

**Item Title:** Wake County Sheriff's Office Drugs and Vice Investigators

**Specific Action Requested:**

**That the Board of Commissioners authorizes 3.0 FTE for additional investigators in the special operations division of the Wake County Sheriff's Office.**

**Item Summary:**

The Wake County Sheriff's Office serves as the primary law enforcement agency for the unincorporated areas of the County. This also includes investigative work in those areas including the Special Operations Division which conducts overt and covert narcotic investigations. The unit is responsible for investigating the distribution, sale and possession of illicit drugs in Wake County as well as its streets and highways. The Drugs and Vice unit also investigates other criminal offenses, such as illegal gambling and prostitution.

**Issue**

The increase in population in Wake County has created a new atmosphere for illegal drug activity and during several Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) investigations it appears that Wake County is now a designated staging area for large narcotics operations. Staff has also learned that Wake County has become an area where narcotics are being stored and dispatched to other areas around the country.

These observations are corroborated by the *Atlanta-Carolinas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) 2014 Threat Assessment*. According to this report, the extensive highway and interstate system, as well as numerous airports, make Wake County an attractive location for narcotics transportation and distribution. Increasingly, Mexican DTO's are transporting cocaine directly into the region and bypassing traditional distribution locations such as Atlanta. Such observations were supported when a search warrant conducted in late 2014, resulted in the seizure of cocaine with a purity level of 97 percent. Additionally, December 2015 search warrant resulted in 46 kilograms of cocaine found in a tractor trailer in Wake County.

Mexican DTO's are also becoming more involved in heroin trafficking according to the HIDTA report. Mexican DTOs are making heroin more affordable and thus more attractive in the United States. At this time, WCSO is only able to access this trafficking through street level narcotics which results in less than a kilogram at a time. Due to staffing levels, there is not enough manpower to target larger operations. Currently, the Federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) targets cases that are over one kilogram. More manpower provides WCSO the capability to a population of drug users and dealers that are above the low level street users but below the large traffickers that are targeted by the DEA.

Additionally, a rise in heroin and methamphetamine use has been noted throughout the County. This is also can be seen in the types of drugs seized over the last few years while there has been a decrease in other drugs such as cocaine and crack cocaine. Details of the amounts of drugs seized since 2013 are below:

Since FY 2013, the Special Operations unit, including drugs and vice, has seized \$177.3 million worth of street narcotics, \$5.2 million in currency, 394 firearms, and has made 1,102 arrests. In 2013, the division seized \$113 million worth of narcotics which included a seizure of two kilograms of heroin, one of the largest seizures in the Office's history. It is the intent to add additional staff in an effort to tackle more cases of this magnitude in order to make Wake County a safe place to live.

Therefore, it is imperative that the Wake County Sheriff's Office is appropriately staffed to be able to fulfill its investigative and enforcement obligations and respond to the threat that large-scale narcotics transportation and distribution operations present. The addition of three investigators will help the unit to be on the level of comparable organizations to address demand resulting from an ever-increasing population.

### Current Staffing

Currently, the drugs and vice unit is comprised of: 8 members, 2 sergeants, and 1 task force officer. This allows for 6 officers to work on the street. Once a case is initiated for a buy or a search warrant is served, a minimum of 4 to 5 staff must be present to work the buy and/or search warrant. This leaves one to two staff available to continue working active cases. In large operations, all officers are required to be present and more often sergeants are assisting officers in processing warrants and buys.

The addition of three investigators would allow each unit five members compared to two teams of four and three. Not only would this allow the Sheriff's Office to target large narcotic and U.S. currency seizures but it would allow for such operation to be conducted simultaneously.

### Cost

The cost for the three investigators is detailed below.

	Description	Partial FY 2016	FY 17
Salary & Benefits	3.0 FTE	\$ 82,070	\$ 164,139
Other Expenditures	One Time Expenditures	\$ 173,343	\$ -
Other Expenditures	Recurring Costs less Salaries	\$ 21,552	\$ 43,104
<b>Total Request</b>		<b>\$ 276,965</b>	<b>\$ 207,243</b>
Revenues	Federal Forfeitures	\$ 173,343	\$ -
Revenues	County General Fund	\$ 103,622	\$ 207,243
<b>Net Cost</b>		<b>\$ 276,965</b>	<b>\$ 207,243</b>
<b>FTEs</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

Due to the current value of the asset forfeiture fund, which is a result of the seizures made by this unit, it is proposed that one-time costs including vehicle acquisition and upfit be funded through the asset forfeiture fund. The remaining costs of \$103,662 will be absorbed in FY 2016 appropriation.

**Attachments:**

1. Budget Memo