CHAPLAINS, FAMILIES & PERSONNEL

# WHEN THE SHIFT NEVER SEEMS TO END

A conversation starter for chaplains, family groups, wellness teams and officers.

Why this is an officer-wellness issue. When departments cannot fill patrol positions, existing officers may shoulder more calls, overtime and unpredictable schedules. That can leave less time for recovery and proactive community work. Staffing levels differ by agency, so national findings should prompt questions about local conditions.

## WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

**64,200** — **SWORN VACANCIES**

The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated this many vacant full-time sworn positions at state and local agencies in 2020 (report released March 2026).

**1.4%** — **STAFFING GAIN**

Agencies in the Police Executive Research Forum survey gained 1.4% sworn staffing during 2025, but remained below early-2020 staffing.

**91%** — **HIGHER ODDS**

Officers working four or more 11+ hour shifts weekly had 91% higher adjusted odds of emotional exhaustion than those working none.

**37%** — **HIGHER ODDS**

Officers reporting mandatory overtime had 37% higher adjusted odds of emotional exhaustion in the same 2019 study of 3,140 officers.

Read the numbers correctly: The vacancy count describes 2020, the staffing gain describes survey respondents, and the burnout figures are associations from an observational study—not proof that scheduling caused exhaustion.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO WITHOUT BREAKING TRUST

- Listen for patterns. Recurring missed breaks, mandated overtime, sleep disruption, canceled leave and fear of reporting fatigue warrant attention; no one conversation is a diagnosis.
- Protect confidentiality. Never identify an officer or disclose counseling details in advocacy materials. Follow the law, agency rules and stated confidentiality limits.
- Request aggregate data. Ask leadership about staffing gaps, shift lengths, overtime demands and department wellness resources without exposing individuals.
- Organize constructively. Chaplains, family groups and employee associations can request a meeting with command and city officials, then propose a measurable scheduling review.

**Suggested request: “Please review our staffing gaps and overtime patterns, publish aggregate findings and include officers and families in planning realistic improvements.”**

Sources: BJS, Hiring and Retention of State and Local Law Enforcement Officers, 2020 (Mar. 2026); PERF staffing survey (May 23, 2026); Peterson et al., BMJ Open 9:e030302 (2019).