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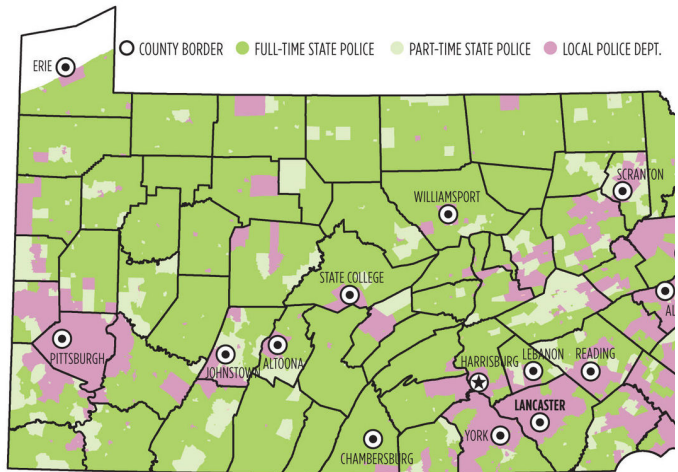


Supervisors are opposed to \$25 per person fee for state police use that would affect 80,000 Lancaster County residents



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer Feb 16, 2017

STATE & LOCAL POLICE COVERAGE BY MUNICIPALITY



SOURCE: PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

TODD SPIDLE

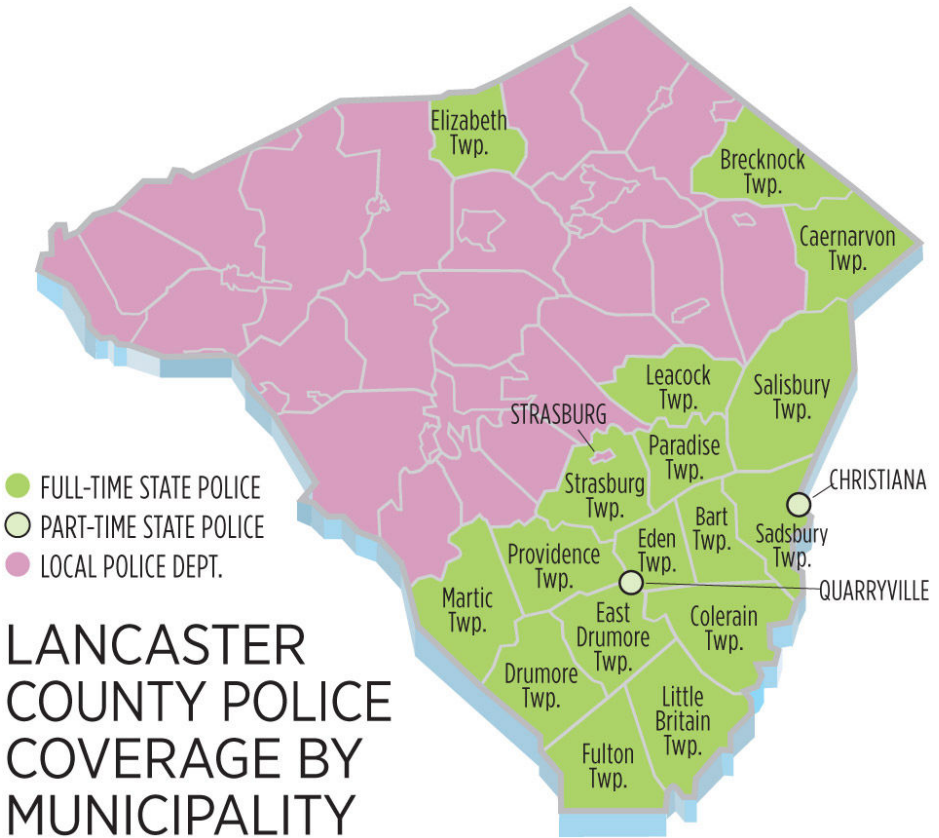
About 1,285 municipalities across the state exclusively use the Pennsylvania State Police for their police coverage. Roughly have local police departments.

Township supervisors in Lancaster County’s most rural areas are irritated and concerned with Gov. Tom Wolf’s budget proposal to impose a fee for the coverage they receive from the Pennsylvania State Police.

The \$25 per-person fee would apply to 1,284 municipalities across the commonwealth that only use state police rather than local police departments — including 17 of Lancaster County’s 60 municipalities that are home to 15 percent of the county’s population.

If implemented, it would raise \$2 million from 80,000 people living in those mostly southern and eastern areas of the county.

The governor's office and other proponents say the \$63 million it would raise across the state would not only go toward the state's strapped general fund, but also take some pressure off the \$1.1 billion state police budget that is now funded mostly through the gas tax, which is supposed to be dedicated to transportation projects.



SOURCE: PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

In Lancaster County, 17 municipalities in the south and east primarily rely on the Pennsylvania State Police for coverage. Two municipalities use the state police part-time and 41 others primarily use local police departments.

TODD SPIDLE

The move would also help channel more money towards repairing and building bridges and highways, according to Wolf's administration.

But officials in municipalities that would pay for this shift say they already contribute their fair share for the state police budget through income and property taxes that go toward Pennsylvania's general fund.

They also said they do not receive, nor do they need, services from the state police that would be similar to the services a local police department provides to its own municipality.

"If we wanted a police force, our residents would come (forward) and be willing to pay for it — and that's not what we've heard. That's not what we've ever heard," said Duane Sellers, a supervisor in Martic Township.

And, officials say, if they do pay they would want better service from the state police including enforcement of speed limits and parking.

'We already pay for state police'

The township that would take on the largest cost in the county would be Salisbury Township, where 11,000 people benefit from just the Pennsylvania State Police.

Les Houck, a Salisbury Township supervisor for the last 43 years, said the question of a state police fee has come up routinely over the last two decades but there has never been any interest among residents in forming or joining a local police unit.

"I can count on one hand the amount of times people said we should have our own police department," Houck said.

If the \$25 per capita cost is implemented, Houck said Salisbury Township residents would want to see visible improvements to state police services that they currently do not get — such as enforcing speed limits on roads below 35 miles-per-hour, enforcing "no parking" signs, and enforcing local township ordinances.

The fact that they don't currently get those services from state police debunks the idea that they currently get local police coverage from the state police for free, Houck and others interviewed by LNP said.

"We haven't felt the need to rely on a local police force," said Dennis Groff, vice chairman of the Paradise Township supervisors. "We already pay, all of us, for state police. Those who decided to form their own police force, that was their own decision."

And as the townships wait for more details, they're also thinking about the options if the fee is eventually approved by the Legislature and signed into law.

"All options are certainly on the table," said Mark Deimler, the Strasburg Township administrator.

Deimler said the township would need to look into other forms of police coverage to find the most financially responsible option for its 4,180 residents. That would likely be joining another local police department or a new regional police department — the latter option he believes will become more prevalent in many areas.

In Leacock Township, supervisor Frank Howe said there would be “no logical way (they) could afford” starting a local police department. And passing on the \$130,500 that would come from the \$25 per capita fee would essentially force them to double their local property taxes.

Legislators considering fee

The state police fee issue is a piece of Wolf’s \$32.3 billion budget proposal that will get some scrutiny in Harrisburg in the coming months.

State Rep. Mike Sturla, a Democrat from Lancaster city, has for several years proposed legislation that would have a similar effect as Wolf’s proposal, arguing municipalities should pay for the “free local police coverage” they currently receive from the Pennsylvania State Police.

Republican legislators from the county said they are open to considering the proposal as they get more details.

Rep. Bryan Cutler, a Republican whose southern Lancaster County district includes 11 of the 17 municipalities that rely on state police, said he will need to see details before making a decision on whether he would support the fee.

He agreed with local officials that the current coverage state police provides is not necessarily “free” because they are funded through the gas taxes and the general fund.

Rep. Mindy Fee, R-Manheim, sits on the House Transportation Committee that would likely consider the legislation. Her district also includes one municipality, Elizabeth Township, that uses state police full-time.

“I’m open to discussing this proposal and anything that will ultimately save tax dollars,” Fee said.

Rep. David Zimmerman, a Republican whose district covers Salisbury and Caernarvon townships, said the townships “would all of a sudden have a good sized bill they do not have at the moment.”

If they have to go through with paying that bill, Zimmerman said he thinks they will expect increased visibility of state police services, and he wonders if the state police is prepared for that.

State police funding (2016-17)

Total budget: \$1.1 billion

- From General Fund: \$257 million
- From Motor License Fund: \$802 million

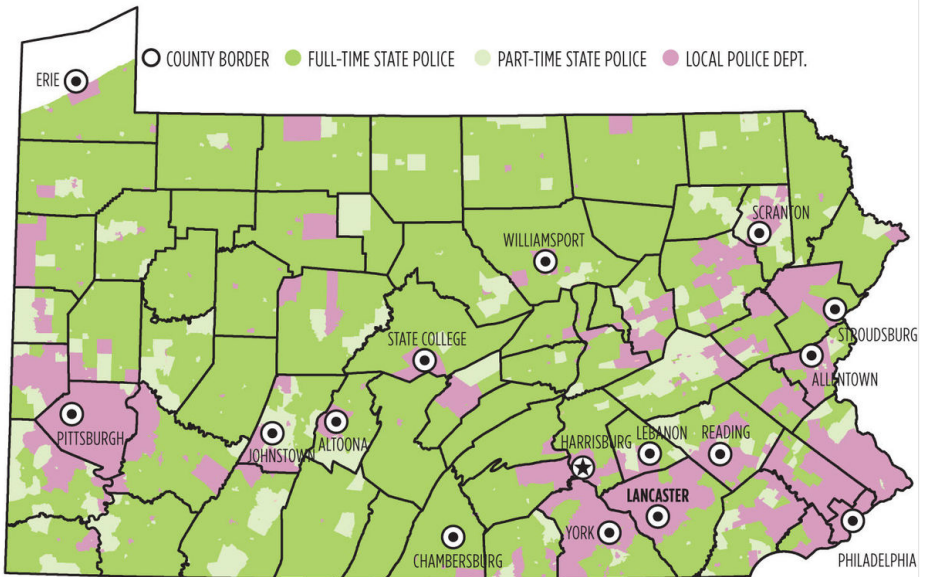
Lancaster County rural crime trends* (2015)

- Areas covered by state police: 743 per 100,000 residents
- Areas covered by municipal police: 1,760 per 100,000 residents

SOURCE: State records

* 'Serious crimes' defined as murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, arson and motor vehicle theft.

STATE & LOCAL POLICE COVERAGE BY MUNICIPALITY



SOURCE: PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

Pennsylvania State Police spends \$234 per person to cover some municipalities full-time