

## DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

**HB 35: Need for Competitive Montana Highway Patrol Salaries****Background**

Montana Highway Patrol salaries are not comparable to those paid by competing local law enforcement agencies. This has made it increasingly difficult for the Patrol to recruit and retain officers, and to fulfill its mission.

- A Legislative Audit Division salary survey conducted in 2004 found that **entry-level Patrol officers are paid \$9,360 less per year** than the average entry-level officer in the eight county sheriffs' departments where the Patrol's headquarters and district offices are located.
- Over the past 11 years, 78% of the officers who left the Patrol for non-retirement purposes went to other law enforcement agencies that offered higher salaries.
- There are fewer uniformed Patrol officers on the road today than there were more than 30 years ago. Despite substantial increases in the number of vehicles on Montana highways, today's Patrol has 206 officers compared to 220 officers in 1973.

**Legislative Study**

In response to the Patrol's recruitment and retention problems, the 2003 Legislature directed the State Administration and Veterans' Affairs Interim Committee to:

- conduct a salary survey in cooperation with the Attorney General's office, and
- develop draft legislation to implement recommendations to improve recruitment and retention of Patrol officers.

HB 35 is the result of the Interim Committee's evaluation and funding recommendations.

**HB 35: Market-Based Salaries**

HB 35 would place Patrol officers in an alternative pay plan that establishes competitive salary rates by using market-based salary information from county sheriffs' offices.

Before January of odd-numbered years, the Department of Administration would conduct a salary survey to establish the base pay and biennial salary increases for existing and entry-level MHP officers. The survey would average the salaries paid in the sheriffs' departments where the Patrol's headquarters and district offices are located. The eight counties included are Butte Silver Bow, Cascade, Yellowstone, Missoula, Lewis and Clark, Gallatin, Flathead and Dawson. Law enforcement agencies in these areas often recruit and hire away Patrol officers.

HB 35 also would exempt the Patrol from vacancy savings. This would allow the Patrol to keep an additional 14 officers on the road.

**Amendment re. Vehicle Registration Fee**

The necessary increase in funding for the next biennium would come from a \$5 fee on registration of all vehicles registered in Montana each year. It would raise approximately \$6 million per fiscal year to fund competitive Patrol salaries.