

Citizen Observer Program (COPS)

Most cities and counties already have a citizen observer program. The citizens are volunteers and work in areas designated by the government. Some drive in specially marked cars, but most volunteers perform back office functions and clerical duty.

The difference between existing COPS programs and what we propose is full time pay for Citizen Observers. The current volunteer program has schedules that are inconsistent and turnover is such that the required training actually reduces productivity. With full time paid Citizen Observers, the benefits will be seen by the community.

The following is how the program will work and why it will help solve our current crime crisis.

OUTLINING THE NEED

Currently police officers go from one 911 call to another. There are almost no routine police patrols to deter crime. I recently made a 911 call due to a theft, and after two hours I just gave up. In order to be safe our community needs eyes on the street watching our neighborhoods and preventing crime before it happens.

Even when a police car is on patrol it does very little to deter crime. The police officer is behind glass with the air conditioning and the radio on. Our COPS program will have individuals on bicycles going places where patrol cars cannot and they will be able to hear what is going on.

In addition, our candidates will meet and talk with people in the community and learn who are the ones committing the crimes.

THE PLAN

The plan is for both the City of Orlando and Orange County to dedicate \$1 million annually to the COPS program. The candidates will be full time employees at a rate of \$10 per hour. They will receive health insurance but no pension because their job is not permanent. Each candidate can serve for only two years to make room for a new candidate to gain job experience.

Each COPS program will have 50 full time observers on the streets of our communities. The observers will be given bicycles and radios and patrol communities in the 4pm to 12 pm shift and the 8pm to 4am shift when most community crimes are committed. The observers will ride through specific areas, seek out criminal behavior, and report events to a uniformed supervisor. They will also talk with residents to find out who is committing the crimes in the area and attempt to gather information to solve existing crimes.

THE BENEFITS

The benefits of the program far outweigh the costs. Having 100 observers on the streets of central Florida will make our communities safer. The observers will be young people in good physical condition, many of who have not held a full time job before. It is good for the community and good for the workforce.

The COPs program will work because it is low cost and puts observers where the crimes are being committed. Instead of writing police reports we will start to catch criminals. The observers will also have the ability to interact with the public in ways that uniformed police officers cannot.

THE ECONOMIC REALITY

The average police officer in central Florida costs the public \$100,000 a year with pay, benefits, pension, and training. Adding the cost of vehicles, supervisors, and other overhead it costs nearly \$150,000 a year to put a police officer on our streets.

Our economy simply cannot afford to acquire the manpower to make our streets safer, especially in this time of economic hardship. The Citizen Observer Program will put eyes on the street and allow the uniformed police officers to make the arrests and respond to 911 calls.

The City of Orlando recently approved \$1 million to buy Segway scooters and pay for staff to ride around Orlando telling people about the City. The reality is that taxpayers need safer communities more than they need downtown promotional ambassadors.

The salaried COPs program is a time that has come and is desperately needed in central Florida.