



UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

South Carolina 2025 Law Enforcement Census

*South Carolina Leaders' Perceptions of Artificial Intelligence in
Policing and Officer Retention*

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Introduction

In the 1980s, the South Carolina legislature requested that the College of Criminal Justice (now the Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice) conduct yearly surveys on the state of law enforcement in South Carolina.¹ With funding provided by the legislature to the College, all law enforcement agencies in the State (i.e., a “census”) have been contacted annually since 1988 and asked to provide information on various agency characteristics, such as the number of civilian and sworn personnel employed, personnel demographics (sex, race, ethnicity), shift and salary schedules, training and operation budgets, equipment and technology, written policies, and so forth, thus allowing law enforcement administrators to compare their agencies to peer agencies on such factors.

Following discussions with the South Carolina Department of Public Safety and representatives from various law enforcement agencies in the early 2000s, it was decided to conduct the traditional or “general” census on agency characteristics every three years and to conduct “special topic” surveys on contemporary issues facing law enforcement during the other years to better serve the law enforcement community and citizens of South Carolina. Special topics examined in off years include gangs, less-lethal weapons and use of force, terrorism, immigration, officer-involved traffic collisions, body-worn cameras, and school resource officers. Reports on these and other topics are available on the Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice website here: [Census Reports](#).

The 2023 and 2024 surveys returned to the traditional format to provide the law enforcement community with updated information regarding agency characteristics. However, in 2025, the Census returned to a “special topics” survey, focusing on artificial intelligence (“AI”) and officer retention factors in policing. The focus for this report is to provide South Carolina law enforcement agencies with results on the prevalence of AI adoption, perceived benefits, and concerns of AI in policing. Additionally, we also ask about officer retention, including why agencies believe officers are leaving law enforcement, and measures used by SC agencies to retain officers at their agency.

This project was a collaboration between the research team and the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy (“SCCJA”), who provided a distribution list. The survey was administered to all SC law enforcement agencies, and the research team encouraged the agency to distribute the survey link to leaders (ranked sergeant and above). The goal was to obtain law enforcement leadership’s perceptions of AI in policing and officer retention. The survey was developed and administered via Qualtrics, an online survey distribution software. For additional information on the methodology, see Appendix A. A copy of the survey instrument is provided in Appendix B.

Results

The results have been divided into five main sections: Agency Characteristics, Agencies with AI, Non-AI Agencies, All Agencies with and without AI adoption, and Retention. Note also that the Table of Contents is hyperlinked so that readers can easily jump to results that are of most interest.

Survey Response Rates

SCCJA provided a list of 766 total contacts, in which some contacts on the list worked for the same agency. Therefore, the 766 contacts do not represent 766 unique law enforcement agencies across the state of South Carolina. Respondents were encouraged to distribute, or forward, our emails to personnel ranked sergeant or above to best capture police leaders' perceptions of AI and retention. During distribution, 28 emails “bounced,” suggesting that 738 of the contacts received the email. After data collection, incomplete submissions were removed for analysis, offering 216 analytic responses.

¹ We thank SCCJA Director Lewis "Jackie" Swindler for his generous support and Major Lauren Fennell for her assistance with all aspect of the project.

The survey was distributed to 313 law enforcement entities, in which at least one respondent from 131 agencies responded to the survey, providing a roughly 42% response rate by agency. Note that in the tables that follow, some percentages may not be based on the 216 respondents because some respondents did not answer every question. Therefore, some percentages are based on the total number of respondents that answered that question. We also want to caution the readers about two important limitations. First, our findings may not be representative of law enforcement in the state overall or all SC agencies (e.g., size, population). Second, since we cannot identify the distribution of SC police leaders (sergeant and above) across the state, our findings may also not be representative of all police leaders in SC. However, our findings should shed light on the “climate” of perceptions of police leaders about AI and officer retention.

SECTION 1. AGENCY CHARACTERISTICS

This section presents information about the respondents’ agency characteristics, such as agency type, agency size, and respondent rank. Figure 1 below presents the distribution of responding law enforcement leaders by agency type.

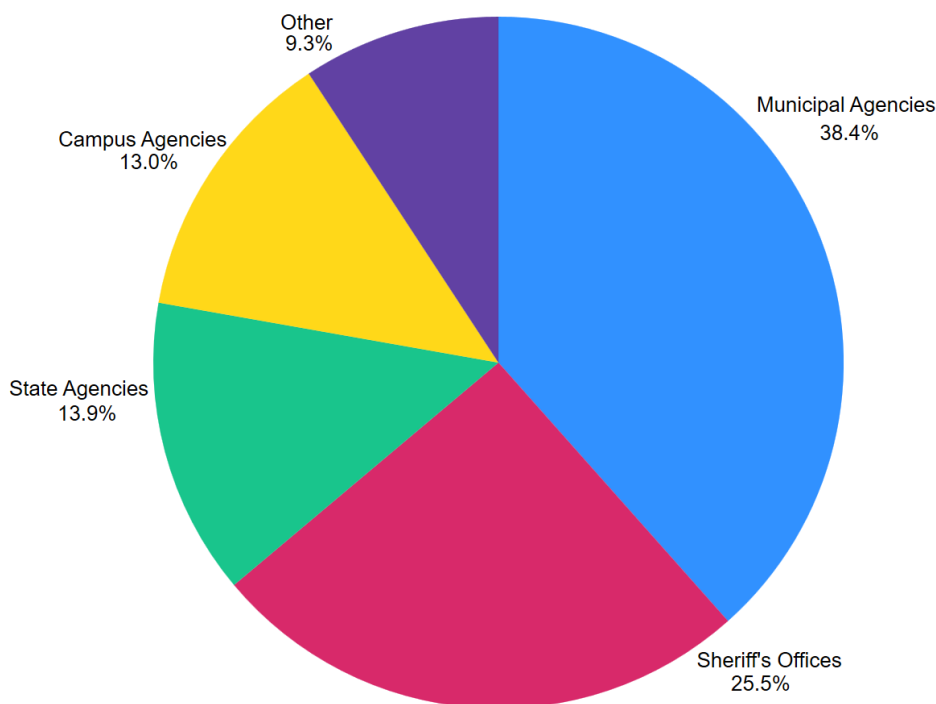


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents by agency type

Our sample consists of 83 respondents from municipalities, 53 respondents from sheriff departments, 30 respondents from state agencies, 28 respondents from campus agencies, and 20 respondents from other agencies (total = 216 respondents) (see Figure 1 above). Other agencies consist of a mix of state law enforcement agencies, airport police agencies, solicitor’s offices, tribal, health authorities, and environmental and water safety and security agencies.

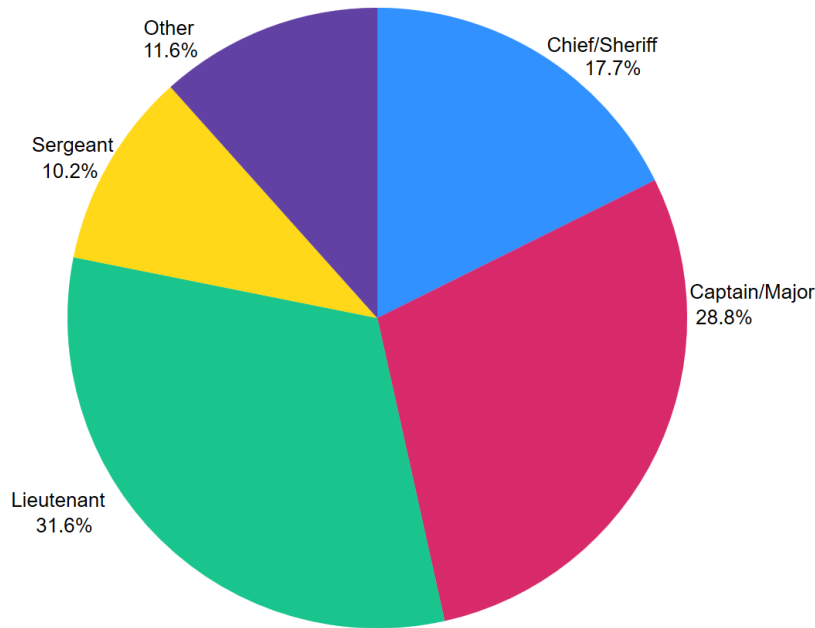


Figure 2. Percentage by respondent rank

Figure 2 above shows the percentage of respondents in the sample by rank. About 18% of the sample was at the rank of chief/sheriff, about 29% was at the rank of captains/majors, about 32% was at the rank of lieutenants, roughly 10% was at the rank of sergeants, and about 12% was at other ranks. Of those who selected “other rank,” most identified their ranks as Corporal, Training Coordinator or Director, Deputy, Deputy Director, and Chief Deputy.

Table 1. Number of respondents by agency sworn personnel

# of Sworn Personnel Employed	Number of Respondents	% of Sample
1-50	119	55.35%
51-100	36	16.74%
101-150	11	5.12%
151-200	8	3.72%
201-250	6	2.79%
251+	35	16.28%
Total	215	100.0

Table 1 above shows the number of current sworn personnel employed by the agency in which the respondents worked. More than half of respondents (about 55%) worked in agencies with 1-50 sworn personnel, 17% worked in agencies with 51-100 sworn personnel, 5% worked in agencies with 101-150 sworn personnel, 4% worked in agencies with 151-200 sworn personnel, 3% worked in agencies with 201-250 sworn personnel, and 16% of the sample worked in agencies with 251+ sworn personnel.

We also asked respondents if their agency currently uses artificial intelligence (AI) tools that were formally instituted and provided by the agency. Of the 212 respondents that answered this question, 44 respondents (20.75%) stated they work for an agency that has adopted AI tools, while the remaining 158 respondents (79.25%) stated that they work for an agency that has yet to adopt AI tools.

SECTION II. AGENCIES WITH AI

Section II reports results from survey items asked only to respondents who stated they work for an agency that has adopted AI tools. As noted above, respondents were initially asked whether they work for an AI adopting agency (or not), and if they selected “yes,” they skipped into a section of questions meant only for respondents that work for AI adopting agencies. Again, a total of 44 possible respondents skipped into this section, although not all respondents answered every question.

Table 2. Types of AI tools adopted

Tools	N
Report writing assistance (e.g., Axon’s ‘Draft One’)	9
Body-worn camera analysis (e.g., “Truleo”)	18
Investigations (e.g., face recognition, DNA analysis, fingerprint identification)	25
Evidence management (e.g., gunshot detection technology)	4
Predictive policing efforts (e.g., evidence inventory, evidence matching, automated meta-tagging of evidence)	8
Social media monitoring	11
Other	8

Note: Respondents were allowed to select more than one option.

Table 2 above reports how AI is currently being used in the agencies where respondents indicated AI adoption. Note that respondents were allowed to select more than one option. The most common type of AI tools reported were those to support investigations (n=25), followed by AI tools for body-worn camera analysis (n=18) and social media monitoring (n=11). Other types of AI tools reported included writing assistance (n=9) and predictive policing efforts (n=8). A total of 8 respondents noted “other” tools adopted by their agency, which included automated license plate readers, emails/data analysis, gunshot detection, and facial recognition tools.

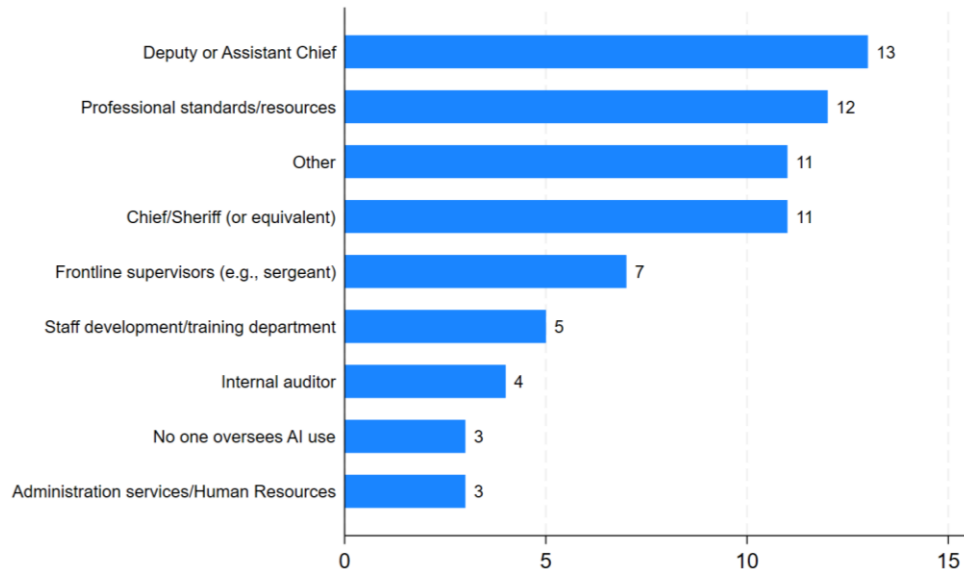


Figure 3. Personnel responsible for oversight of AI use

Figure 3 above reports the personnel responsible for overseeing AI usage within agencies. The most common personnel noted by respondents were deputies or assistant chiefs (or equivalent) (n=13), followed by professional standards/professional responsibility officers (n=12), Chiefs/Sheriffs (or equivalent) (n=11), and “other” personnel (n=11). Frontline supervisors (n=7), staff development/training departments (n=5), and internal auditors (n=4) were less often designated as responsible, and a total of 3 respondents reported no

supervision. Of the respondents who selected “other” for responsible personnel, common responses included Commander, IT Department, Lieutenant, and Captain over Technology.

Table 3. Respondents’ overall attitude toward the use of AI and its helpfulness

	N of Respondents	Range of Overall Attitude & Helpfulness		Average
		Minimum	Maximum	
Overall attitude toward AI	37	1	10	7.92
Helpfulness of AI	34	4	10	7.91

Table 3 above reports respondents’ perceptions of their agencies’ overall attitude toward AI use and the helpfulness of AI since its implementation. Both items were on a 1 to 10 scale, in which 1 indicated very negative/unhelpful, and 10 indicated very positive/helpful. Attitudes toward AI were generally positive. Of the 37 people who responded, there was an overall positive attitude toward the adoption of AI, with a mean score of 7.92. Regarding helpfulness, respondents believed AI tools were generally helpful, with a mean score of 7.91 among 34 total responses.

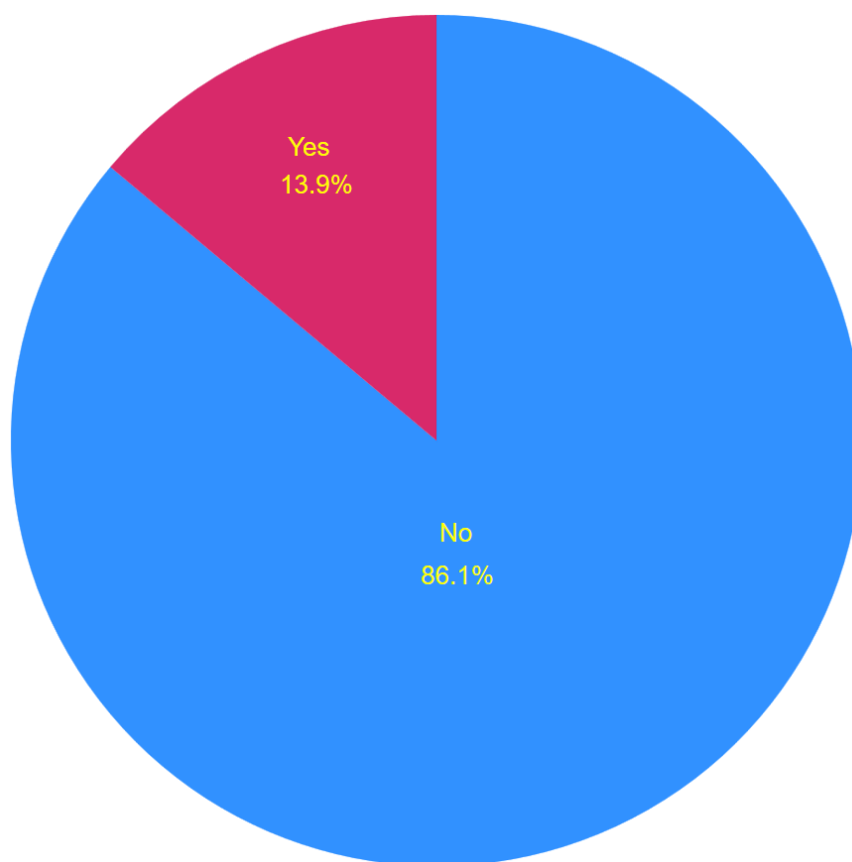


Figure 4. Percentage of respondents whose agencies have external oversight of AI use

Figure 4 above reports the percentage of respondents whose agencies have external oversight over AI utilization. External oversight was not common. Among those responding, about 14% (n=5) noted an external entity overseeing their AI utilization, while 86% (n=31) did not have external entity oversight. Respondents who selected “yes” to having external oversight were asked to specify which entity; the additional responses included Axon and university IT governance (the latter of which is applicable to university agencies).

Table 4. Within-agency training of AI tools being utilized

Training Provided	N	%
Yes	27	73.0
No	10	27.0
Total	36	100.0

Table 4 above reports whether respondents' agencies provide training for the AI tools being utilized, with the majority of respondents indicating that training was provided. Of those who responded to this question, 73% (n=27) identified that their agency provides training for AI tools, while 27% (n=10) of respondents indicated that their agency does not provide training.

Table 5. Perceptions of training on AI tools

Perceptions	% Agreement
Training adequately covers all AI tools utilized by the department	80.77%
The amount of training on AI tools is sufficient	73.08%
Officers feel better equipped to use AI tools after the training	88.46%
The training offered is sufficient	69.23%

Note: Five-point Likert-scale was binary coded where strongly agree and agree = 1, while neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree = 0 to assess agreement.

Table 5 above reports the percentages of respondents that either strongly agreed or agreed to the above statements about training. Note that respondents who answered these questions had to initially select "yes" to whether their agency provides training on the AI tool. About 81% stated that the training adequately covers all AI tools utilized by the department, 73.1% stated that the amount of training is sufficient, 88.5% stated that officers feel better equipped to use AI tools after the training, while 69.2% stated that the training offered is sufficient. Respondents largely had positive perceptions regarding the amount and adequacy of training received.

Table 6. Key reasons why agencies have adopted AI tools

Reasons for Adopting AI	N
Increase agency efficiency	28
Increase agency productivity	21
Enhance the quality of the outputs by the agency	20
Help address low staffing numbers	6
Utilize innovative tools for policing	24
Other	2

Table 6 above reports the reasons that respondents stated that their agency adopted AI tools. Note that respondents were allowed to select more than one option. Of those that responded, 28 stated AI was adopted to increase agency efficiency, 24 stated AI was adopted to utilize innovative tools for policing, 21 stated AI was adopted to increase agency productivity, and 20 stated AI was adopted to enhance or improve quality of agency outputs. Although far less common, 6 respondents stated AI was adopted to address low staffing numbers. The 2 "other" reasons provided were that AI is baked into almost every tool they use, and that AI looks at officer interactions to help promote positive reinforcement.

Table 7. Frequency of review of AI tools and their applications

Frequency of AI review	N
Never	5
Once a year	9
Twice a year	5
Four times a year	1
Five or more times a year	5
Other	10

Table 7 reports how frequently AI tools and their applications are reviewed within a given year. A total of 9 respondents stated that AI tools were reviewed once a year, 5 stated AI tools were never reviewed, 5 stated AI tools were reviewed twice a year, and 5 stated AI tools were reviewed five or more times a year. A total of 10 respondents denoted “other” frequencies, which included monthly, as needed, varied by AI tool, and on a case-by-case basis.

Table 8. Perceived value of AI tools

Values of utilizing AI	%
AI tools are a valuable addition to our agency	91.43%
AI tools help with investigations	77.14%
AI tools support informed decision-making	68.57%
AI tools are easy to use	77.14%
AI tools save time	91.43%
AI tools save resources	85.71%
AI tools are cost-effective	57.14%
AI tools reduce administrative workload	70.59%
AI tools improve officer performance	68.57%
AI tools improve officer objectivity	57.14%

Note: The five-point Likert scale was binary-coded, where strongly agree and agree = 1, while neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree = 0, to assess agreement.

Table 8 reports respondents’ perception of the value of AI tools in various capacities. The percentages reflect the percentage of respondents who either strongly agreed or agreed with the statements. About 91.4% of respondents agreed that AI tools are a valuable addition to their agency and AI tools save time. About 85.7% agreed that AI tools save resources, while 77.1% agreed they are easy to use and help with investigations. About 70.6% of respondents agreed that AI tools reduce administrative workload, while 68.6% agreed that they support informed decision-making and improve officer performance. Leaders saw less value tied to their cost-effectiveness and objectivity (57.1%). Finally, among those respondents who indicated their agency had adopted various types of AI tools, a series of questions were asked about the perceived benefits of these specific tools. The results are reported below.

Table 9. Perceived benefits of adopting AI report writing tools

Benefits	%
It has standardized the report writing process	62.50%
It creates unbiased report writing	75.00%
It is a useful tool for all types of incidents (e.g., violent, property, drug)	75.00%
It increases the speed of report writing	87.50%
It improves the quality of officer reports	75.00%
It accurately reports details of the incident	75.00%
It requires minimal editing	62.50%

Table 9 reports on the perceived benefits of adopting AI report writing tools. A total of 9 respondents indicated that their agency used this type of AI tool. The table shows the percentage of respondents that either agreed or strongly agreed with the above benefits. About 87.5% of respondents agreed that this AI tool increases the speed of report writing. Additionally, 75% of respondents agreed that this tool creates unbiased report writing, is useful for all types of incidents, improves the quality of officer reports, and accurately reports details of the incident.

Table 10. Perceived benefits of adopting AI body-worn camera review tools

Benefits	%
It allows the review of all footage	81.25%
It increases the efficiency of the review	81.25%
It accurately identifies instances of profanity	53.33%
It accurately identifies instances of inappropriate uses of force	68.75%
It reduces perceived unfairness	62.50%
It improves the department's performance evaluation process	75.00%

Note: Five-point Likert-scale was binary coded where strongly agree and agree = 1, while neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree = 0 to assess agreement.

Table 10 above reports on the perceived benefits of adopting AI body-worn camera review tools. A total of 18 respondents indicated their agency used this type of AI tool. The table presents the percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the perceived benefits noted. About 81% of agencies agreed this tool allows for the review of all body-worn camera footage and increases the efficiency of the review. Additionally, 75% of respondents agreed this tool improves departments' performance evaluation processes, while 69% of respondents agreed it accurately identifies instances of inappropriate uses of force and 62.5% agreed it reduced perceived unfairness. There was more split agreement on its ability to identify instances of profanity.

Table 11. Agencies that have adopted AI evidence analysis tools

Benefits	%
It allows for more efficient evidence collection	54.55%
It provides more accurate time and location information of the crime incident	72.73%
It improves officer response time to the crime scene	54.55%
It helps with the successful apprehension of offenders	72.73%
It contributes to cleared cases	50.00%

Note: Five-point Likert-scale was binary coded where strongly agree and agree = 1, while neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree = 0 to assess agreement.

Table 11 reports on the perceived benefits of adopting AI evidence analysis tools, such as gunshot detection technology. A total of 4 respondents indicated their agency used this type of AI tool. The table shows the percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the above benefits. About 73% of agencies agreed that this tool provides more accurate time and location information of the crime incident helps with the successful apprehension of offenders. There was more split agreement in terms of whether the tool allows for more efficient evidence collection, improves officer response time to the crime scene, and contributes to cleared cases.

Table 12. Agencies that have adopted AI predictive policing tools

Benefits	%
It allows officers to prevent crime before it occurs	28.57%
It improves officer response time to crime scenes	28.57%
It helps with the successful apprehension of offenders	57.14%
It accurately predicts future crime locations	42.86%

Note: Five-point Likert-scale was binary coded where strongly agree and agree = 1, while neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree = 0 to assess agreement.

Table 12 reports on the perceived benefits of adopting AI predictive policing tools, such as tools that predict future high crime areas and real time crime centers. A total of 8 respondents indicated their agency used this type of AI tool. The table presents the percentage of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed with the above benefits. There was general lack of agreement for the benefits listed. About 57.1% of agencies agreed that this tool helps with the successful apprehension of offenders, while about 43% stated this tool accurately predicts future crime locations. About 29% of agencies agreed that this tool allows officers to prevent crime before it occurs and improves officer response time to crime scenes.

SECTION III. NON-AI AGENCIES

Section III reports results from survey items asked only to respondents who stated they work for an agency that has not adopted AI tools. As noted above, respondents were initially asked whether they work for an AI adopting agency (or not), and if they selected “no,” they skipped into a section of questions meant only for respondents that do not work for AI adopting agencies. Again, a total of 158 possible respondents skipped into this section, although not all respondents answered every question.

Table 13. Reasons why agencies have not adopted AI in their agency

Reasons for non-AI adoption	%
Our agency is not big enough	15.13%
Our agency does not have a need for it	10.46%
Our agency does not have the resources to support it	42.48%
Our agency has other mechanisms in place to provide officer oversight	46.41%
Our agency has other mechanisms in place to support officers in the field	55.92%
Our agency cannot support staff to oversee AI implementation	40.52%
Our agency cannot support training in AI	18.95%
Our agency does not have adequate oversight to control AI	26.14%
Our agency would have to require added overtime or training hours to adopt AI	51.63%

Note: Five-point Likert-scale was binary coded where strongly agree and agree = 1, while neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree = 0 to assess agreement.

Table 13 above shows the percentage of respondents that either agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements regarding non-AI adoption. There was general lack of agreement with most statements. About 56% of respondents agreed their agency has other mechanisms in place to support officers in the field and 51% of respondents agreed their agency would have to require added overtime or training hours to adopt AI. Similarly, 46% of respondents agreed their agency has other mechanisms in place to provide officer oversight and 42% of respondents agreed that their agency does not have the resources to support AI.

Table 14. Key reasons why respondents from non-AI agencies would adopt AI tools

Reasons for Potential Adoption	N
Increase agency efficiency	116
Increase agency productivity	79
Improve quality outputs by the agency	96
Help compensate for low staffing numbers	47
Utilize innovative tools for policing	102
Other	10

Note: Agencies were allowed to select more than one option

Table 14 presents the number of respondents who identified each of the key reasons for potential adoption of AI tools. Among the non-AI agency respondents, 116 indicated they would adopt AI tools to increase efficiency, 102 would adopt AI for purposes of bringing innovative tools into policing, 96 would adopt AI to improve quality outputs, 79 would adopt AI to increase agency productivity, and 47 would adopt AI tools to help compensate for low staffing numbers. Respondents also gave “other” reasons, such as aiding administrative workflow, identifying suspects more quickly, and threat recognition technology.

SECTION IV. ALL AGENCIES WITH OR WITHOUT AI ADOPTION

Section IV reports results from survey items asked to all respondents about AI tools, regardless of whether their agency had adopted AI tools or not.

Table 15. Perceived concerns about current or potential AI use

Concerns about AI	% Concerned
Removal of the “human element” in policing	47.49%
Lack of contextual understanding by AI tools	67.60%
Lack of nuance in interpretation of situations	64.25%
Inaccurate predictions by AI tools	60.89%
Potential violations of civilian privacy	54.24%
Potential exposure of confidential case-level information	68.72%
Potential exposure of sensitive information	68.54%
Security breaches from using web-based servers	73.18%
Potential for inadmissibility in court	65.92%
Public perception of AI use in policing	41.90%

Note: Five-point Likert-scale was coded such that very concerned and concerned = 1, while neither concerned nor unconcerned, unconcerned, and very unconcerned = 0 to assess level of concern about AI tools

Table 15 reports on the perceived concerns about current or potential AI use in their agency. The percentages reflect those who indicated they were concerned or very concerned about each of the issues noted. About 73% of respondents were concerned about security breaches from using web-based services, 69% were concerned about the potential exposure of confidential case-level information and sensitive information, and 68% were

concerned about a lack of contextual understanding by AI tools. Additionally, 66% of respondents were concerned or very concerned with the potential for inadmissibility in court and 64% of respondents were concerned about the lack of nuance in interpretation of situations. Respondents were less concerned with the removal of the “human element” in policing (47.5%) and public perception of AI use in policing (41.9%).

Table 16. Perceived effect of AI tools on officers

Concerns about officers using AI	% Concerned
Officer morale	26.70%
Officers reducing collaboration with other officers	41.14%
Officers feeling like their jobs are being displaced	30.68%
Officers feeling like “big brother” is watching their every move	55.68%
Officers disconnecting from their daily duties	47.73%
Officers becoming over-reliant on automated tools	76.70%
Officers changing their behavior negatively	36.93%
Officers putting themselves and others in harm’s way to minimize risk of getting flagged	44.32%

Note: Five-point Likert-scale was coded such that very concerned and concerned = 1, while neither concerned nor unconcerned, unconcerned, and very unconcerned = 0, to assess the level of concern about AI tools

Table 16 reports on the perceived effect of AI tools on officers. The percentages reflect those respondents who were concerned or very concerned about each of the effects noted. About 77% of agencies were concerned about their officers becoming over-reliant on automated tools and roughly 55% of agencies were concerned with their officers feeling like “big brother” is watching. Additionally, about 48% of respondents were concerned about their officers disconnecting from their daily duties and about 41% of agencies were concerned about AI reducing collaboration with other officers. Respondents were less concerned with officer morale (26.7%), officers feeling like their jobs were being displaced (30.7%), and officers changing their behavior negatively (36.9%).

Table 17. Perceptions around public opinion and AI in policing

Public opinion and AI	% Agreement
Community input should be required when introducing new AI technologies into policing practices	27.59%
The public understands how AI is used by police departments	18.39%
AI increases public trust in law enforcement	16.09%
Civilian review boards should be put in place to review AI policies of police agencies	13.22%
Civilian review boards should be put in place to provide external oversight of AI use	10.92%

Note: Five-point Likert-scale recoded such that strongly agree and agree = 1, while neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree = 0 to assess agreement.

Table 17 presents respondents’ perceptions around the public and its view/knowledge of AI in policing. The percentages reflect those who either agreed or strongly agreed with the above statements. Only about 28% of respondents agreed that community input should be required when introducing new AI technologies into policing practices. Additionally, only about 18% of respondents agreed that the public understands how AI is used by police departments, with 16% of respondents agreeing AI increases public trust. Only 13.2% and 10.9% of respondents agreed with civilian review boards to review AI policies of police agencies and provide external oversight of AI use, respectively.

Additionally, respondents were asked whether their agency allows officers to use AI tools that are not provided directly by the agency (not visualized in a table). About 43% of respondents stated that their agency allows their officers to use AI tools that are not provided directly by the agency. Respondents that responded “no” to the above question were then asked whether their agency has policies or regulations in place to prevent the use of unauthorized AI tools. These same respondents were also asked their level of concern that officers are using AI on their own despite the agency’s stance against it. About 22% of respondents stated that they do have policies or regulations in place for unauthorized AI tools. Additionally, about 16% of these respondents stated that they were concerned or very concerned that officers are using AI tools despite the agency’s stance against it.

Table 18. Perceived trust in officers that utilize AI tools not provided directly by their agency

Trust in officer usage of non-agency adopted AI tools	%
I trust officers are using AI to aid in report writing, not supplement report writing	67.57%
I trust officers are using AI to improve the efficiency of report writing	79.73%
I trust officers are using AI appropriately	75.68%
I trust officers review all items in which they used AI	58.11%

Note: Respondents were allowed to select more than one option.

Table 18 turns attention to those respondents that indicated their agencies allowed the use of AI tools not provided directly by the agency. These respondents were asked a series of questions related to their perceived trust in officers that utilize these tools. The percentages reflect those who agreed or strongly agreed to the above statements. About 80% of respondents stated that they trust officers are using AI to improve efficiency of report writing, 76% of respondents stated that they trust officers are using AI appropriately, 68% stated that they trust officers are using AI to aid in report writing but not supplement it, and 58% of respondents stated that they trust officers review all items in which they used AI.

SECTION V. RETENTION

In this final section, we asked police leaders about retention of officers and efforts to improve officer retention. We report these findings below. As a benchmark, about 45% of respondents reported their agency was currently experiencing a staffing crisis.

Table 19. Perceived top reasons that officers have left their agency within the last five years in rank order

Reasons	Average Rank
Lack of perceived adequate pay and benefits	3.03
Lack of career advancement	3.87
Lack of perceived organizational support	4.4
Friction with superiors/leadership	4.47
Familial issues (work-life balance)	4.8
Low agency morale	5.28
Burnout	5.46
Low support from the community	6.79
Lack of training	6.9

Note: Respondents rank-ordered each of these reasons from most relevant (1) to least relevant (9).

Table 19 above shows what respondents believe to be the top reasons why officers have left their agency within the last five years. This was a rank order question, in which respondents were asked to order these reasons from

most relevant to least relevant. Thus, lower numbers indicate greater relevance, as these reasons were ranked toward the top. The table reports the average ranking of each item. The primary reason attributed to officers leaving in the last five years was lack of perceived adequate pay/benefits, which was then followed by lack of career advancement, lack of perceived organizational support, friction with superiors/leadership, familial issues, low-agency morale, job burnout, low support from the community, and lack of training.

Table 20. Exit interviews conducted when an officer leaves the agency

Exit interviews conducted	N	%
Yes	116	67.44%
No	37	21.51%
Other	19	11.05%
Total	172	100.0

Table 20 reports the number of respondents who indicated an exit interview is conducted when an officer leaves their agency. About 67% (n=116) of respondents work in an agency where exit interviews are conducted, while about 22% (n=37) of respondents stated that their agency does not conduct exit interviews. About 11% (n=19) responded “other,” with common responses including exit interviews are voluntary, exit interviews are sometimes conducted, a voluntary survey is distributed, and it depends on the situation.

Respondents were also asked approximately what percentage of sworn officers have expressed an intention to leave within the past five years (not visualized in a table). Respondents reported an average of about 30% of officers that have expressed their willingness to leave in the last five years. Additionally, respondents were asked whether they believed the officers that left were leaving law enforcement completely or going to other agencies. About 6% of respondents stated they believe officers were leaving law enforcement completely, 42% believed officers were going to other agencies, 50% believed officers were leaving for both reasons, while the remaining 3% said they did not know.

Table 21. Strategies agencies use to help with officer retention

Strategies	Frequency
Signing bonuses	52
Pay increases	142
Changes to encourage flexibility for school	48
Wellness programs	66
Education incentives	58
Career advancement opportunities	71
Other	21

Note: Respondents were allowed to select more than one option.

Table 21 reports which strategies respondents’ agencies utilize to help with retention of officers. Note that respondents were allowed to select more than one option. A total of 142 respondents reported their agency focuses on pay increases, 71 focus on career advancement opportunities, 66 focus on wellness programs, and 58 focus on education incentives. Of the respondents that selected “other” strategies, respondents reported utilizing rent stipends or housing options, better or new equipment, larger training budgets, and an organizational culture pivot.

Table 22. Perceptions of agency climate as tied to retention

Respondent's Agency Climate Factors	%
The morale of my agency is high	54.65%
The organizational culture is supportive of officers	70.35%
The compensation package provided by my agency (pay/benefits) is adequate	41.28%
Officer burnout is a serious issue in my agency	28.49%
There are adequate resources to support/address officer stress	55.81%

Note: Five-point Likert-scale recoded where strongly agree and agree = 1, while neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree = 0 to assess agreement.

Table 22 reports perceptions on a series of statements around agency climate that could be tied to retention. The percentages represent those who either agreed or strongly agreed with the above statements. About 70% of the respondents agreed the organizational culture of their agency is supportive of officers. There was far less agreement around the other climate factors. About 56% agreed there are adequate resources to support/address officer stress within their agency and about 55% agreed the morale of their agency is high. A minority of respondents agreed the compensation package was adequate (41.3%) and most did not think officer burnout was a serious issue (28.5%).

In addition to these climate factors, respondents were asked how much of an impact public scrutiny of police has had on police retention issues in their agency. Only about 27% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that public scrutiny of police contributes to police retention issues in their agency (not visualized in a table).

Table 23. Issues that contribute the greatest to staffing issues within agencies in rank order

Issues	Average
Retaining an adequate number of officers	1.56
Recruiting an adequate number of officers	1.58
Officers failing to graduate from the academy	2.86

Note: Respondents rank-ordered each of these reasons from most relevant (1) to least relevant (3).

Finally, we asked about contributors to the staffing crisis for those that reported their agency was currently experiencing one (which was 45% of respondents). Table 23 shows the results from asking respondents to rank order three specific issues from most relevant to least relevant. Thus, lower scores indicate greater relevancy to the respondent. Based on the averages, the primary issues contributing to greater staffing problems were retaining an adequate number of officers, followed by recruiting an adequate number of officers, and finally officers failing to graduate from the academy.

Open-Ended Responses

At the end of every general census, respondents are asked about what issues/topics they would like covered in future census efforts. Some of these areas can be covered either by special topics of the census or by independent studies. Below we will bullet-point some of the key themes from the open-ended responses that emerged.

- Cultural diversity practices among agencies in hiring/leadership.
- State funding to cover state-mandated training/accreditation.
- Retention rates for each agency.
- Average years of experience for command staff/line officers.
- Smaller departments lose officers to larger departments, and larger departments should have to pay smaller departments for certifying said officers.

- Staffing issues, retention, recruitment.
- Regional academies, upstate, midlands, coastal.
- Retirement: allowing officers to retire and return to work without a 10k cap.

APPENDIX A

Methods

Team members developed the survey instrument with the goal of understanding police leaders' (sergeants and above) perceptions of AI in policing, including its benefits, concerns about usage, and tools that had been adopted, as well as officer retention factors. The distribution list came from the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy (SCCJA), who frequently sends emails to all SC agencies about training policies and standards in South Carolina.

The survey was initially pilot tested with two lieutenants and one investigator with whom the research team works. After receiving feedback, minor changes were made, and the survey was distributed to the larger list. This distribution began on July 24, 2025, with five weekly reminder emails sent. Data collection concluded on September 3, 2025.

A total of 247 respondents took the survey, but a final working sample of 212 respondents was retained based on survey completion. Of the 313 unique agencies we distributed the survey to, we received a response from a leader in 132 of those agencies, which equates to a 42% agency response rate.

APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument

****Note: The survey below was administered via Qualtrics and therefore the format does not mirror the appearance that responding agencies viewed; however, the questions/choices are identical****

Agency Demographics

What is the name of the agency you work for?

Response format: Open-ended text response.

What is the email address of the person filling out this survey (in the event that we have potential follow-up questions)?

Response format: Open-ended text response.

What is your current rank?

Response options:

- Chief/Sheriff (or equivalent)
- Captain/Major (or equivalent)
- Lieutenant (or equivalent)
- Sergeant (or equivalent)
- Other (please specify)

Which category below best describes your agency type?

Response options:

- Municipal police agency
- Sheriff's office/department
- State agency (e.g., Department of Public Safety, Highway Patrol)
- Campus agency
- Other

Please provide an estimated number of current sworn personnel employed by your agency.

Response options:

- 1-50
- 51-100
- 101-150
- 151-200
- 201-250
- 251+

Agency Use of Artificial Intelligence

Does your agency currently use artificial intelligence (AI) tools that were formally instituted and provided by your agency?

Response options:

- Yes
- No

Module A: Agencies Not Currently Using AI

Presented to respondents who indicated that their agency did not currently use formally instituted, agency-provided AI tools.

Thinking about the reasons for not utilizing AI in your agency, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements:

- Our agency is not big enough.
- Our agency does not have a need for it.
- Our agency does not have the resources to support it.
- Our agency has other mechanisms in place to provide officer oversight.
- Our agency has other mechanisms in place to support officers in the field.
- Our agency cannot support staff to oversee AI implementation.
- Our agency cannot support training in AI.
- Our agency does not have adequate oversight to control AI.
- Our agency would have to require added overtime or training hours to adopt AI tools.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

If your agency were to adopt AI tools, what do you think would be the key reasons your agency adopts AI tools? Select all that apply.

Response options (select all that apply):

- Increase agency efficiency
- Increase agency productivity
- Improve quality outputs by the agency
- Help compensate for low staffing numbers
- Utilize innovative tools for policing
- Other (please specify)

Please elaborate on any other reasons your agency has decided not to adopt AI tools.

Response format: Open-ended text response.

Module B: Agencies Currently Using AI

Presented to respondents who indicated that their agency currently used formally instituted, agency-provided AI tools. Tool-specific subsections were presented when the respondent selected the corresponding type of AI use.

How is AI currently used within your agency? Check all that apply.

Response options (select all that apply):

- Report-writing assistance (e.g., Axon's Draft One)
- Body-worn camera analysis (e.g., Truleo)
- Investigations (e.g., gunshot-detection technology, face recognition, DNA analysis, fingerprint identification)
- Evidence management (e.g., evidence inventory, evidence matching, automated meta-tagging of evidence)
- Predictive policing efforts (e.g., predicting future high-crime areas, real-time crime centers)
- Social media monitoring
- Other (please specify)

Within your agency, who is responsible for overseeing AI use? Check all that apply.

Response options (select all that apply):

- Chief/Sheriff (or equivalent)
- Deputy or Assistant Chief (or equivalent)

- Frontline supervisors (e.g., sergeant)
- Professional standards/professional responsibility office
- Internal auditor
- Administrative services/Human Resources
- Staff development/training department
- We do not have anyone overseeing AI use internally
- Other (please specify)

On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being very negative and 10 being very positive, how would you describe your agency's overall attitude toward the use of AI in the agency?

Response scale: 1 (very negative) to 10 (very positive).

We previously asked about internal oversight of AI in your agency. Does your agency have external oversight of AI utilization? If so, please specify which entity or entities.

Response options:

- Yes (please specify which entity or entities)
- No

What do you think are the key reasons that your agency adopted AI tools? Select all that apply.

Response options (select all that apply):

- Increase agency efficiency
- Increase agency productivity
- Enhance the quality of outputs by the agency
- Help address low staffing numbers
- Utilize innovative tools for policing
- Other (please specify)

Does your agency provide training in the AI tools being utilized?

Response options:

- Yes
- No

Thinking about the training provided by your agency with respect to the AI tools utilized, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements:

- The training adequately covers all AI tools utilized by the department.
- The amount of training on AI tools is sufficient.
- Officers feel better equipped to use AI tools after the training.
- The training offered is sufficient.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

Within a given year, how frequently are AI tools and their applications reviewed or audited to ensure compliance with department policies and ethical standards?

Response options:

- Never
- Once a year
- Twice a year

- Three times a year
- Four times a year
- Five or more times a year
- Other (please specify)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the AI tools adopted by your agency?

Statements:

- AI tools are valuable additions to our agency.
- AI tools help with investigations.
- AI tools support informed decision-making.
- AI tools are easy to use.
- AI tools save time.
- AI tools save resources.
- AI tools are cost-effective.
- AI tools reduce administrative workload.
- AI tools improve officer performance.
- AI tools improve officer objectivity.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being very unhelpful and 10 being very helpful, how unhelpful or helpful has AI been to your agency since its implementation?

Response scale: 1 (very unhelpful) to 10 (very helpful).

Report-Writing Assistance

Presented when report-writing assistance was selected as a current AI use.

You indicated that your agency uses AI for report-writing assistance (e.g., Axon's Draft One). Thinking specifically about AI used to aid with report writing, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements:

- It has standardized the report-writing process.
- It creates unbiased report writing.
- It is a useful tool for all types of incidents (e.g., violent, property, drug).
- It increases the speed of report writing.
- It improves the quality of officer reports.
- It accurately reports details of the incident.
- It requires minimal editing.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

Body-Worn Camera Analysis

Presented when body-worn camera analysis was selected as a current AI use.

You indicated that your agency uses AI for body-worn camera analysis (e.g., Truleo). Thinking specifically about AI used to review body-worn camera footage, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements:

- It allows the review of all footage.
- It increases the efficiency of review.
- It accurately identifies instances of profanity.

- It accurately identifies instances of inappropriate uses of force.
- It reduces perceived unfairness.
- It improves the department's performance evaluation process.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

Investigations

Presented when investigations were selected as a current AI use.

You indicated that your agency uses AI for investigations (e.g., gunshot-detection technology). Thinking specifically about AI used for investigations, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements:

- It allows for more efficient evidence collection.
- It provides more accurate time and location information for crime incidents.
- It improves officer response time to crime scenes.
- It helps with successful apprehension of offenders.
- It contributes to more cleared cases.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

Predictive Policing

Presented when predictive policing efforts were selected as a current AI use.

You indicated that your agency uses AI for predictive policing efforts (e.g., real-time crime centers). Thinking specifically about AI used for predictive policing efforts, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements:

- It allows officers to prevent crime before it occurs.
- It improves officer response time to crime scenes.
- It helps with successful apprehension of offenders.
- It accurately predicts future crime locations.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

Please provide any additional comments you have about AI use in your agency.

Response format: Open-ended text response.

Questions Presented to All Agencies

The following questions relate to concerns about the use or potential use of AI within the respondent's agency. Respondents were instructed to answer all questions regardless of whether their agency currently used AI.

Thinking about the use or potential use of AI in your agency, how concerned are you about the following?

Statements:

- Removal of the "human element" in policing.
- Lack of contextual understanding by AI tools.
- Lack of nuance in interpretation of situations.
- Inaccurate predictions by AI tools.
- Potential violations of civilian privacy.
- Potential exposure of confidential case-level information.
- Potential exposure of sensitive information.
- Security breaches from using web-based servers.
- Potential for inadmissibility in court.

- Public perception of AI use in policing.

Response options for each statement: Very concerned; Concerned; Neither concerned nor unconcerned; Unconcerned; Very unconcerned.

Thinking about the effect or potential effect of AI on officers, how concerned are you about AI tools affecting the following?

Statements:

- Officer morale.
- Officers reducing collaboration with other officers.
- Officers feeling like their jobs are being displaced.
- Officers feeling like "Big Brother" is watching their every move.
- Officers disconnecting from their daily duties.
- Officers becoming over-reliant on automated tools.
- Officers changing their behavior negatively.
- Officers putting themselves and others in harm's way to minimize the risk of getting flagged.

Response options for each statement: Very concerned; Concerned; Neither concerned nor unconcerned; Unconcerned; Very unconcerned.

Thinking about public opinion and the use or potential use of AI in policing, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements:

- Community input should be required when introducing new AI technologies into policing practices.
- The public understands how AI is used by police departments.
- AI increases public trust in law enforcement.
- Civilian review boards should be put in place to review AI policies of police agencies.
- Civilian review boards should be put in place to provide external oversight of AI use.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

Does your agency allow officers to use AI tools that are not provided directly by the agency?

Response options:

- Yes
- No

Are there policies or regulations in place to prevent the use of unauthorized AI tools within the department?

Response options:

- Yes (please specify)
- No

How concerned are you that officers are using AI on their own despite the agency's stance against it?

Response options:

- Very unconcerned
- Unconcerned
- Neutral
- Concerned
- Very concerned

Thinking about officers who utilize their own AI tools, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements:

- I trust officers are using AI to aid in report writing, not supplement report writing.
- I trust officers are using AI to improve the efficiency of report writing.
- I trust officers are using AI appropriately.
- I trust officers review all items in which they used AI tools.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

What additional support or resources would be needed to make AI tools more effective in your agency?

Response format: Open-ended text response.

Staffing and Retention

This was the final section of the survey. Respondents were informed that some agencies may adopt AI tools to address staffing issues and were then asked brief questions about agency staffing.

Please rank order the top reasons you think officers may have left your agency in the past five years, with a higher rank indicating greater importance.

Items to rank:

- Lack of perceived organizational support
- Friction with superiors/leadership
- Lack of perceived adequate pay and benefits
- Lack of career advancement
- Low agency morale
- Low support from the community
- Lack of training
- Familial issues (e.g., work-life balance)
- Burnout

When an officer leaves your agency, do you conduct exit interviews?

Response options:

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

In the past five years, approximately what percentage of your sworn officers have expressed an intention to leave?

Response scale: 0% to 100%, in 10-percentage-point increments.

To the best of your knowledge, when officers leave your agency, are they leaving law enforcement completely or going to other agencies?

Response options:

- Leaving law enforcement completely
- Going to other agencies
- Both
- Don't know

Please select all strategies your agency has used to help with the retention of officers.

Response options (select all that apply):

- Signing bonuses

- Pay increases
- Changes to encourage flexibility in scheduling
- Wellness programs
- Education incentives
- Career advancement opportunities
- Other (please specify)

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about retention factors in your agency.

Statements:

- The morale of my agency is high.
- The organizational culture is supportive of officers.
- The compensation package provided by my agency (pay/benefits) is adequate.
- Officer burnout is a serious issue in my agency.
- There are adequate resources to support/address officer stress.

Response options for each statement: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Public scrutiny of police contributes to police retention issues in my agency.

Response options:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Is your agency currently experiencing a staffing crisis?

Response options:

- Yes
- No

Please rank which issue contributes the most to staffing issues in your agency.

Items to rank:

- Officers failing to graduate from the academy
- Recruiting an adequate number of officers
- Retaining an adequate number of officers

Our goal every year is to cover issues and topics of concern to law enforcement agencies in South Carolina. Our previous census efforts have largely been shaped by comments from law enforcement leaders across the state, and we would like to continue this practice. If there are issues or topics you think should be covered in future census efforts, please describe them below.

Response format: Open-ended text response.