

# Consolidation of Police Services: Local Control vs. Financial Savings

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## **Abstract**

*This paper seeks to increase understanding of the impact of consolidating police services between local police departments and county sheriff's office for law enforcement services. Is there financial savings for municipalities to consolidate police services with county sheriff's office and do citizens support consolidation? Consolidation of police services is a continuing concern in American law enforcement. Florida's current economic status is forcing cities to look toward consolidating law enforcement services. There have been a few notable exceptions where consolidation of police services are successful; however communities are reluctant to relinquish local autonomy and control. Findings indicate the consolidation of law enforcement services is less expensive by eliminating duplication of services. There are cost cutting measures that benefit municipal agencies by consolidating police services; however most cities fear losing local control.*

## **Introduction**

This project is an analysis of the impact to municipalities in subcontracting law enforcement services with county sheriff's office. This study is to determine whether or not it's in a municipality's best interest to contract with a county sheriff's office for financial savings or risks a high unemployment rate within the city boundaries. Is it better for a municipality to maintain a city police department for local control or contract with a county sheriff's office? (Andrews, 1997) "The most efficient police force in any city can be obtained through the medium of a single-headed commission, with a suitable staff of assistants, and not by a means of Board of Commissioners". The following counties were selected for this study: Miami Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach.

There have been numerous studies conducted by private and business companies on rather the feasibility of whether outsourcing works or does outsourcing relinquishes local control. The focus is on structuring the agreement with the county sheriff's office to maintain the level of service, criteria to measure the level of performance against the former and existing agency, and managing the contract or merger process. Outsourcing allows city managers more time to focus their energy on long term planning (strategic) and address city council members and constituent concerns. The city manager is no longer required to address police union issues such as arbitration, grievances, lawsuits, workers' comp., Family Medical Leave Act, etc... Municipalities often consolidate public services with the hopes of saving money and better utilizing patrols. The city manager can devote their attention to managing the city and leave law enforcement issues to the county sheriff.

## Literature Review

Regionalizing law enforcement services for police agencies (duplication) hasn't always been easy. Police agencies don't always play well with each other. Agency pride, ways of operating, and reputation all influence how a community views its law enforcement. When law enforcement agencies consolidate; consideration should be given to quality. (Fahim 2011) Reports: "Increasingly communities are looking to the consolidation mechanism as a way of achieving efficiencies of scale in response to citizen's demands for services. However, voters are more often than not reluctant to approve mergers between neighboring communities." Consolidation is the mechanism used to achieve economies of scale by reducing numbers of local government units. Private companies have many avenues they can take to consolidate their businesses to facilitate future operations and keep business afloat. The circumstances are dictated according to applicable state laws (right to work or at will employee). Florida is an at will employee state; therefore applicable state laws apply. The private companies will bring in an outside vendor to conduct an audit review for cost cutting measures. Based upon the analysis, the private business company will process the information and initiate layoffs or significant reductions in services. Municipalities looking to outsource their police services must look toward their county sheriff's department. County sheriff's department's executive staff must ensure their departments are attractive alternatives to local police departments. The alternative must be lucrative and significant in the following areas: manpower, financial savings, and professional strength/experience. Outsourcing contracts must be clear of any ambiguity, clearly understood (written), and must contain standards of performance for evaluation purposes for the contracting agency to meet. Kelling and Bratton (2006, p.4) point out that the radically decentralized law enforcement presence in the United States (i.e., more than 17,000 separate police departments) can be seen as both a strength and weakness: "It's great a great strength because the police are better attuned to their local communities and is directly accountable to their concerns. But it is also a weakness in the post September world where information sharing is key" (Miller, Hess, Orthman, 2011).

Municipalities are facing significant budget reductions due to the current economy and therefore; must make adjustments to balance the city coffers. With the rapidly declining financial picture affecting communities today, it is vitally important to seek a new approach to assess how cities can conduct business effectively in the future. City managers and county sheriff's departments must have standards to review if contracting with sheriff departments is beneficial. Performance evaluations according to pre-contracting and post contracting measureable standards can serve as guidelines. The sheriff must have performance evaluations that they can control and measure. For example; crime control and financial responsibility can be tracked and measured. Many sheriff departments are able to share with city managers what crime is occurring via crime trends and what assigned district Captain or Lieutenant (command level structure according to contract) is doing to address the issue. Financial records are easily obtainable and provided upon demand to produce a track record for evidentiary purposes and ensure adherence to contractual terms. The city manager(s) must take into account, upon renewing contract negotiations, if crime trends are showing an overall success rate in crime reduction and populations within the city will increase.

Financial budgets may increase due to urban sprawl and/or population increase; therefore a more applicable measurement would be law enforcement cost per resident may be more appropriate. Constituents will place increased pressure to maintain the level of services they have become accustomed to from county sheriff departments even when the levels of crime rates are reduced in comparisons to the former local department (Martin and Shiff, 2011).

The consolidation process between municipalities and county sheriff's departments must be analyzed carefully. The conclusions Sarah Cliffe (1999) draws from Synergon's disastrous acquisition of Beauchamp, Becker & Company can be applied to the post-contract integration of a city police department into a county sheriff office. Among the reasons for the problems facing Synergon was not the fact that it did not understand Beauchamp's critical success factors, nor was it able to keep its customers happy. It was skilled at post-acquisition assimilation, but the company had no experience, and no inclination, to integrate the two companies' strengths. According to the handful of business experts interviewed by Cliffe for this article, Synergon the acquirer (or, on this case, the CSO) has to clearly understand the merged organization's goals and objectives in order to meet pre-contract performance targets

Importance should be placed on a person at the county sheriff's department who will act as a liaison between municipalities and the county sheriff department who is responsible for managing all contracts signed. This person will serve as an "expert" that is able to explain the minute details in any contract and rationalize the importance of maintaining strong relations in the near future when contract negotiations are renewed. The liaison is able to formulate quick changes to the contract as needed, initiate short and long term projects that create positive synergy between the two agencies, create comorbidity between the former agency( local police department) and the new one (sheriff's department), and have flexible initiatives where new leaders can initiate changes if needed. During any consolidation adjustments will need to be made which will allow room for mistakes, enable leaders to learn from their mistakes, and allow departments and/or leaders to move on to the larger picture-ensuring that the consolidation transition works (LaGrange 1987)

The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office (PBSO) was faced with a daunting task of merging with three municipalities located in the western hemisphere of the county during the calendar year of 2006. The municipalities (South Bay, Belle Glade, and Pahokee) were experiencing difficult economic times and requested information on consolidating services. The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office leadership has negotiated public policing service contracts with several municipalities and will not solicit or actively try to merge with any local police department without a request from the city manager or council members. The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office currently has nine public policing service contracts. The Broward County Sheriff's Office (BSO), in the neighboring county, has actively worked to merge city police departments into the county agency, with reported positive results. BSO currently has eighteen public policing contracts.

The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office has consistently maintained a high level of service to public policing contracting agencies and is committed to continuing these standards; as evident by the latest merger with the City of Lake Worth. Constituents

came out in mass numbers to show their support when the former city manager initiated studies by an outside private agency to compare monetary funds to revert back to their local police department. City government officials are approaching the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office leadership with aspirations of exploring or showing interest with a possible consolidation of police services.

## **Methods**

To conduct this analysis, I will utilize primary and secondary research methods. Primary methods will include interviews with executive staff from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, Broward County Sheriff's Office and Miami Dade Police Department and representatives with municipal police departments. Secondary method will include statistical data submitted to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement annual crime reports from county and municipal police departments and projected budgetary information reported by county and city finance departments.

To define the benefits and drawbacks from subcontracting with county sheriff's offices, percentage of major and minor crime rates solved, and overall cost per capital pertaining to residences collected and analyzed from several municipalities; comparable to equal size and populace that have consolidated their police departments and subcontract with CSO's. The statistical data information will be compared to pre-contracting and post-contracting results.

Information will be collected from several municipalities who currently have subcontracting services with the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office for law enforcement services. The Village of Wellington contracted with the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office in 1996 and the City of Lake Worth contracted in 2008. There will be no pre-contract information on the Village of Wellington. The following cities will be analyzed for Broward County: Oakland Park, Lauderdale Lakes, Deerfield Beach, and Lauder Lakes. Miami Dade Police Department has actually lost contracts back to several cities and their current information as to what cities they provide contract services with is unavailable on their website until it is updated. Pre and Post information will be analyzed to gauge their performance for law enforcement services.

The plan initially called for factoring in non-crime and financial performance as indicators; however several municipalities and counties do not indicate factoring in response times as indicators for levels of service. Agencies comprise different track performance indicators (at department level) and no single performance indicator was tracked by all agencies; therefore it is not feasible to utilize response times as an indicator to judge performance. The surveys, along with other statistical data, will assist in determining how satisfied citizens, municipal (subcontracting obligations) and county governments are with their law enforcement agency.

## Results

The survey had a seventy eight percent response return rate with the exception of thirteen surveys not being returned. There were twenty-two surveys mailed out. The below stats will be based off of the seventy eight percent returns.

The respondents were asked to rate their police department based on the numerical system scale of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. (1 representing not satisfied and 5 representing very satisfied with the level of service). Fifty nine percent 58.8% (estimation based on the actual results) were very satisfied and 1 not satisfied. These numbers are tabulated with seventeen respondents answering the question and five skipping the question all together.

Fourteen respondents responded to the question of, "Would you be in favor of consolidating your police services if it lowered your taxes?" Sixty four percent answered "Yes" and thirty six percent answered "No". The basis for this particular question is to measure if the citizen(s) are concerned with cost savings or level of services provided.

The follow-up question asks, "Would you be in favor of law enforcement services being consolidated into a metro county wide service?" Seventy one percent answered "Yes" and twenty eight percent answered "No". The survey was sent to a significant segment of citizens who are active in local government and knew who their local chief of police and county sheriff.

Two survey questions revealed sixty eight percent have not called their police or sheriff's department within the last three years for non-emergency calls and zero percentage for emergency calls for service.

Also, respondents were asked to "Please rate the level of concern for crime in your community" based on the following numerical category scale:

- 1-not concerned,
- 2-concerned,
- 3-very concerned,
- 4-don't care.

Not concerned: Concerned: Very Concerned: Don't Care: Rating Average: Response Count:

<b>Not concerned</b>	46.2%	30.8%	23.1%	0.0%	1.77	13
<b>Concerned</b>	0.0%	80.0%	20%	0.0%	2.20	10
<b>Very Concerned</b>	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	2.67	3
<b>Don't Care</b>	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	2.33	3

## Discussion

There is no perfect formula to determine how local government agencies provide police services to the communities they serve. There is a cost savings analysis with consolidation of law enforcement services. In the research of the proposal for law enforcement services for the City of Lake Worth versus contracted services for the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, the cost charged by the sheriff's office is determined by an initial startup cost spread out over a three year period. The cost for each municipal contract service agreement will depend on the level of service the contracted city is looking to provide for the citizens within their geographical boundary. The city of Lake Worth Police Department's fiscal operating expense is \$15,015, 753 versus the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office proposal of \$13, 851,472 operating expenses. The saving to the city is \$1, 164, 281 which can be placed back into the general fund and allocated for other departments within the city. There are some reoccurring costs, personnel costs and incidental cost, but this is incurred when the sheriff's office mergers with the police department. In 2008, the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office merged with the City of Lake Worth reducing the City's operating expenses by over one million dollars.

The Town of Loxahatchee Groves incorporated in 2007, which mandated them to have police services by Florida Law for their citizens. The Town of Loxahatchee Groves contracted for police services with the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office in 2007. The initial startup rate for police services started at \$274, 000 and is currently \$240, 000. The Town of Loxahatchee Groves has saved money over the last few years; however there is no current information to calculate the saving comparison of their operational budget if they had a police department versus the Palm Beach County Sheriff' Office. Most cities agree that the most important element is liability. When the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office merges with a law enforcement agency, the Sheriff's Office takes on all the liability for the actions of the merged officers. This is very attractive to municipal governments.

Consolidation of police services from local governments to county sheriff's office neglect to mention the cost inherited by providing additional resources such as; aviation, S.W.A.T., marine, K9 units, crime scene/lab, and sex crimes unit. The above departments are not mentioned during the initial cost analysis because they are taken for granted under the hospice they are automatically included in the contract(s). Large county sheriff's office utilizes these units as incentives for local government agencies to merge as added bonuses. It's a "win-win" situation for local government agencies and their citizens receive additional resources without their taxes increasing. The county sheriff's office is seen as a "forward thinking department" with the constituent's safety and well-being coming first.

Palm Beach County has thirty eight municipalities with thirty of them having their own local police department. There are a small percentage of local police departments in affluent areas that patrol approximately two square miles of beach front property. A large percentage of the population in these coastal areas are vacation homes and the residents are away more than three-fourths of the year, with the exception of the summer months. These thirty agencies all support various levels of law enforcement with specialized units and equipment. The redundancy in services with police and fire service can be reduced by becoming one agency. The cost of providing police and fire

service from local governments to their citizens is astronomical. The majority of the budget for local government comes from police and fire. If these services can be contracted out to county sheriff's offices (assuming citizens agree), the potential for savings are astounding. There is clearly a cost saving with consolidation. The survey clearly demonstrates citizens will agree to the consolidation of police services; refer to survey questions 4 and 5 "would you be in favor of consolidating your police services if it lowered your taxes-63.6 % in favor and 36.4% against and "Would you be in favor of law enforcement services being consolidated into a metro countywide service 71.4% voted yes and 28.6% voting no. This indicates a majority of the people are in favor of consolidating police services if they can save money on their taxes.

There is clearly a cost savings with consolidation especially during the difficult economic times. Merging provides better services, merging saves money, and large organizations are more professional; however this does not negate small agencies that are professional. Small departments can provide a more personal and so better type of police department, but this is contingent upon organizational management (LaGrange 1997). The challenge for most cities will be looking for ways to reduce their operating budget; the largest operating expense for most cities is police and fire services. Most cities are experiencing financial woes due to the housing market downfall. This will be a very interesting year for the citizens of Palm Beach County, local law enforcement, and the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office. There will be many opportunities to merge with local municipalities; however the caveat will be are the citizens and local government willing to relinquish control for financial savings.

### **Recommendation**

Cities are facing difficult economic times with balancing their budgets. The majority of their funds are allocated toward police and fire service, but this will create dire circumstances if the funds are not available to fund retirees. Ultimately, the decision will be made by the citizens in the form of a referendum vote as in most instances will require change in a city charter. Cities and towns still want high levels of service which their citizens are used to receiving; however will they be willing to pay for these services. There are examples listed in the research paper (City of Lake Worth and Loxahatchee Groves) that shows consolidation saves money and services are not reduced. There is no one way (cookie cutter) to provide contractual services to each city who wishes to merge; each one brings a different set of dynamic. The citizens will measure the performance of the merger in terms of feedback to the local governing board (city council). The contracting county sheriff's office will adapt their policing services based on the feedback provided by the local citizens to the sitting governing board.

Lieutenant Patrick Johnson has been in law enforcement for over 22 years. He spent 4 years as a law enforcement specialist in the United States Air Force. He began his civilian law enforcement career with the Boynton Beach Police Department in 1995. He worked as a road patrol officer and in the tactical unit addressing street level narcotics. He left the Boynton Beach Police Department and joined the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office in 1997. Since that time he has worked in the following capacity: road patrol deputy, narcotics agent, road patrol supervisor, supervisor in narcotics, watch commander, administrative officer and is currently assigned to Internal Affairs. He is a graduate of the Southern Police Institute Administrative Officers Course (S.P.I) in Louisville, Kentucky and is currently pursuing his Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Columbia Southern University.

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## Appendix A

### Citizen Survey

1. Have you called the Police within the last three years for an emergency?  
Yes  
No
2. Have you called the Police within the last three years for a non-emergency call?  
Yes  
No
3. Please rate the level of concern for crime in your community.
  1. Non Concerned
  2. Concerned
  3. Very Concerned
  4. Don't Care
4. Would you be in favor of consolidating your police services if it lowered your taxes?  
Yes  
No
5. Would you be in favor of law enforcement services being consolidated into a metro countywide service?  
Yes  
No
6. How long have you lived in your current location (city or county)  
1-3 years  
4-10 years  
11-20 years  
Over 20 years
7. What is your gender  
Male  
Female
8. What is your age?  
18-21  
22-30  
31-39  
40-49  
50-59  
Over 60

9. Please select how you rate your police department  
5, 4, 3, 2, 1  
(5 very satisfied, 1 not satisfied)

10. What is your race/ethnicity?

Black

White

Hispanic

Asian

Other