

Department Autonomy: Regional Public Safety/Crime Lab

Through time and by the nature of modern law enforcement, agencies have become more dependent on each other to achieve objectives, whether it be public safety or crime investigation. A portion of one such relationship I would like to examine is that of the Jackson County Sheriff's Department with the Michigan State Police.

Let's take a look at some historical facts on the Michigan State Police as displayed on the M.S.P. website.

- The M.S.P. originated as a temporary wartime agency intended for domestic security.
- 1917 April - Michigan Governor Albert Sleeper created the first version of M.S.P., then referred to as Michigan State Troops Permanent Force (a.k.a. the Michigan State Constabulary).
- 1919 March - Public Act 26 is passed creating the permanent, peace-time Michigan State Police.
- 1963 June - Current Michigan Constitution is ratified creating 20 State Departments
- 1965 July - Public Act 380 is ratified to reorganize executive and administrative agencies; the modern-day Michigan State Police is established under this Act.

In time, county and local law enforcement have become more dependent on M.S.P. for fulfilling goals and objectives in public safety and law enforcement efforts. While this is not necessarily a detriment, I believe it is in the best interest for the Jackson County Sheriff's Department and Jackson County as a whole to be as self-reliant as possible. This includes the viable establishment of a regional lab that is necessary for public safety and criminal investigations.

While I cannot make a definitive determination as to the viability of a regional lab without examining what the current assets of the Jackson County Sheriff's Department, I can articulate the functional areas that need to be examined to make a determination of viability. These areas include building availability/location, equipment, human resources, training, certification and permit requirements, and most significant, funding.

In the contemplation of funding a regional crime lab, it is not my intention to institute a bond initiative on the public. It is merely exploratory in terms of ways to raise funds for such a lab. I recall my teen years in Morenci, MI (Southwest Lenawee County) that a variety of fundraising events were held to support equipment purchases required by the Morenci Volunteer Fire Department or the Morenci Police Department. I would be much more in favor of similar approaches to fundraising than burdening the taxpayers with financial bond commitments. In that this approach may take more time to raise funding, an escrow account would prove very advantageous to maintain accrued funds for earmarked expenditures.

If the event that a Regional Public Safety/Crime Lab could be established, it would prove very resourceful to not only the Jackson County Sheriff's Department, but other law enforcement agencies in the county. Additionally, other counties in the South-Central Michigan Region might reach out for lab and investigative services from Jackson County rather than relying on M.S.P. Competition is Good! Empowering Jackson County towards autonomy in law enforcement makes us stronger in the long run.