Commissioners, Budget Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I thank you for the hard work you do and the difficult decisions you have to make each year as we go through the county's budget process. I also want to express appreciation for your on-going support and the assistance you have given the sheriff's office throughout the year as we have worked through some difficult circumstances. I am thankful for the partnerships that have allowed us to deal effectively with pressing issues as they come up.

For the next couple of hours, we will be going through each of the budgets affiliated with the Sheriff's Office, but I wanted to start with a statement here, for the public record, outlining what I think is our biggest challenge and clearly identifying the most urgent priority for the Sheriff's Office budget.

Yesterday, Commissioner Kamahlu wisely pointed out that everyone speaking before this committee has a perspective based on their own position, but you all have to have a perspective based on everything, so I also hope to impress upon you why I think this particular issue should be a top priority for the county budget as a whole.

I have been a law enforcement officer for nearly 40 years. I have never been an alarmist, and I have tried to never exaggerate a situation. I will tell you now that we are facing a crisis in law enforcement the likes of which I have never experienced in all my years of service.

It is a national if not a global situation and it has been an enduring problem for a few years now. We quite simply are not attracting enough people into our ranks to replace the number leaving the profession.

At the same time, we are seeing a significant increase in crime, particularly violent crime. It should not be a surprise to anyone that fewer officers on the street and decreasing support for those officers has and will result in more victims of crime.

In the same way, fewer correctional officers in the jail will lead to increased disorder, and more frequent incidents in the jail. This compromises public safety as well as the safety of inmates in our care and custody.

To illustrate the potential impact of this staffing shortage, our correctional deputies and Jail Operations Specialists have intervened in **90** active suicide attempts from September 21 to September 22. That averages over 7 each month. We can't save that many lives if we don't have enough deputies to do rounds inside the jail.

This problem presents a real danger to public safety in our county, it is happening now, and it requires immediate action.

As Sheriff, I have an affirmative duty to maintain public safety in Davis County, but that responsibility is not mine alone. Commissioner Elliott, Commissioner Kamalu, Commissioner Stevenson, Clerk/Auditor Koch, as elected officials you also share that responsibility. Public safety is one of the primary functions of our government.

Davis County is certainly not immune from the staffing problems facing public safety across Utah. The Sheriff's Office currently has **66** positions that are unfilled (66 vacancies). Last year at this time we had **60** vacancies.

In 2021, we lost **81** employees to resignation, retirement or termination. So far this year we have lost **49** and **4** more are scheduled to leave this month. Considering the statistic Chris Bone shared with you yesterday, the cost of replacing this many employees is staggering.

Perhaps more impactful, we have ever fewer officers trying to do more and more. In 2020 our law enforcement officer handled just over 9,000 incidents. Last year we had almost 15,00 calls for service and we are on track for almost that many again this year..

We are surviving only on an unprecedented amount of overtime. So far this year our deputies JOS's and dispatchers have worked over **26,139** hours of overtime. Our projection for all of 2022 is **35,769** overtime hours at a cost of over 1.5 million dollars. The human reality is, our officers are stretched and stressed and there is a finite limit to what they can do.

There are probably many factors contributing to this crisis - social, cultural, and economic. In the past we could rely on factors such as a sense of duty or service, public admiration of this noble profession, or perhaps the benefits of government employment to attract applicants. Large numbers of people would apply even knowing that these are not high paying jobs. That is no longer the case. Things have changed. What worked in the past is no longer working. We have to rethink our approach.

Consequently, law enforcement agencies have realized that higher wages are and will be required to attract applicants. That fact has ignited a rapid acceleration of wages across the state. There is fierce competition for a limited pool of applicants and only those agencies that have managed to keep up with the "wage war" have been successful in retaining their employees or filling their vacancies. An agency can get left behind pretty quickly.

It is a sad reality, but an absolute reality. Davis County Sheriff's Office is simply not where we need to be to compete with these other agencies.

This competition is really about the starting pay rate. The pay scale someone might reach in 10 or 15 years simply does not resonate with today's job seekers.

Currently our starting wage is the lowest of any class 1 or class 2 county in Utah. Our neighboring county to the south is starting deputies at over **$3** an hour more than us. The State Prison is starting correctional officers at 4 dollars and 68 cents more than we pay, and offering some other attractive incentives. Starting wage at the Utah Highway Patrol is more than $7 an hour higher than us. Two of our deputies who recently left to go to work for two different police department in Davis County each got about $3 an hour more than they were making here. These are real examples of what is going on in this market.

As I said earlier, this is a real public safety crisis and it requires an immediate response. Last year when a wildfire threatened homes in Davis County our deputies and other officers did not walk calmly through neighborhoods tapping lightly on doors and suggesting people think about

leaving – they ran, pounding doors until people woke up and then directed them to evacuate immediately, because that is what you do in a crisis. You act with urgency.

You cannot wait, hoping the wind will change. We can't wait hoping a change in economics, or some other factor might cure this current situation. We have got to take action even though that might be immensely difficult. Failure to act is not an option.

Having a competitive wage is going to cost a lot of money – an inescapable fact. I am fully aware of the immense budgetary constraints on our county and the difficult job you have before you balancing the budget. At the Sheriff's office we have been working this problem for sometime. We have been very purposeful the last few years in efforts to streamline, to improve efficiency and to find ways to save money and stretch our human resources. I am happy to go over some of those with you if you like, but I think you are aware of them.

We have tried to do all we can without threatening the essential services we owe to the public, and as I said before there is a real physical limit to what we can do.

We must act to retain good employees in whom we have a huge investment, and we must become competitive in recruiting from a very limited applicant pool. I am convinced that the biggest hindrances we have right now is our non-competitive wages.

So where do we get the money to fix the problem? I wish I had an easy answer. Anyone who has been paying attention, at all, knows that nearly all cities and counties around us have had raise taxes, much of that due to the public safety crisis.

I don't want to see taxes raised in Davis County, heck I don't want to have to pay more taxes. I know you don't want to raise taxes, but that might be exactly what has to be done. Certainly holding the line, being fiscally conservative requires courage, but sometimes raising taxes is the right thing, the absolutely necessary thing, and that may require even more courage.

We all work for the good of the citizens of Davis County not for our own interests. I believe the citizens have a right to expect us to apply our combined knowledge, experience, education, and training and do the right thing for them even when it is hard.

I truly hope as a budget committee you can find some other way of identifying the necessary funds to address this critical issue, but absent that, I hope our county government will have the courage to raise the necessary funds to maintain our public safety in Davis County.

All other budgetary concerns notwithstanding, employee compensation is the Sheriff's Office overriding top priority in this budget cycle – it simply has to be. There is too much at stake.

As Sheriff, I hope, and pray that you will also make it a top priority, as you work through the county budget with your perspective based on everything.

Thank you again for the hard work you do, and may God bless and inspire you as you work for the good of your fellowmen in your position here.