Alaska Department of Public Safety

2020 Update: Recruitment and Retention Plan

Introduction

The Alaska Department of Public Safety's 2018-2023 Recruitment and Retention Plan Overview detailed significant challenges in filling state trooper positions and retaining troopers for a career with the department. The report outlined reduced staffing levels, high attrition, and difficulty attracting candidates. This report provides a mid-point update on initiatives and accomplishments, the status of trooper recruitment and hiring, and current workforce data. These metrics are used to gauge the efficacy of efforts deployed over the past two years and serve as a guide for the department to identify ways to further improve trooper recruitment and retention. While improvements in recruitment and retention are encouraging, leadership is committed to constantly deploying new efforts to continue the forward momentum while strengthening and growing the trooper workforce to carry out the department's mission.

2019-2020 Initiatives and Accomplishments

Significant accomplishments in addressing trooper recruitment and retention since the 2018-2023 Recruitment and Retention Plan Overview was published include:

- Established an Employee Retention Workgroup to provide field-level input on how to improve areas of deficiency noted in the 2017 Commissioned Employee Engagement Survey
- Wage increases, including a one-range market based increase and cost of living adjustment for the State Trooper job series (including command staff)
- Doubled the leave incentive offered for troopers who successfully recruit new troopers; expanded recruitment incentive leave to command staff
- Implemented a customized trooper exit survey
- Implemented measures to resolve pay disparities for troopers promoting into the command series
- Published a trooper series promotional process and implemented a formal selection process for investigator assignments to encourage career growth within the department.
- Established Wellness & Advanced Training Unit to oversee the department's wellness program and provide professional development training to state troopers
- Replaced the annual evaluation system with a Tri-Annual Performance Check-In, designed to provide ongoing coaching, mentoring, and career development for troopers
- Established SpeakUP portal as an open platform for Department staff to raise ideas or concerns directly to senior leadership
- Conducted Supervision and Leadership surveys and used feedback to establish action plans to improve communication and leadership
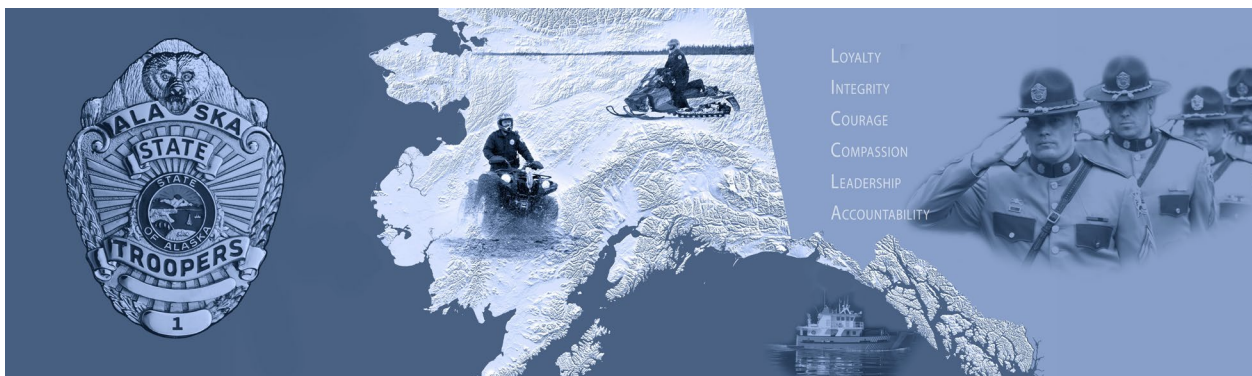
Appointments and Separations: Comparative Analysis

In the last two years, the department noted a rise in applications and a resulting increase in appointments to the trooper job class. In 2019 the number of new hires eclipsed separations, marking a positive gain in trooper hires.

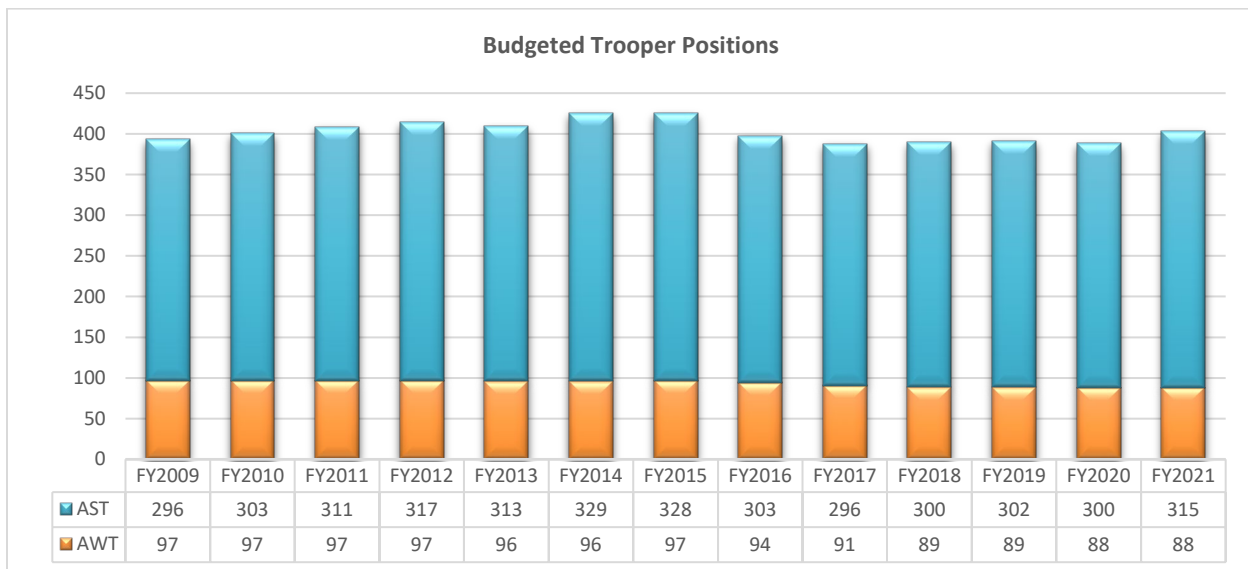| Year	Appointments	Separations	*Gain/loss*
2017	10	28	*-18*
2018	29	32	*-3*
2019	34	24	*10*
2020 (YTD)	17 / +21 projected for Fall 2020 academy	19	*TBD*

Data Source: State of Alaska Payroll System

Probationary Separations: Attrition During the First Year on the Job

Beginning with the recruitment cycle for the Fall 2016 academy, the department implemented an updated state trooper selection process and began tracking attrition during the first year of employment. From July 2016 – July 2019, there was a 23% attrition rate during the first year of employment in the state trooper job class. This is down from a 31% first-year attrition rate from the trooper job class during the years 2008-2014.

Average Trooper Position Counts

Over the last 10 years, the number of budgeted trooper positions peaked in fiscal years 2014 & 2015, with 425 budgeted positions. Moving into FY21, the department has 403 budgeted trooper positions, which is an increase of 15 positions over the prior fiscal year. The department averages a 9.55% vacancy rate for the trooper job series at the beginning of the fiscal year.

Budgeted Trooper Positions

	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021
AST	296	303	311	317	313	329	328	303	296	300	302	300	315
AWT	97	97	97	97	96	96	97	94	91	89	89	88	88

Data Source: Alaska Budget System

Exit Survey: Inadequate Staffing Cited as Primary Factor in Voluntary Attrition

The department mines separation data from an exit survey that is customized to the state trooper job class. This survey was implemented in April 2018 and generated 39 responses as of July 2020. The exit survey indicates 45% of respondents were voluntary, non-retirement separations. Nearly half of this subgroup was separating with less than five years of service, and 35% of respondents indicated they will work in another law enforcement position. This subgroup cited the top factor contributing to their decision to separate was inadequate staffing, followed by dissatisfaction with the administrative requirements associated with the job.

5-Year Attrition Analysis

The attrition rate for the trooper job class is determined based on the workforce size at the beginning of the calendar year. The department notes 2019 marked a 5-year low in the trooper attrition rate.

Year	Separations	Attrition Rate
2015	28	7%
2016	35	9%
2017	28	7.7%
2018	32	9.3%
2019	24	6.9%

Data Source: State of Alaska Payroll System

A 2018 Best Practices Guide to Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover of Law Enforcement Personnel published by the International Association of Chiefs of Police underscores that little research has been done to establish a benchmark of "acceptable" or "normal" attrition for law enforcement agencies. Agencies that have provided attrition information included Vermont (8.25-8.9% attrition rate) and North Carolina (12.7-14.2% attrition rate)[1]. The Alaska Department of Public Safety's trooper attrition rate falls close to or below available comparator data.

Retirement Eligibility: Planning Ahead

Approximately 44% of the department's state trooper workforce will reach retirement eligibility in the next five years. This is a slightly higher percentage of retirement-eligible troopers within the next five years than what was noted in the 2018-2023 Recruitment and Retention Overview (39%); however, retirement eligibility does not equate directly to projected or anticipated retirements.

Title	% Less than 1 Year	% Between 1 and 5 Years	% More than 5 Years	% Tier IV
MAJOR, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY	100.0%			
CAPTAIN, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY	83.3%	16.7%		
LIEUTENANT, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY	64.0%	32.0%		
Total - Command Series	71.0%	26.0%	>1%	
SERGEANT, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY	38.8%	35.8%	6%	19%
CORPORAL, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY		25.0%	25%	50%
STATE TROOPER	14.3%	17.7%	8.8%	59.1%
STATE TROOPER RECRUIT			4.5%	95.5%
Total - Entire Series (Rct - Major)	23.3%	20.8%	7.7%	48.2%

Data Source: Division of Retirement and Benefits (5/1/20)

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[1] Orrick, Dwayne W. "Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover of Law Enforcement Personnel." The IACP. August 2018

Looking Ahead: Internal Efforts to Address Recruitment and Retention

Retention and recruitment remain a top priority for the department and efforts are continuously underway to progress and improve in these areas. The department is acutely aware that successes must constantly be built upon to sustain gains in recruitment and retention and continue to grow the workforce. Initiatives underway and in the planning phases include:

- **Rural Trooper Housing**: The department will standup an internal workgroup to address housing maintenance needs. Additionally, the department will seek an external assessment of rural trooper housing. The scope of the external assessment will be to identify issues and provide recommendations to improve existing housing or suggest new or alternate housing. The goal is to positively impact retention and interest in serving in rural Alaska.
- **Post to Post Website**: The department is developing a portal for troopers and their families indexing each trooper post throughout Alaska with information for families considering a move. This is aimed to ensure troopers and their families have accurate information to build careers with the department by moving to different posts.
- **Diversity in Recruitment and Retention Workgroup**: In 2020 the department will stand up an internal workgroup tasked with providing recommendations on how to increase diversity of applicant pools, identifying barriers to application and/or staying with the department, and recommending recruitment and retention strategies for a diverse workforce within DPS.
- **Advanced Training Unit (ATU):** In 2019 the department stood up a training unit exclusively dedicated to providing in-service training for state troopers. Starting in 2020 the unit will deliver develop a core in-service training curriculum and schedule to ensure troopers have the skills and tools necessary to safely and effectively deliver services.
- **Officer Wellness Program**: Starting in 2019, the Wellness Program kicked off under the ATU with regular updates to the field on managing physical and mental health. Additionally, troopers are being sent to mental health first aid courses and crisis intervention training. The department is looking to expand the capacity of this program in 2020 by adding a sergeant exclusively dedicated to the program, establishing a department psychologist, and expanding the use of the department's internal Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT).
- **Leadership Action Plans:** Using feedback generated through 2019 Supervision and Leadership Surveys, the Divisions of Alaska State Troopers and Alaska Wildlife Troopers generated division leadership action plans to improve communication, improve staff engagement, establish accountability metrics for command, and unify the divisions through shared priorities. The action plans will be built upon and implemented in 2020 with follow-up to assess progress and efficacy.

Conclusion

The department has experienced a decline in the attrition rate for the trooper job class and is encouraged that in 2019, appointments to the trooper job class eclipsed separations. While the department has experienced a net increase in troopers over the last five years, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unanticipated dip in the number of applications received for the state trooper job class. Moving forward, retention of the current workforce remains a top priority as the department works to increase its trooper ranks and address factors that contribute to attrition.