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Sheriff's office to face shortage of corrections officers

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ANTIGO — Thursday morning, the County Board's Public Safety Committee approved a motion to forward a proposal from the Langlade County Sheriff's Office to amend the county's 2025 budget.

When the entire county board next convenes on Nov. 18, presumably, just as he did last month, Sheriff Mark Westen will again request dispatchers and

corrections officers receive \$3 hourly raises instead of the \$2 raises they and other county employees were scheduled for in the budget adopted late last month.

The request, meant to improve the sheriff's office's ability to retain and attract employees, comes after Westen announced the "imminent departures" planned by three corrections officers at the Langlade County Jail.

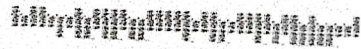
"That's really going to be a huge, huge hit for the corrections staff," Westen

said at the meeting. "We're fortunate right now that the jail population has taken a dip to average daily populations in the 60s that we've been running in... We don't have an exact departure date on a couple of those. We do know that there's going to be one of them that is leaving to attend a recruiting academy that starts in February. So that's going to be a very large problem for the Langlade County Jail to lose three additional people and overcome those vacancies.

It's going to be a heavy lift unfortunately of overtime of staff that are currently here and trained

and certified to deal with doing this job."

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CORRECTIONS/

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Chief Deputy Dan Bauknecht said that even after the sheriff's office hires new employees these days, the positions often are not immediately filled.
"If we hire someone off the street, it is a five month training academy for parole and then it is a four month training for the road, so if we hired someone today to fill the vacancy that we've had for six months, they're not patrol-ready until December of 2025. That's the amount of road in front of them for the training. I think that's significant and impactful, because we have had [the job posting] up for six months," Bauknecht said. "In the meantime, you have your patrol staff that's working doubles and covering shifts and trying to figure out how we're going to do transports and how we're going to accommodate the day-to-day operations. That's a significant impact."

Doug Curler, the chair of the Public Safety Committee, said that to him, the hiring struggles

of the sheriff's office were "a hot button issue."

"It's what you guys have to live with and it's been kind of an important issue," Curler said. "It's good to have a balanced budget, but if we don't provide the services and provide a safe environment, that balanced budget doesn't mean anything."

Westen and Bauknecht suggested the pay schedule for the sheriff's office should also be examined.

"The simple platform of beginning, mid, and max doesn't necessarily

capture everybody. In working with the numbers and looking at some of the years of service versus where they are [in the current] pay format, there are some pretty gross inequities inside of there," Bauknecht said. "[Some] have been here then for two years. With two years of completed service, they are making 50 cents an hour less than employees who were hired at the turn of the century in 2000."

Westen agreed, and said he believed funding for the raises specific to sheriff's office

dispatchers and corrections officers could be found, possibly from shared revenue dispersed from the state.

"We've said, 'What are the priorities for the county?' and we've said that at multiple committee meetings," Westen said. "What are the priorities, and should there be an emphasis placed a little bit higher on public safety? Is that important to you as a county board member? And I believe if you ask 21 people on a county board 'What is the priority for public safety?' I would say