly more difficult and dangerous, yet, the salary system in place to compensate them has remained unfunded for years.

Recognizing the severity of the problem, the Sheriff commissioned a salary study in early 2016 to examine the issue and look for a solution to improve salary and the compression issues within the Office. “As Sheriff, part of my duties are to ensure the compensation received by all of the Office's personnel is fair and in accordance with their duties and responsibilities. Accordingly, my team and I have made addressing the shortcomings of the salary plan our top priority. To be clear, the existing Sheriff's Office salary structure is broken from top to bottom and as a result, we are seeing retention issues with tenured personnel, a reduction of qualified applicants and low morale related to pay and compression of the pay scale.”

During the last year, the HCSO saw an increase in the number of deputies resigning prior to retirement. A common theme developed in exit interviews revealed salary as a primary reason for departure. In many instances, 10-year veterans of this agency are paid at a rate similar to those who have only two years of experience. The failure to attract and retain high quality deputies is not only an additional cost burden to the taxpayers, but has the potential to create a public safety crisis. We are now at the threshold of a critical tipping point.

The completed study was presented to Sheriff Gahler at the end of 2016. Of the study, the Sheriff remarked, “The completed Salary Study has provided for a path to address all employees' salaries and I am hopeful that working together with the County Executive and County Council, we can begin the process of returning this Office to a level that is both competitive and comparable to our surrounding agencies.”

Sheriff Gahler has shared the results of the completed study with the County Executive, the Harford County Delegation, the Harford County Deputy Sheriff's Union and the Harford County Correctional Association and a date to present the results to the County Council is still pending.

That still leaves one agency salary that cannot be modified through the Salary Study, that of the elected Office of Sheriff. Current legislation has been drafted that will set the salary of the Sheriff to that of the elected State's Attorney (which is set to mirror that of a District Court Judge). Proposals such as these exist for jobs that are similar in function, scope, duty and/or responsibility. This tie of the Sheriff's salary to the State's Attorney's salary has been a common practice for the past 20 years. Establishing a process that allows the salary of the Sheriff to remain at a market level will reduce the frequency of the need for the legislature to continually revisit this topic. Any changes that might occur to the Sheriff's salary would not be effective until the next elected term in 2018.

In conclusion, the Sheriff offered, "In my past two years, serving as Harford County's Sheriff, I have spoken many times concerning the broken pay plan at the HCSO. The independent salary study has not only validated what we feared to be true, but also indicated its shortcomings and has clearly identified the path to address the needs of the agency. The correction in structure and compensation identified in the study will positively impact issues pertaining to our hiring, retention, and promotion, providing for increased opportunities to ensure a sound, well qualified, and mission capable law enforcement agency positioned to continue providing quality public safety services to a growing community."