

Because I was out of town and unable to attend the recent council meeting where considerable discussion focused on public safety staffing, I wanted to provide the council with a brief report addressing those concerns. The purpose of this report is to review the current staffing levels of the Harrison Police Department and Harrison Fire Department and to provide context regarding whether the City of Harrison is appropriately staffed for a community of our size.

After reviewing national benchmarks, operational standards, and the specific service demands placed on our departments, it is evident that Harrison's public safety staffing levels are appropriate and necessary to provide effective emergency services.

### **Community Population and Service Demand**

The City of Harrison has a resident population estimated between 13,000 and 15,000 residents. While this population figure provides a baseline, the actual service demand for public safety is significantly higher due to several factors:

- Harrison is located on U.S. Highway [65](#), [U.S. Highway 62](#), and U.S. Highway 412, which are major transportation corridors connecting Arkansas with Missouri and serving a significant volume of traffic traveling to Branson, Missouri, particularly during tourism seasons.
- The city experiences a substantial daily working population pulling from our surrounding communities and multiple other counties where several people commute to and from Harrison.
- The Harrison Police and Fire Departments regularly provides mutual aid assistance throughout Boone County, extending its operational responsibilities beyond city limits.

Because of these factors, Harrison's public safety departments serve a population that is effectively larger than the resident population alone. The daily traffic patterns indicate up to 26,000 drivers on our main highways alone. With our other state highways around town, we reasonably estimate our daytime population exceeds 30,000 on multiple occasions throughout the year.

### **Police Department Staffing Benchmarks**

Across the United States, municipal police departments average approximately 2.0 to 2.5 officers per 1,000 residents (FBI Uniform Crime). For a city with a population between 13,000 and 15,000, this benchmark suggests a typical staffing range of approximately 26–38 sworn officers. This number includes personnel necessary to maintain:

- 24-hour patrol coverage
- Criminal investigations
- School resource officers
- Traffic enforcement
- Supervision and administration

Police staffing must also support two, 12-hour daily patrol shifts, while accounting for vacation leave, training, illness, and specialized assignments.

Additionally, Harrison's location along a major tourism corridor increases demand for services such as:

- Traffic accident response
- Highway enforcement

- Visitor-related calls for service
- Commercial district policing

These factors justify staffing levels consistent with cities serving a larger service population.

For reference, we have compared the City of Harrison to other municipalities in Arkansas for staffing size per traffic count. Traffic counts were pulled directly from ARDOT’s website and the number of officers were verified with each individual department. These do not include interstate as these are policed by Arkansas State Police.

<u>City</u>	<u>Resident Pop</u>	<u>Traffic Count</u>	<u>Traffic Location / Non-Interstate</u>	<u>Police Officers</u>	<u>Per Traffic Count</u>
Arkadelphia	9,894	13,000	Hwy 51	29	2.23
Batesville	11,539	24,000	Hwy 69	28	1.17
Camden	10,116	12,000	Hwy 79	24	2.00
El Dorado	16,657	16,000	Hwy 167	52	3.25
Forrest City	12,340	15,000	Hwy 1	28	1.87
<b>Harrison</b>	<b>13,723</b>	<b>26,000</b>	<b>Hwy 62/65/412</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1.38</b>
Heber Springs	7,313	14,000	Hwy 25	19	1.36
Hope	8,465	16,000	Hwy 278	23	1.44
Magnolia	10,759	14,000	Hwy 82	26	1.86
Malvern	11,082	19,000	Hwy 270	23	1.21
Mountain Home	13,348	21,000	Hwy 62/412	36	1.71
Paragould	30,680	22,000	Hwy 49	52	2.36
Russellville	29,442	29,000	Hwy 7	67	2.31
Searcy	23,997	21,000	Hwy 36	60	2.86

The City continues to work with other local, state, and Federal agencies to aid in stopping criminal activity, so our reach is much further beyond the boundaries of the city limits.

### **Fire Department Staffing and Structure**

National fire service guidelines recommend sufficient personnel to ensure that multiple firefighters can respond quickly to emergency incidents, particularly structure fires.

Cities with populations between 13,000 and 15,000 residents commonly operate 2 to 3 fire stations and approximately 28–36 firefighters (NFTA).

The Harrison Fire Department operates three fire stations, strategically located to provide rapid response throughout the city and surrounding response areas. Harrison currently maintains approximately 33 personnel, which is well within the normal staffing range for cities of similar size. The department’s staffing and station placement allow Harrison to maintain an ISO Class 2 fire protection rating, which is considered an excellent rating and helps keep property insurance costs lower for residents and businesses.

In addition to city response responsibilities, the Harrison Fire Department regularly assists surrounding Boone County departments through mutual aid agreements, increasing the demand placed on the department. The department also routinely aids the National Park Service and other counties with high-

angle rescues, hike outs, and other emergencies that arise that expands our footprint even further beyond the boundaries of city limits.

For reference, we have compared the City of Harrison to other municipalities in Arkansas for staffing size per traffic count. Traffic counts were pulled directly from ARDOT’s website and the number of firefighters were verified with each individual department.

<u>City</u>	<u>Resident Pop</u>	<u>Traffic Count</u>	<u>Firefighters</u>	<u>ISO</u>	<u>Per Traffic Count</u>
Arkadelphia	9,894	13,000	9	3	0.69
Batesville	11,539	24,000	13	2	0.54
Camden	10,116	12,000	28	2	2.33
El Dorado	16,657	16,000	53	2	3.31
Forrest City	12,340	15,000	23	3	1.53
<b>Harrison</b>	<b>13,723</b>	<b>26,000</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.27</b>
Heber Springs	7,313	14,000	8	3	0.57
Hope	8,465	16,000	16	3	1.00
Magnolia	10,759	14,000	13	3	0.93
Malvern	11,082	19,000	18	3	0.95
Mountain Home	13,348	21,000	29	3	1.38
Paragould	30,680	22,000	34	2	1.55
Russellville	29,442	29,000	58	2	2.00
Searcy	23,997	21,000	50	1	2.38

There are many on this list that are substantially lower per traffic count due to the additional part-paid and volunteer firefighters they have available. Typically, those firefighters have additional jobs and come to emergencies from a different location (job, home, etc.). Response times and staff participation in such emergencies can vary significantly due to those variables.

*Operational Coverage Considerations*

Public safety staffing cannot be evaluated based solely on population size. Several additional factors significantly affect staffing needs, including:

- Geographic size of the city and their coverage area
- Highway and tourism traffic volumes
- Emergency response time requirements
- Mutual aid obligations to surrounding communities
- Maintaining favorable insurance service office (ISO) ratings

Harrison’s staffing model reflects these operational realities and ensures that emergency services remain effective and responsive.

**Conclusion**

Based on national benchmarks, comparable municipal practices, and Harrison’s specific service demands, the city’s public safety departments are appropriately staffed and not excessive for a community of our size.

Maintaining current staffing levels allows the City of Harrison to:

- Provide reliable emergency response to residents and visitors
- Maintain strong public safety coverage across all areas of the city
- Preserve favorable insurance ratings for property owners
- Support surrounding communities when mutual aid assistance is needed

Public safety remains one of the most important services provided by the City of Harrison, and the current staffing levels reflect a responsible commitment to protecting both our residents and the many visitors who travel through our community each year.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to myself or any of the department heads.