



EVALUATING THE EFFECT OF PAY INCREASES ON GEORGIA PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING CENTER INSTRUCTORS ON MORALE AND RETENTION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *Given that morale and retention of skilled public safety instructors are crucial for public safety training in Georgia, this evaluation examines the impact of pay increases on morale and retention rates specifically at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center.*

Research Question: *Does increasing pay have a positive impact on employee morale and retention? Does offering higher pay make an employer more attractive to potential applicants?*

Theory: *Evaluating the Effect of Pay Increases on Georgia Public Safety Training Center Instructors on Morale and Retention* – *Maintaining strong morale and retaining skilled and qualified instructional staff are vital needs for effective public safety training agencies. These factors directly influence the quality of instruction provided and the success of further developing competent personnel. When experienced instructors remain with the agency, it ensures consistent and high-quality training for public safety professionals in the State of Georgia.*

This study investigates the views of Public Safety Trainer 3 (PSTI3) and Public Safety Trainer Supervisor (PSTI4) employees at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC). The evaluation explicitly examines how pay increases, implemented by two different Governors, affected instructor morale, the agency's ability to retain its skilled instructors, and its attractiveness as an employer in the public safety sector. While there are further possibilities that could be evaluated, such as in-depth investigative interviews with instructors and comparative analyses with other states, my focus will remain on public safety within the confines of the State of Georgia, specifically at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center.

Hypotheses: *Two hypotheses will be examined to determine the effects of pay increases at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center on instructor beliefs. The first hypothesis will determine employees' beliefs on morale in the workplace after pay increases. The second hypothesis will determine employees' beliefs on retention in the workplace after pay increases.*

Methods: *Descriptive statistics of respondents' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions, obtained from surveys, will be used to determine the effects of pay increases on morale, recruitment, and retention. Paired sample t-tests will be used to compare data obtained from the 2016 and 2025 surveys of instructors and identify changes in perception concerning the effects of pay increases on morale, recruitment, and retention. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used to compare the attitudes of the 2025 respondents based on their tenure with the agency. Lastly, at a future date, In-depth interviews will be conducted with a sample of survey respondents to gain a deeper understanding of how they perceive the impact of pay increases on the agency's morale, recruitment, and retention.*

Results: *This evaluation assesses the impact of pay increases on the morale and retention rates of instructors at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center, highlighting the importance of competitive compensation in recruiting and retaining instructional staff for the agency. It is expected that the survey results will indicate a positive correlation between the state's pay increases and improvements in instructor morale. Second, the findings are expected to demonstrate that instructors perceive the implemented*

compensation adjustments as an acknowledgment of their contributions to public safety. Third, it is expected that a positive relationship will be demonstrated between pay increases and a reduction in turnover, enabling GPSTC to retain instructors. Lastly, the survey results are expected to demonstrate a positive change between the pay increases and GPSTC's ability to attract new talent for job openings, making it a stronger competitor in the job market.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Current Study

This program evaluation examines the impact of pay increases on morale, retention, and recruitment specifically at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC). I have selected my employment agency since I have firsthand knowledge of the issues that GPSTC has faced with morale, recruitment, and retention during my 18 years with the agency. While not a front-line law enforcement agency like the Georgia Department of Public Safety, the role that GPSTC plays in ensuring public safety personnel are adequately trained to deal with all facets of public safety issues is crucial in keeping the citizens of Georgia safe. With that in mind, it is imperative that GPSTC attract and retain quality instructional staff, and that those staff are paid adequately and in line with the requirements of a seasoned public safety instructor. This evaluation of pay increases provided to GPSTC instructors over the past decade will demonstrate the positive impact on morale, retention rates, and the recruitment potential of the Georgia Public Safety Training Center.

Plan

This paper will be organized by first providing some contextual background and identifying the problems that the Georgia Public Safety Training Center faces with morale, retention, and recruitment, as well as the historical issues that have led to the current situation. Issues include retirement system changes, the comparison of central state locations versus metro area locations, challenges in job comparisons with other state public safety agencies, and budgetary limitations. Georgia has proposed a new

retirement system explicitly designed for state law enforcement. However, as an agency employing instructors from the fire and emergency communications field, will this create more dissension, specifically for GPSTC instructors?

Second, with the identified problems GPSTC faces with morale, retention and recruitment, this evaluation will look at the theories behind human motivation coupled with organizational design and whether a syncretic theory that combines the concepts of Maslow's hierarchy of needs with components of structural contingency theory can help GPSTC's problems with morale, retention, and recruitment. How can GPSTC design an effective organizational structure that simultaneously addresses the needs of employees and the agency in a way that positively affects retention and morale all while ensuring the productivity of the agency is not affected? In a state government agency limited by budget constraints, is pay the only motivator for employees to experience job satisfaction (Sandri & Bowen, 2011)? Or by utilizing components of structural contingency theory, can agencies adapt their organization in response to internal and external environmental changes appealing to current and future employees.

Next, I will examine potential solutions to the issues with morale, retention, and recruitment at GPSTC. Can changes to the organizational structure create the launching pad needed for the executive team to affect changes in morale, retention, and recruitment that money may or may not resolve? What other policy changes could be made to make the agency more attractive to current and potential employees? Employees often use GPSTC as a springboard in their career development by working for the agency long enough to obtain all the critical instructional certifications necessary to become a training officer for a local public safety agency. Is this something that

GPSTC could utilize to recruit potential employees and require a contract that leads to these critical certifications, but obligates the individual to a specific employment period, thereby retaining the employee for a more extended period?

Third, I will conduct three literature reviews to offer insight into existing research on compensation and its impact on morale and retention in the public safety sector. In the first review, I will look at turnover and recruitment costs. With the high costs of training a new employee, turnover rates can have significant impact on the financial burdens on employment agencies, preventing them from achieving a break-even point before the employee leaves for higher pay or promotion at another agency (Griffin & McGuire, 2022).

The second review will examine the impact of protests on turnover. As the United States faced significant backlash across the country due to scrutiny from various incidents, recruitment hit an all-time low (Schroeder, 2023). Paired with the danger of the profession and calls for defunding the police, law enforcement agencies struggled to have enough staff to respond to calls for service. Ultimately, did agencies have to lower their standards to fill a vacant position?

For the third review, low morale in public safety agencies creates significant challenges, creating issues with job satisfaction and hindering the agency's performance. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency has faced this challenge for years and has done little to stop the flood of agents leaving the profession. It was not until years later that CBP surveyed exiting employees and discovered the root of the problems, including leadership issues, a lack of employee recognition, and officer workload imbalances (Gambler, 2024).

After the literature review, I will provide the relevant background concerning the Georgia Public Safety Training Center. Starting with the current organization of the training sections, the diversity of the sections in terms of expertise and qualifications, and how these factors contribute to making GPSTC a diverse yet functional agency. The historical context of the morale, retention, and recruitment issues faced by GPSTC will be reviewed, including the steps taken to address the issues, the turnover trends, and the recent salary study conducted.

Next, I will discuss the research design methodology. This research project will employ quantitative, non-experimental research design, utilizing survey data collected from two surveys. A Likert scale will be used to rate the respondents' opinions from strongest to weakest response. Summative scaling will be used to establish a mean score, with scores exceeding 2.50 being considered acceptable in support of the hypothesis. Identified limitations in the study include self-selection bias, as both surveys were voluntary. Additionally, future evaluation will be conducted by utilizing cognitive interviews with respondents to gain a deeper understanding of their thought processes regarding the survey questions and responses. The statistical methodologies used to analyze the two surveys include descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) which will measure the respondents' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions regarding the effects of pay on morale, retention, and competitiveness.

The following section will discuss the potential findings of the research. The findings will include my expected results based on the hypotheses and literature review. The results of the survey will indicate an increase in morale following the pay changes

and that the instructors believe that the pay increases had a positive impact on retention, reduced agency turnover, and improved GPSTC's ability to retain instructors. Future cognitive interviews will also indicate an increase in morale following the pay changes. Last, I expect that the pay increases have leveled the marketability of GPSTC instructor positions, making the staff less inclined to leave for higher pay at another agency.

Following the potential findings will be the potential applications of the research and implications of the results. The implications of the research may include the need for policy adjustments and a review of market expectations in the public safety sector. Second, there may be a need for strategic retention policies to address areas of concern in maintaining staffing levels. Finally, agencies may need to address work-life balance programs more effectively.

Lastly, the conclusion of this research project will provide a summary of the survey results. Based on the research outcome, I expect the findings to show that instructors believe the pay changes have improved employee morale, retention, and recruitment, or, conversely, created a situation in which employees now feel they are never satisfied unless continuous pay increases occur annually. Further research, including cognitive interviews, could expand awareness of employee beliefs on morale, recruitment and retention. Additionally, the comparison of Georgia salaries to other training facilities in other states across the nation providing valuable competitive information that could level the playing field. This expanded research could enhance the awareness of the Governor and Legislature concerning compensation for similar training facilities.

Background

Since a 1993 restructuring, the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC), the Georgia Police Academy (GPA), and the Georgia Fire Academy (GFA) have operated as one consolidated agency (Hinton, 2001). The purpose of GPSTC is to provide training that meets the needs of public safety agencies across the state. The current configuration of GPSTC employs instructional staff across four distinct training sections: the Law Enforcement Operations & Investigations Section, the Critical Skills Section, the Fire & Emergency Services Section, and the Basic Law Enforcement Training Section. Each of these sections plays a critical role in delivering specialized training to public safety professionals, ensuring that students are prepared for the challenges they may face working with the field of public safety. While the basic qualifications for instructors are generally consistent across each section, the specific roles within the sections have additional specialized requirements based on the nature of the subject matter being taught and the level of expertise needed for the topic.

For example, instructors within the Critical Skills- Use of Force unit, the instructors are required to hold certifications for both General Instructor and Use of Force Instructor. These certifications ensure the instructors are fully equipped to teach the critical skills necessary for law enforcement personnel to manage potentially dangerous situations (Wigginton, 2025). Basic Law Enforcement instructors must possess six certifications including General Instructor, Firearms Instructor, Use of Force Instructor, Defensive Tactics Instructor, Driver Training Instructor, and Emergency Medical. These additional credentials ensure that Basic Training Instructors are well-

versed in the comprehensive curriculum required for this program, preparing all cadets for the aspects of working in law enforcement.

This diversity in qualifications across the divisions enables instructors to focus on their areas of expertise, providing specialized instruction tailored to the needs of each Section. Instructors who are experts in certain areas, such as firearms or driver training, can contribute their specialized knowledge to ensure that trainees receive the highest level of instruction in critical areas. Meanwhile, those teaching broader concepts can concentrate on teaching the foundational skills necessary for success in the field.

The specialized nature of the roles within each division also means that instructors can hone their skills and stay current in their respective areas of expertise. This specialization enhances the overall quality of training provided at GPSTC, as each instructor brings knowledge and experience to their courses. Trainees benefit extensively from the structure of GPSTC's instructional sections, which ensures that both instructors and trainees are well-equipped to meet the diverse and evolving nature of public safety.

Problem

Like many law enforcement agencies in Georgia and across the nation, GPSTC has struggled for years with issues related to employee morale and retention. This challenge is not unique to Georgia, as it reflects a broader trend within law enforcement agencies at all levels of government (Wareham et al, 2015). While most law enforcement agencies are local or county-based, state government entities face similar challenges as private employers and other government agencies when it comes to

attracting and retaining personnel. One major advantage a private employer has over public agencies is the ability to offer higher wages and more competitive compensation packages than government entities which are constrained by public accountability and the need to justify the use of taxpayer dollars.

Historically, while pay lagged behind that of the private sector, government employers were able to attract and retain employees by offering robust retirement systems that provided more generous benefits to individuals dedicating 30 years of public service. However, the stock market collapse of 2008 changed the attractive nature of government retirement. As stocks crashed, benefit plans tied to stocks saw significant losses in investments and increasing levels of unfunded liabilities (Butrica et al., 2009). Like other states, Georgia closed membership into its defined benefit plan on June 30, 2009, shifting all new employees on July 1, 2009, to its defined contribution plan (Employees' Retirement System of Georgia, 2023). Pre-recession retirement plans consisted of defined retirement plans which guarantee a set pension based on years of service (Employees' Retirement System of Georgia, 2023). Post-recession retirement plans saw a shift to defined contribution plans which are more akin to personal savings accounts like 401(k) plans (Employees' Retirement System of Georgia, 2023).

This shift fundamentally altered the nature of government employment. Where public service once held the appeal of long-term financial security, it no longer offers the same incentives to prospective employees. As a result, many employees who had previously viewed government work as a career with valuable retirement benefits no longer saw the same long-term reward. The profound nature of this impact has created a loss of loyalty and competitiveness with now less attractive retirement benefits no

longer “effective for recruiting and retaining long-term employees” (National Conference on Public Employee Retirement Systems, 2008). The shift to portable defined contribution plans has contributed to an increasing turnover rate, with GPSTC specifically experiencing turnover rates up to 27.8% in 2015. The loss of benefits that once helped retain employees left many in state law enforcement agencies feeling undervalued and less committed to long-term service, which ultimately compounded the challenges of recruitment and retention in an already demanding field.

In addition to the retirement system changes, before the start of the state fiscal year 2009, the State of Georgia had a system in place to support its employees through regular pay increases. These included cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) provided at varying amounts during the mid-fiscal year, as well as merit-based increases of about three to five percent at the beginning of each fiscal year. However, when the U.S. economy experienced the 2008 downturn, government revenue sharply declined, forcing most states to reevaluate their revenue estimates and subsequently adjust budgets for state agencies. In this challenging economic environment, the priority shifted from salary increase to job retention. During the recession, state employees, while grateful to remain employed, were faced with furloughs and no pay raises as the state faced the substantial revenue shortfalls and struggled to meet financial obligations.

As the economy slowly began to recover, the State of Georgia cautiously introduced minor pay adjustments, starting with a modest 1% increase in fiscal year 2015 (HB744-FY 2015 Appropriations Bill, 2014). For GPSTC, this 1% increase translated into an additional \$64,824 allocated to the agency’s budget. These funds

were distributed at the discretion of the agency head, with the decision made to reward employees who had received a performance evaluation rating of at least 3 or successful performers (out of a possible 5) (Bearden, 2014). This approach enabled GPSTC to recognize and reward employees who were performing at a higher level, without offering additional pay to underperforming staff. The increase was designed to assist with recruitment, retention, and merit pay adjustments, marking the first pay adjustment in six years for those that received it. Though modest, it was seen as a positive sign that the economy was improving and that pay increases may return to normal levels in the future.

During the fiscal year 2015, GPSTC submitted a proposal to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, requesting a review and possible consideration by both the Governor and the Legislature. This proposal highlighted GPSTC's alarming 27.8% turnover rate among instructors, particularly within the Basic Training program. GPSTC had continuously invested significant amounts of time and resources into training instructors, only to lose them shortly after certification to better-paying positions in local government law enforcement agencies. The proposal detailed the reasons for the high turnover, focusing on the disparity in pay between GPSTC's instructional staff and the salaries offered by other law enforcement agencies. GPSTC emphasized the following key points regarding the tenure and reasons for leaving employment during 2015:

- Turnover Trends (in the previous five years):
 - 40% of those leaving had 2 years or less of service.
 - 35% had 3 to 5 years of service.
 - 15% had 6 to 10 years of service.

- Primary Reason for Leaving: Low Salary.
 - The average starting salary for law enforcement positions outside of GPSTC ranged between \$45,000 and \$55,000, while the starting salary for GPSTC instructors ranged between \$35,569.44 and \$39,038.40 in 2015. This discrepancy is significant considering GPSTC requires a minimum of five years of experience in public safety versus the other agencies starting salary for individuals brand new in public safety.
 - Interestingly, students in Basic Law Enforcement training were earning more as an uncertified recruit than the certified instructors teaching them.
- Comparative Salary Data:
 - The proposal included data comparing GPSTC salaries with those of other state agencies. For example, a Trooper First Class with the Department of Public Safety required only three years of experience and earned \$44,544. A GPSTC Public Safety Trainer 3 required at least five years of experience and earned just \$35,569.44.
 - Similarly, a Trooper Second Class position requires only four years of experience and earns \$48,564. A GPSTC Public Safety Trainer Supervisor requires six years of experience and earned just \$39,038.40.

This disparity in pay combined with the high turnover rates presented a critical issue for GPSTC, which had been unable to retain experienced instructors. Recognizing the importance of addressing these challenges to maintain the quality of training, the proposal garnered favorable consideration. As a result, the Georgia legislature approved additional funding for the state fiscal year 2016, allocating \$642,000 to implement a new salary scale aimed at retaining instructional staff and improving morale (HB76-2016 Appropriations Bill, 2015). This funding marked a significant step toward addressing the retention challenges faced by GPSTC. It was viewed as a necessary move to ensure the long-term effectiveness and stability of the agency's training programs. The 2015 proposal not only highlighted the reasons for employee departures but also underscored the importance of a competitive and sustainable compensation system to retain skilled professionals in public safety.

While the pay restructuring at GPSTC elevated the salaries of its instructors to a higher pay bracket, the adjustments still did not align with comparable positions in other state agencies or local government. However, it marked an important step in addressing pay disparities. Following the salary restructuring for GPSTC instructors, other state law enforcement agencies began to express concerns about high turnover rates, prompting Governor Nathan Deal to take broader action in addressing law enforcement pay across all state agencies. In amended fiscal year 2016, Governor Deal implemented a 20% pay increase for all law enforcement personnel working state public safety agencies. While this increase represented a significant step forward in tackling retention and morale issues within the state's law enforcement community, it inadvertently created new challenges, particularly for GPSTC.

One still unresolved issue that the pay restructuring did not address was the misalignment between staff pay brackets and job responsibilities, as well as entry-level requirements. Although the 2016 raise brought entry-level pay for GPSTC instructors to the same level as Trooper First Class and Trooper Second Class, these positions did not accurately reflect the responsibilities or the qualifications required for roles like the Public Safety Trainer 3 and the Public Safety Trainer Supervisor. At the time, the 2016 pay increase was the highest the state could offer. However, it still fell short of aligning the GPSTC instructor positions with appropriate comparative roles, which should have been closer to those of Corporal and Sergeant in terms of pay and responsibilities.

In addition to this ongoing issue, the 20% pay increase introduced another challenge: it was only applied to law enforcement instructors. At GPSTC, all instructors, regardless of whether they teach law enforcement, fire safety, or communications, are grouped under the same job codes and treated as equivalent positions. However, when the funding for the 20% increase was allocated, the fire instructors were excluded from the adjustment. As a result, the pay raise intended to address retention and morale issues, created division and dissatisfaction among fire instructors performing the same work for less pay. For over five years, GPSTC continued to request that the pay disparity be addressed and extended to the fire instructors.

Finally, in fiscal year 2022, the Legislature provided 5% of the 20% needed to make the salary levels whole for GPSTC instructors. This left a significant shortfall of the 15% gap between law enforcement and fire instructors for equivalent work. During the middle of fiscal year 2022, GPSTC made internal adjustments to its budget to address

the 15% gap, allowing the agency to compensate all instructors at the same pay rate and improve morale.

Government jobs, once perceived as offering stability and a strong benefits package, are no longer a competitive option for many (Schroeder, 2023). When comparing pay between positions in other state public safety agencies, a marked difference is evident. Agencies that are directly visible to citizens daily, such as the Department of Public Safety, typically recruit for entry-level law enforcement positions with starting salaries that challenge GPSTC's recruitment efforts. GPSTC's requirements are not for entry-level positions, but rather for public safety professionals with a minimum of five to six years of experience, typically in specific areas of specialized public safety experience (Wigginton, 2025). An additional factor contributing to pay lags comparatively across state governments is the fact that GPSTC is located centrally in Georgia, where pay has always lagged areas like Metro Atlanta. During my tenure with GPSTC, I have found that it is common for a Basic Law Enforcement instructor to earn less than a non-certified recruit from a metro area agency (Jones, 2015). These discrepancies do not go unnoticed by GPSTC instructional staff, and the effects on morale are noticeable.

Law enforcement pay remains a key focus for Governor Brian Kemp and the Georgia Legislature. In fiscal years 2024 and 2025, additional law enforcement-specific pay increases of \$2,000 and \$3,000, respectively, were provided. Unfortunately, GPSTC law enforcement positions were inadvertently excluded from the fiscal year 2025 law enforcement-specific pay increase, further eroding morale. GPSTC has been working with the House and Senate budget offices to correct this error. GPSTC has also

submitted a comprehensive pay study to the Governor and Legislature, recommending adjustments to job codes and pay scales to align positions more accurately with job responsibilities. During calendar year 2025, GPSTC received the newly approved job classifications. While this is a favorable start, it did not come with funds to remediate the pay discrepancies.

All these conditions underscore the broader dilemma faced by government agencies, including law enforcement bodies like GPSTC. The challenge is not only to recruit seasoned talent, but also retention struggles to maintain a stable, committed workforce in an environment where the traditional incentives have significantly changed, requiring new approaches to support and retain personnel.

Theory: Evaluating the Effect of Pay Increases on Georgia Public Safety Training Center Instructors on Morale and Retention

Pay discrepancies between state agencies highlight the broader dilemma faced by government agencies, including law enforcement bodies such as GPSTC. The challenge is not only to attract new talent but also to maintain a stable and committed workforce in an environment where traditional incentives have undergone significant changes, necessitating new approaches to support and retain personnel (Schroeder, 2023).

The ongoing pay disparities and the lack of progress in addressing these issues highlight the complex challenges GPSTC faces in recruiting and retaining qualified instructors. Despite some efforts to address these concerns, further work is needed to ensure that pay scales across the agency accurately reflect the responsibilities and

qualifications required for each role. Aligning compensation with job responsibilities and addressing inequities between other state law enforcement agencies can help GPSTC maintain a stable, dedicated workforce and improve morale across the organization.

While the pay concerns are an area that GPSTC can request additional funding to correct, it is not an area under GPSTC's authority to correct. Funding for pay changes must be completed through the actions of the Governor and the Legislature.

Understanding this, the executive team regularly communicates with staff regarding actions being taken to secure additional funding to alleviate the pay discrepancies. The current salary proposal includes the realignment of positions to comparable levels of responsibility at other public safety agencies, as well as step increases for each position. While the turnover rate still averages approximately 25% each year agency-wide, the results of my analysis will demonstrate that instructor morale has still increased at GPSTC. While we have not yet achieved salary realignment, GPSTC staff are rallying behind the executive team and recognize that they are doing their best to correct the situation.

Have the pay increases secured helped GPSTC retain instructors? Although there has been a minimal reduction in turnover, the results may demonstrate that retention remains a significant issue. The turnover in 2015 was just over 27%, and it still averages between 9% and 21% annually today. Third, have the pay increases helped with recruitment? I believe the results will likely show that staff do not feel that GPSTC is competitive. Speaking specifically of salary level, I would agree that we are not competitive. Instructors could go back to the local level with less responsibility and higher pay.

A specific and actionable solution for GPSTC involves strategically promoting beyond just basic physiological or safety needs. The distinct advantages of employment with GPSTC can help instructors achieve psychological and ultimately self-fulfillment needs, while conversely providing a return on the organizational sustainability for GPSTC. The potential win-win situation is an important contrast to take into account when compared to employment at local agencies or active state law enforcement entities. This theory of a syncretic approach combines portions of both Maslow's hierarchy of needs and structural contingency theory into what I will refer to as Jones' theory. When reviewing how Maslow's hierarchy of needs fits within organizational theory, it provides an overall framework that helps leaders understand how to motivate, engage and achieve the highest level of productivity possible from employees (Maslow, 1943). One way to achieve this is for organizations limited by funding restrictions like GPSTC to instead focus on and communicate the benefits of agency employment and facilitate these advantages to create a synergy that boosts employee morale and improves retention.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a psychological theory that utilizes a tiered approach for understanding human motivation (Maslow, 1943). The second tier of the pyramid, safety, is an important basic need and one that GPSTC could further exploit for retention purposes. A law enforcement officer patrolling the streets is in a more high-risk situation and may not necessarily have his or her safety needs completely satisfied, while officers serving as instructors serve in a far safer capacity. Additionally, considering the environment over the past 30+ years where law enforcement officers face scrutiny and less support after well-publicized incidents, the tense nature of the job

has only increased (DeSilver et al., 2020). Relieving some of this tension by serving in roles that face far less citizen interaction and thus less scrutiny can easily help an officer feel more inclined to have their lower-level needs satisfied.

GPSTC's instructional schedule typically operates Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM and offers a structured routine often unavailable in other public safety roles. While instructors can voluntarily join the GPSTC Police Department or the GPSTC Fire Department, it is not a requirement. Benefits of instructors who choose not to join the police department or fire department include the absence of weekend duties, on-call requirements, and work obligations on major holidays. Instructors who voluntarily join the police department or fire department are expected to participate in duty officer responsibilities which include staying overnight on campus in the dormitories during their monthly duty night, the possibility of call outs if our departments are activated for statewide assistance, responding to calls during the day or evening while the duty officer, but will still have most major holidays off.

Furthermore, the state's generous sick and vacation accrual rates represent a significant benefit. This predictable schedule also offers certified officers the flexibility to engage in part-time security-related employment. While such supplementary work may also be feasible for individuals employed by local agencies, GPSTC's consistent schedule provides instructors with greater autonomy in pre-planning their external work commitments, thereby enhancing their overall work-life balance and potentially increasing job satisfaction and retention. These are areas where GPSTC fails to promote advantages to employment with the agency.

An additional actionable solution for GPSTC involves the strategic application of structural contingency theory. GPSTC has historically demonstrated a willingness to adapt its policies to enhance staff retention and support a positive work environment. For instance, a notable change involved the relaxation of the facial hair policy, transitioning from a strict prohibition to allowing neatly groomed facial hair, which many male instructors positively received.

Furthermore, previous policy required instructors to wear suits while in the classroom. This practice has since been flexed to permit instructors to wear a standardized uniform consisting of a GPSTC polo shirt and tactical pants, which GPSTC provides. While the policy still specifies a spectrum of acceptable shoe colors, this revised dress code represents a more flexible approach than the previous policy. These adjustments exemplify GPSTC's capacity to modify internal policies in response to personnel needs, aligning with the principles of structural contingency theory to foster a more adaptable and employee-centric environment.

A further policy area that could benefit from structural contingency flexibility is teleworking. While this flexibility is extended to administrative staff, many instructional staff do not possess the option to telework. Given that GPSTC maintains hundreds of courses within its master course files, all of which require annual review and updates, implementing a structured schedule for these tasks, parceled out to each instructor, would enable them to perform these reviews and updates remotely. The nature of course updating does not inherently require instructors to be on campus. Introducing this level of flexibility could significantly contribute to enhancing morale, improving retention, and improving recruitment efforts for instructional staff.

Finally, recognizing that GPSTC often serves as a foundational steppingstone for its instructional staff careers, it would be strategically beneficial for GPSTC to implement a reciprocal obligation, much like the one in statute for officers providing a specific number of years of service to the agency sponsoring their basic training. A statute or even a policy change would require instructors to commit to specific periods of continued employment for each certification obtained. This approach would ensure that GPSTC receives a commensurate return on its investment in career development efforts, striking a balance between employee growth and organizational stability and service.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Does increasing pay impact employee morale? Does offering higher pay make an employer more attractive to potential applicants? These questions have been widely explored in public safety research, as scholars have sought to understand whether salary adjustments can lead to enhanced job satisfaction, productivity, and motivation. Additionally, they have sought to discover if pay matters in attracting applicants to a profession at times heightened with distrust and criticism. This literature review aims to offer insight into existing research on compensation and its impact on morale and retention in the public safety sector.

Historical Research on Pay as a Motivator

As previously discussed, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a key framework that utilizes a tiered approach for understanding human motivation (Maslow, 1943). Written from a more humanistic version of psychology, Maslow believed that to achieve one's full potential, basic needs like food, water, shelter, financial security and love had to be met (Maslow, 1943). While Maslow originally believed these levels had to be achieved in hierarchical order to reach esteem and self-actualization levels, his further research in 1970's *Motivation and Personality* revealed new thoughts that allowed for some flexibility in the order. This change brought a new perspective that it was possible in some cases for multiple needs to be achieved simultaneously, or in the case of "starving" artists, may even find individuals willing to set aside basic needs in pursuit of esteem or self-actualization needs for a short period of time (Maslow, 1970). Maslow did not deep dive on whether pay was specifically a motivator for employees to remain with

a particular employer, but more recent research like that of Sandri & Bowen (2011) looked at how Maslow's framework explains how individuals must first markedly satisfy their basic physiological needs, like food, clothing, and shelter, before they can move onto higher level needs. These lower needs are what drive the search for employment. The higher-level needs, like personal security, social connections, esteem, and self-actualization are the levels that employers need to satisfy to retain staff. According to Sandri & Bowen (2011), they believed that Maslow's theory suggests that income plays a role in addressing the foundational level, enabling employees to meet their basic life requirements and freeing them to focus on higher-level motivations.

In the workplace, Maslow's theory offers valuable insight into how employers can foster a more motivated and productive workforce (Sandri & Bowen, 2011). Sandri and Bowen (2011) suggest that by understanding the needs outlined in Maslow's hierarchy, employers can more effectively meet their employees' basic and psychological needs. Employers with understanding of the hierarchy can cultivate a more dedicated, engaged, and efficient workforce. While money is not the sole factor that influences an employee's sense of fulfillment, it is a critical element in addressing the foundational physiological needs that allow employees to focus on other aspects of job satisfaction (Sandri & Bowen, 2011).

For instance, when employees are compensated fairly and their basic financial needs are met, they may feel more secure and valued in their role. This sense of security can have a ripple effect, leading to improved morale and a stronger commitment to their work. Moreover, the perception that an employer recognizes and supports employees' basic needs can contribute to greater trust and satisfaction with

the organization. As employees' basic needs are met, they are better positioned to pursue higher-level goals, such as career development, personal growth, and contributing meaningfully to the organization's success (Sandri & Bowen, 2011).

In a study of the Chinese army, Yang et al. (2008) job satisfaction was linked to increased productivity and lower turnover rates. Their research showed that when the Chinese government increased the base pay, not only were the soldiers happier in the job, but they also experienced improved overall job satisfaction effectively reducing absenteeism and improving efficiency. The higher income allowed the soldiers to better support their families, reducing stress on the workers. While money is certainly not the only motivator, it is a vital component of a strategy to boost employee morale and long-term success. A 2013 study by Schreurs et al. found that employees who are not paid at a level commensurate with their skill level and ability will not feel valued and will seek that sense of value elsewhere, leading to higher turnover rates. However, when they are paid more in line with the value they bring to the table, Schreurs et al. (2013) found that job satisfaction is strengthened, turnover is reduced, and employees are more committed to the organization.

As Maslow indicated in his study, being even "basically satisfied" in the lower-level hierarchy of needs, allows the individual to be guided by more higher needs (Maslow, 1943). If the pay is sufficient to feed the employee and their family, they move up the hierarchy to other needs such as esteem. Allowing an employee to establish a strong commitment to an organization can create a sense of satisfaction in the job, possibly allowing less focus on the need for higher pay. Researchers Olafsen et al. (2015) found a similar perspective to Maslow. Their study revealed that while pay was

important, it mattered less if strong bonds and a sense of cohesion existed within the work environment. When employees in the study felt a sense of belonging and job satisfaction, they tolerated lower wages as the physiological need of belonging was met. Sandri and Bowen's study (2011) also found that while salary was an important factor, it alone does not guarantee sustained employee satisfaction. Like Olafsen et al. (2015), Sandri and Bowen (2011) point out that non-monetary factors, such as a positive work environment, opportunities for advancement, and meaningful work, also play a significant role in fulfilling employees' psychological needs. However, when these factors are combined with competitive pay, they can create a well-rounded approach that helps organizations attract and retain dedicated employees.

Structural Contingency Theory

Research goes both ways as to the importance of pay in satisfaction, but when law enforcement agencies face challenges in competitive advantages, such as pay that does not align with the cost of living in high-expense areas, overly demanding training standards, or extremely strict appearance standards, they may need to place a greater emphasis on attractive pay to being able to recruit or modify standards (Giblin & Galli, 2017). This approach is known as structural contingency theory which allows an agency to flex its organizational response to changes in areas such as the environment and technology (Giblin & Galli, 2017). In the study by Giblin & Galli (2017), factors such as salaries, incentives, and reimbursements were compared to employment rates among other predictors. The overall findings suggested that departments in jurisdictions may have challenges in recruiting if salary levels are not adjustable to remain competitive

and suggested that human resources departments have flexibility in hiring salaries that are annually reviewed (Giblin and Galli, 2017). By allowing flexibility to attract officers with robust incentive packages such as annual leave days, signing bonuses, supplemental pay for special duties, and educational incentives, allow agencies to attract and retain adequate staffing (Giblin & Galli, 2017). One interesting area noted by the researchers was identified in the study. The data analyzed demonstrated that in areas of high crime, salary was not a factor. In fact, police officers were called to the job with the goal of keeping citizens safe and were less concerned with higher salary in less safe working conditions (Giblin & Galli, 2017).

Agencies that have large applicant pools may not need to utilize contingencies or pay modifications as they have sufficient resources to fill vacancies, however, for organizations that are struggling with having a sufficient applicant pool, contingencies may need to be used to adjust pay considerations either with or without modifications in areas such as appearance policies to set the stage for increasing the number of applicants (Giblin & Galli, 2017). For instance, prior to 2021, the Georgia State Patrol (GSP)'s policy prohibited visible tattoos on the arms. However, in 2021, using the theory of structural contingency to expand their applicant pool, GSP modified their rigid policy and began allowing arm tattoos if the trooper wears long-sleeve uniform shirts to keep them covered (Abusaid, 2021). This was not an option previously, and combined with increased state pay, amplified strategic focus on law enforcement, the concepts sought to increase the number of applicants for GSP.

For U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), faced with declining efforts to offset turnover between fiscal years 2013 and 2017, pay and onboarding were heavily

evaluated (Gambler, 2024). Utilizing multiple recruitment and retention techniques, including marketing and pay incentives, CBP has been able to more closely meet the necessary staffing levels for the agency (Gambler, 2024). The agency was provided with flexibility to provide recruitment incentives of up to 25% of the base pay, 10-25% retention pay and even 25% of base pay for relocation to new geographic areas that benefit the agency (Gambler, 2024). Currently the agency is offering between \$20,000-\$30,000 in recruitment incentives dependent on the work location with payment split between completion of an academy and meeting a pre-determined service period of three years (Gambler, 2024). Among other techniques used, incentives are evaluated each year for effectiveness and discontinued when no longer an effective recruitment tool. Since implementation, recruitment and retention incentives have continued to help CBP meet staffing goals.

Much like the changes by GSP to appearance standards, CBP made structural changes to the hiring process as it was a contributing factor in low applicant rates (Gambler, 2024). Specifically, CBP made changes to its policy on marijuana use which had been a contributing factor in many applicants failing the polygraph (Gambler, 2024). Since the policy regulations were lowered and the polygraph exam process changed, the number of applicants passing the polygraph exam has increased, helping the agency with meeting staffing goals (Gambler, 2024).

Turnover and Recruitment Costs

The cost of turnover in law enforcement can be significant, and according to 2021 research conducted by Mourtgos et al., these costs can sometimes reach up to five times the salary of the departing officer and include expenses such as training and onboarding. These costs can have a major impact on agency budgets, which was amplified for Georgia Law Enforcement agencies beginning January 2025 when the Basic Law Enforcement Training Course (BLETC) was expanded from 408 hours to 809 hours (11 to 20 weeks shift). This increase adds additional financial burdens on the employing agencies, including salary, per diem, travel costs, as well as the workforce management aspect, as agencies wait longer for officers to become certified and available to augment staffing. The Georgia House of Representatives introduced a bill during the 2025 legislative session to help mitigate the financial strain on agencies when officers switch employers shortly after becoming certified. House Bill 549 sought to extend the time frame during which the original employing agency can seek reimbursement for the total cost of training by increasing from 15 to 36 months after the completion of mandate training and provide for up to 90 days of salary reimbursement (Peace Officers; Extend Time Frame for Which Reimbursement of Total Training Expenses by a Subsequent Employer May Be Sought, 2025). While the bill passed the House, it was tabled by the Senate and could come up for discussion again in the next Legislative Cycle. Current law, O.C.G.A. § 35-8-22, only allows for half of the total costs to be reimbursed when officers accept jobs with another agency during a 15-to-24-month period after certification (Georgia General Assembly, 1992).

Due to the nature of police work, the costs for recruitment can be significant (Wareham et al., 2015). For agencies such as the Department of Public Safety (DPS), which require significant pre-screening including polygraph, extensive background investigations, and psychological and medical examinations, these costs can substantially impact the budget. DPS spends an estimated \$16,000 per graduate on application and screening costs, which would equate to \$1,600,000 for one graduating class of 100 (Griffin & McGuire, 2022). Additionally, in a special examination performed by the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts, it was estimated that DPS spends about \$125,000 per trooper for training, which includes salary, benefits, recruitment, and screening processes (Griffin & McGuire, 2022). Taking note of these costs at the Georgia DPS level compared to turnover data available and evaluated by researchers Wareham et al. (2015), it is no wonder turnover is such a high cost to agencies. Using data from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) and the Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (CSLLEA) surveys, Wareham et al. (2015) examined the significance of job turnover in law enforcement. This examination sought to provide information to agencies to facilitate the reduction in cost. Specifically, weighted samples were used to determine that about 70% of officers in the periods examined voluntarily resigned (Mourtgos et al., 2021). The obligation to provide services to citizens does not go away whenever high turnover is present. Along with the costs of recruitment and training, there are the costs associated with knowledge loss, particularly when experienced officers leave their positions due to transfers or retirement. This “brain drain” can significantly impact an agency’s ability to meet the

demands of its citizens when people resources are already strained due to loss (Mourtgos et al., 2021).

Protests and Turnover

Since 2020, the public safety profession has encountered backlash and scrutiny at every turn, including constant poor media attention and public perception that have heightened the brain drain. Nationally, the role of an officer has become even more dangerous, and attracting recruits is increasingly difficult when potential candidates feel that the compensation is out of alignment with danger and scrutiny (Schroeder, 2023). Following the costliest protests in U.S. history, law enforcement has struggled with turnover and tried numerous incentives to entice individuals to switch agencies or enter the profession. These incentives have included sign-on bonuses, take home vehicles and pay increases, yet the vacancy rate has not been eliminated, and financial incentives have not been able to counter the negative coverage (Mourtgos et al., 2021). Using data from a large law enforcement agency in the western half of the United States, Mourtgos et al., (2021) analyzed turnover data using a time series analysis to examine an agency's ability to retain staffing. The data showed that resignations significantly increased by 152% from 2016 to 2020 at the height of the protests and negativity (Mourtgos et al., 2021). The BSTS model presented showed that a trend in resignations occurred from 2016 to 2019, but nowhere near the jump experienced in 2020. The analysis is statistically significant for the observation shown for resignations (Mourtgos et al., 2021).

In a 2024 study, Del Pozo et al. conducted a national survey of police chiefs to determine the impact of the George Floyd incident on recruitment. The results revealed that 83.6% of those surveyed reported having difficulties with recruiting individuals into law enforcement (Del Pozo et al., 2024). An additional concern highlighted was the loss of control over public perceptions of the law enforcement profession. Many chiefs expressed frustration with the increased distrust and negativity towards police, which they attributed to the fallout over incidents like the death of George Floyd (Del Pozo et al., 2024)

One alarming conclusion from the survey was the contemplation by chiefs on possibly lowering standards to meet recruitment needs. This change could have potentially serious consequences for the safety of communities and the effectiveness of law enforcement. Researchers offered an alternative option that called for a focus on efforts to recruit women, rather than reducing standards (Del Pozo et al., 2024). Women account for an underrepresented demographic in the United States and could be used to inform opinions that chiefs need to heavily recruit women to make up the difference in applicant pools, rather than lower standards that would place the communities at further risk from unsuitable candidates (Del Pozo et al., 2024). In the United States, females outnumber males in the population by an estimated 3 million, yet many occupations, like law enforcement, continue to be male dominated (Yellen, 2020). In the 2022 U.S. Census data, 81% of those employed in law enforcement were male, while only 19% were female (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Based on this, the recommendation by Del Pozo et al. (2024) is valid, and recruiting more heavily from this demographic with highly

qualified females can help solve the recruitment issues rather than exacerbating the climate with unsuitable candidates and further undermining public trust.

Morale

In addition to ongoing concerns regarding pay disparities and a general mistrust of the profession, agencies are also grappling with low morale among their staff (Yang, 2023). This issue is particularly evident within U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), where morale among Border Patrol agents has been a significant challenge for nearly two decades. According to a study on Border Patrol agents, morale has consistently been a major issue since the federal fiscal year 2005 (Gambler, 2024). These long-standing morale challenges have contributed to job dissatisfaction and hindered overall agency performance. By surveying exiting employees, CBP was able to determine changes that needed to be addressed with leadership, employee recognition, and workloads (Gambler, 2024).

In response to morale challenges, agencies need to also look at current staff and correct morale issues (Yang, 2023). One way to address morale issues is with servant leadership or shifting focus to employees rather than continued focus on the agency (Yang, 2023). Additionally, by ensuring employees are recognized and rewarded for their contributions demonstrates to staff that they are appreciated and may be a turning point in agency turnover rates (Yang, 2023). CBP has implemented steps to improve morale and address the root causes that led to its agency issues. These initiatives include leadership training courses designed to enhance the skills and effectiveness of

supervisors and create a more supportive and engaging management style (Gambler, 2024). CBP also introduced employee recognition programs designed to acknowledge and reward the hard work of agents and boost morale and created healthier work-life balances to address complaints on workload (Gambler, 2024).

In a study conducted by Yang (2023), quantitative methods were used to determine if servant leadership styles at law enforcement agencies correlated with higher morale and job satisfaction compared to agencies with a more authoritative leadership style. The findings revealed that agencies with servant leadership styles were more successful at having employee environments where employees feel more valued (Yang, 2023). These environments led to both increased morale and job satisfaction in the results for these agencies and align with similar efforts by CBP to improve morale. By initiating programs such as Engagement-in-Action and Values-in-Practice, CBP has helped to engage employees, communicate positive outcomes, and recognize performance and performance of staff (Gambler, 2024). These programs have helped transition CBP to a more supportive and motivating workplace. According to Gambler (2024), such programs not only recognize individual performance but also create a broader culture of appreciation and accountability, which, in turn, contributes to overall improvements in morale and job satisfaction across CBP. These efforts are part of a larger strategy to promote a more positive organizational environment, fostering greater employee loyalty and engagement.

Chapter 3: Methodology

When trying to determine and generalize the opinions of a large group of individuals, in this case instructors at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center, the survey instrument has long been a practical social science tool. I originally used a survey instrument in 2016 to compile information from instructors on pay rate changes at that time. By reusing the 2016 survey format, I can establish a macro-level comparison of GPSTC instructors' beliefs to help assess whether pay changes have influenced their attitudes and opinions on GPSTC recruitment and retention efforts. There are specific advantages and disadvantages in the use of surveys for research into complex social theories, like the effect of pay increases on recruitment and retention. One advantage of surveys is their use when a researcher wants to measure typically unobservable data, like that of instructor's attitudes and beliefs. Secondly, surveys are quicker and cheaper to publicize through platforms like SurveyMonkey, Microsoft Forms and Google Forms (Zimba & Gasparyan, 2023). These instruments allow for collection of data in normally unobservable areas and in this case allow for a comparison between surveys over two different collection periods. A common disadvantage of survey instruments includes non-response bias. Non-response bias can occur when individuals do not complete the survey instrument or generally do not respond to the survey at all. SurveyMonkey, the platform used in both survey instruments conducted in this research, recommends making surveys short so that individuals are not fatigued by the number of questions (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). This may reduce non-response bias in survey instruments.

In this research project, I am looking directly at whether instructors believe pay increases improved morale, improved retention and thereby improved competitiveness in the job market. These two hypotheses are looking at the beliefs of the surveyed instructors. This research project uses a quantitative, non-experimental research design using survey data collected in 2016 and 2025 from staff instructors at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center. Survey research was selected to collect the thoughts of instructional staff and the impact that pay raises had on their opinions of recruitment and retention within the agency. The surveys targeted full-time staff instructors holding the positions of Public Safety Trainer 3 and Public Safety Trainer Supervisor during each respective year. In 2016, the survey was distributed to 52 instructors, while the 2025 survey was distributed to 77 instructors. In both years, participants received an email explaining the purpose of the study. In addition, participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous and no personally identifiable information would be collected. The email included a hyperlink to the survey which required respondents to respond to all questions before submission.

Participants were given a defined eight-day window to complete the 2016 survey and a defined six-day window to complete the 2025 survey. Reminders were sent out halfway to the deadline and then again, the morning of the deadline in both instances. For the 2016 survey, 35 out of 52 instructors completed the survey, resulting in a 67.31% participation rate. In the 2025 survey, 35 out of 77 instructors responded, yielding a 45.45% participation rate. The increased pool of potential participants in the 2025 survey is attributed to the addition of new Basic Training instructional staff at GPSTC during the beginning of Fiscal Year 2025. These new instructors were included

in the survey distribution. The marked decrease in the response rate from 67.31% to 45.45% is likely a result of two key methodological factors including:

1. **Reduced Response Window:** The 2025 survey was distributed with a response window two days shorter than the 2016 survey, which may have reduced the opportunity for instructors to complete the instrument.
2. **New Staff Inclusion and Comfort Level:** The recently hired instructional staff may have been hesitant to participate due to the minimal amount of time employed. It could be a lack of sufficient time-in-service that contributed to a potential discomfort in forming or submitting a definitive response regarding GPSTC operations or culture.

This lower response rate in 2025 introduces a potential for non-response bias in the data. Specifically, the views of longer tenured or more engaged instructors may be overrepresented, while the perspectives of newer staff or those with less time to dedicate to the survey are underrepresented. To further investigate this potential bias and gain a richer understanding of the instructional staff's perspectives, a qualitative follow-up study involving in-depth interviews with instructional staff is recommended for future research.

Both the 2016 and the 2025 surveys included a total of eight questions. Five of the questions gathered demographic information, including age, race/ethnicity, education, years employed at GPSTC, and gender. The other three questions utilized a five-point Likert scale to rate the opinions of the respondents related to the two hypotheses of the research. The two hypotheses were stated in the survey with five possible choices from the Likert scale in order from strongest response to weakest

response as follows: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Using summative scaling, a mean score was established for each hypothesis with all undecided responses removed from the calculation. Mean scores exceeding 2.50 were accepted as agreeable to the applicable hypothesis.

The potential for future evaluation exists that would include an in-depth follow-up interview with selected participants from the 2025 survey. The interviews would need to be unstructured, which would allow participants to discuss the survey questions and share their thoughts on morale, retention, and recruitment at GPSTC. Since the 2025 survey had 35 respondents, an email would need to go out to those 35 instructors asking for volunteers to participate in the interview. The interviews would enable the researcher to add depth, context to the responses and a better understanding of the participants' responses to the 2025 survey questions.

Limitations:

A potential limitation of this study is the presence of self-selection bias, as participation in the survey was voluntary. It is possible that the respondents who chose to complete the survey may differ in attitudes or experiences from those who chose not to respond which can skew results and bias estimates. This may limit the generalizability of the findings to the entire population of Public Safety Trainer 3 and Public Safety Trainer Supervisor instructors at GPSTC, particularly for the 2025 data set, which had a lower response rate. In addition to potential self-selection bias, survey fatigue may have influenced participant responses. Although the survey was relatively

short, the requirement that respondents answer all questions may have led some instructors to rush responses or not fully engage with each question. This could be particularly relevant for instructors experiencing work-related stress or time constraints. The impact of survey fatigue may affect the accuracy and reliability of responses since the questions were opinion seeking questions and may be the result of the lower response rate.

Definitions:

- ***Public Safety Trainer 3:*** A position that serves as an instructor for public safety training in either basic, advanced or specialized topics. Individuals in this role typically have at least five (5) years of work experience in public safety as either a firefighter, law enforcement officer or communications officer, depending on the position.
- ***Public Safety Trainer Supervisor:*** A position that consists of highly responsible administrative duties in carrying out the entire training program within their assigned section. Individuals in this role typically have at least six (6) years of work experience in public safety as either a firefighter, law enforcement officer or communications officer, depending on the position, as well as supervisory or lead trainer experience.

Variables:

The following variables were used:

- ***Dependent Variable:*** The dependent variables are the Public Safety Trainer 3 and Public Safety Trainer Supervisor views on Governor directed pay increases

occurring in the periods of 2015-2016 and 2024-2025 for public safety employees.

- **Independent Variables:** The independent variables are pay increases provided during the periods of 2015-2016 and 2024-2025 for public safety employees.
- **Control Variable:** The control variable is the employee demographic limiting the survey to only Public Safety Trainer 3 and Public Safety Trainer Supervisor positions that were employed with the Georgia Public Safety Training Center at any point between July 1, 2016, and June 30, 2023.

Hypotheses:

There are two hypotheses for this study:

- **Hypothesis 1: Pay Increase Improved Morale**
 - If Public Safety pay increases are implemented (in 2015-2016 and 2024-2025), then employee morale will improve.
- **Hypothesis 2: Pay Increase Improved Retention**
 - If Public Safety pay increases are implemented (in 2015-2016 and 2024-2025), then GPSTC's ability to retain quality instructors will improve.

Data Collection:

The data collected for this survey consists of:

- Post-survey of attitudes on the effects of the 2015-2016 base salary changes for GPSTC instructional staff:
 - This section will focus on the feedback collected from instructional staff about their perceptions and experiences regarding the 2015-2016 GPSTC Base Salary changes. By analyzing the responses,

the aim is to understand the perceived effects on morale and retention, and ultimately the perception of GPSTC's competitiveness due to the changes.

- Post-Survey of attitudes on the effects of the 2015-2016 and 2024-2025 focused public safety pay increases:
 - This section will focus on feedback about the public safety salary increases in 2015-2016 and 2024-2025. These pay increases were targeted at improving compensation for state public safety employees, and the survey will explore whether these adjustments had a notable impact on the instructional staff's morale and retention, and ultimately the perception of GPSTC's competitiveness due to the changes.
- Future work will consist of in-depth follow-up interviews with selected participants from the 2025 survey.
 - The interviews would need to be voluntary and unstructured, allowing participants to discuss the survey questions and share their thoughts on morale, retention, and recruitment at GPSTC. Since the 2025 survey had 35 respondents, an email would need to go out to those 35 instructors asking for volunteers to participate in the interview.
 - Conducting the interviews would allow the researcher to do more than just provide a chart with survey results. The interviews would

allow the participants to articulate their feelings on the topics in their own words, allowing a more authentic level of data.

- Interviews may also reveal additional ideas that were not part of the original survey instrument allowing for additional research topics.
- Interviews would also assist with interpretation of the data collected to ensure that the participants' point of view is correctly obtained, and researcher bias is reduced.

Statistical Methods:

The statistical methodology for this study includes the following:

- Quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics to measure respondents' attitudes, opinions and perceptions regarding the effects of pay increases on morale and retention, and ultimately the perception of GPSTC's competitiveness during both the 2016 and the 2025 survey periods. Descriptive statistics were chosen to take the collected data sets and provide a simple, yet straightforward summary of what the data looks like (Bhattacharjee, 2012). To ensure a precise measurement of instructor opinion, neutral or undecided responses were excluded from all mean calculations. This methodological choice was employed to achieve a more accurate measure of the central tendency of the expressed opinion and to enhance the discriminating power of the resulting descriptive statistics. The exclusion of the non-directional responses allows the analysis to focus exclusively on those instructors that demonstrated a definitive stance, thus providing a clearer understanding of the average level of agreement or satisfaction among the surveyed staff.

- Paired sample t-tests will be used to compare employee morale after the 2015-2016 salary increases to the morale after the 2024-2025 salary increases. This research design is specifically designed to measure information from the same group of individuals at two different time points, in this case, after two different periods of salary increases to determine the effects on morale and retention (Wadhwa & Marappa-Ganeshan, 2023).
- One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used to compare the attitudes of the 2025 survey across employees with different tenures. ANOVA was chosen to determine if there are any statistically significant differences in opinion about morale and retention based on an employee's tenure (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Kent State University, 2024).

Ethical Considerations:

Both surveys conducted (2016 and 2025), were guided by ethical principles established by Columbus State University and Middle Georgia State University, respectively. As the surveys were completed utilizing resources available at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center, the Director of the agency provided a letter of approval for the use of the survey results.

Chapter 4: Results and Findings

The principal survey results do not support a simple correlation between pay increases and sustained employee satisfaction. The findings strongly align with the principles of Jones' theory. While the pay increases initially satisfied the lower-order needs of physiological and safety, articulated in Maslow's hierarchy (1943), the short-lived nature of this motivation confirms the theory's assertion that monetary rewards alone cannot sustain long-term engagement. The structural contingency model posits that for motivational effects to persist; the organization must adapt its structure to align with the environment and strategy. The persistent cycle of competitive pay escalation indicates that GPSTC and the declining results indicate that GPSTC has not implemented structural adjustments necessary to complement the financial changes. Consequently, the initial boost to morale and retention perception as shown in the results demonstrate that morale and retention perception quickly dissipated, highlighting the need for structural intervention to solidify gains in compensation changes.

The results based on the hypotheses and literature review include:

Hypothesis 1: Pay increase improved morale.

Since the 2024-2025 pay increases were built on top of the 2015-2016 base pay changes, for hypothesis 1, the results of the 2025 survey are expected to show an increase in morale. After the 2015-2016 pay rate changes, the initial survey revealed that 74.29% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that morale increased. Based on these results, with a base pay adjustment in 2015, a 20% increase in 2016 and a \$2,000 pay raise in 2024, it is expected that the survey would demonstrate that morale

has increased, therefore acknowledging that the State of Georgia has worked hard over a 10-year period to raise the pay:

- Public Safety Trainer 3 from a base pay of \$44,544 to a new base pay of \$62,452.80, reflecting an increase of \$17,908.80 or 28.68%.
- Public Safety Trainer Supervisor from a base pay of \$48,564 to a new base pay of \$67,276.80, reflecting an increase of \$18,712.80 or 27.81%.

Hypothesis 2: Pay increase improved retention.

For hypothesis 2, the survey is expected to demonstrate a relationship between the pay increases and a decrease in turnover rates for GPSTC. Specifically, it is anticipated that the pay increases will have a positive impact on retention, reducing turnover and improving GPSTC's ability to retain its instructional staff.

- The turnover rate prior to the 2015-2016 base pay increases was 27.8%.
- The turnover rate after the 2015-2016 base pay increases is expected to have decreased.

Analysis of Results:

Given that Public Safety Trainer 3 and Public Safety Trainer Supervisor positions were provided with significant pay increases, 28.68% and 27.81% respectively, the data was expected to demonstrate a clear correlation between increased compensation and higher morale.

Table 1

Table 1: Summative Scaling of Hypotheses questions by all respondents to the 2025 survey.						
<i>The 2015-2016 & 2024-2025 focused Public Safety pay increases improved morale.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	0	8	7	17	3	28
Likert Value	0	16	0	68	15	99
99/28=						
MEAN 3.54						
<i>The 2015-2016 & 2024-2025 focused Public Safety pay increases improved GPSTC's ability to retain quality instructors.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	2	14	8	9	2	27
Likert Value	2	28	0	36	10	76
76/27=						
MEAN 2.82						
<i>The 2015-2016 & 2024-2025 focused Public Safety pay increases made GPSTC more competitive in the job market.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	8	11	7	8	1	28
Likert Value	8	22	0	32	5	67
67/28=						
MEAN 2.39						

Table 2

Table 2: Summative Scaling of Hypotheses questions by all respondents to the 2016 survey.						
<i>The 2015 Instructor base pay increase improved morale.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	0	1	8	11	15	27
Likert Value	0	2	0	44	75	121
$121/27=$						
MEAN 4.48						
<i>The 2015 Instructor base pay increase improved GPSTC's ability to retain quality instructors.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	0	4	8	13	10	27
Likert Value	0	8	0	52	50	110
$110/27=$						
MEAN 4.07						
<i>The 2015 Instructor base pay increase made GPSTC more competitive in the job market.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	0	5	4	18	8	31
Likert Value	0	10	0	72	40	122
$122/31=$						
MEAN 3.92						

It was anticipated that the survey results would show a noticeable improvement in instructor satisfaction, suggesting that financial recognition has positively influenced morale among staff instructors. This trend would support the hypothesis that higher pay can act as a motivational factor, contributing to a more engaged and satisfied workforce among the instructors. The 2016 survey, shown in Table 2 above, revealed that 77.14%

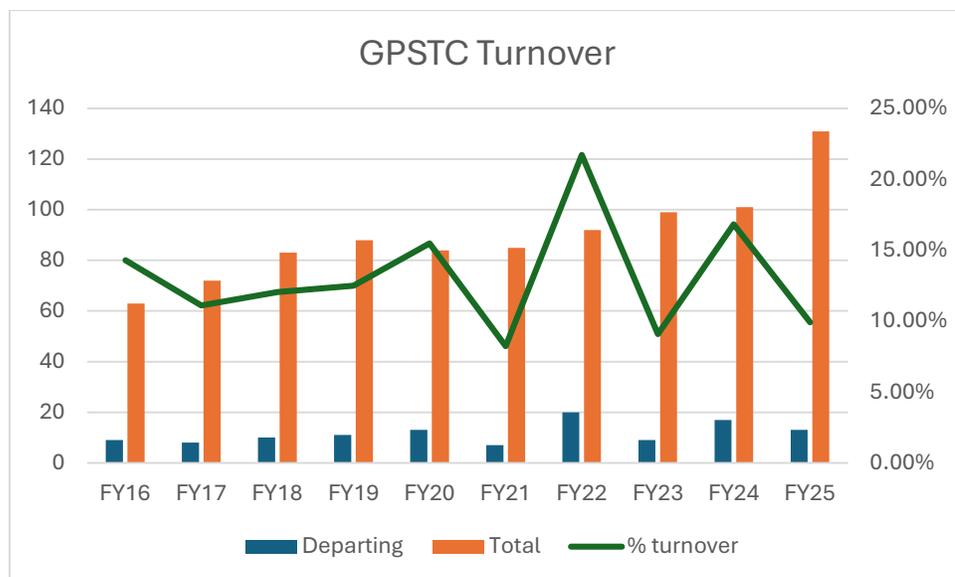
of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that morale increased because of the base pay increase. The survey for hypothesis 1 in 2016 resulted in a mean of 4.48 on the five-point Likert scale indicating that respondents agreed with the statement. The 2025 survey, shown in Table 1 above, disclosed that 57.14% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the 2015-2016 and 2024-2025 pay increases increased morale. The survey for hypothesis 1 in 2025 resulted in a mean of 3.54 on the five-point Likert scale with respondents agreeing to the statement. Between the two surveys, the unexpected decline in the number of respondents who felt that morale increased was a surprising result, especially considering the 2016 pay increases resulted in a 20% increase.

In addition to morale improvements, it was expected that turnover rates would show a downward trend after each of the pay increases. With the 27.8% turnover rate prior to 2015 serving as a baseline, the pattern should be an inverse relationship between pay increases and turnover. If the turnover rate decreased after each pay increase, this would provide evidence that higher compensation has a direct and positive effect on employee retention. As a result, the pay increases would then appear to have enhanced GPSTC's ability to retain skilled instructors and made it more attractive for instructors employed with GPSTC.

Additional survey questions from the 2016 survey revealed that 65.71% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the base pay increase helped GPSTC retain quality instructors with a mean score of 4.07 on the five-point Likert scale, indicating an acceptance of the statement by respondents. The 2025 survey revealed that only 31.42% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the 2015-2016 and

2024-2025 pay increases helped GPSTC with retention. The results of this response were a mean score of 2.82 on the five-point Likert scale meaning the respondents generally agreed with the statement. However, the substantial drop in respondents agreeing that retention was improved was alarming and resulted in the need to further investigate by looking at the changes in turnover rates for GPSTC (Chart 1 below).

Chart 1

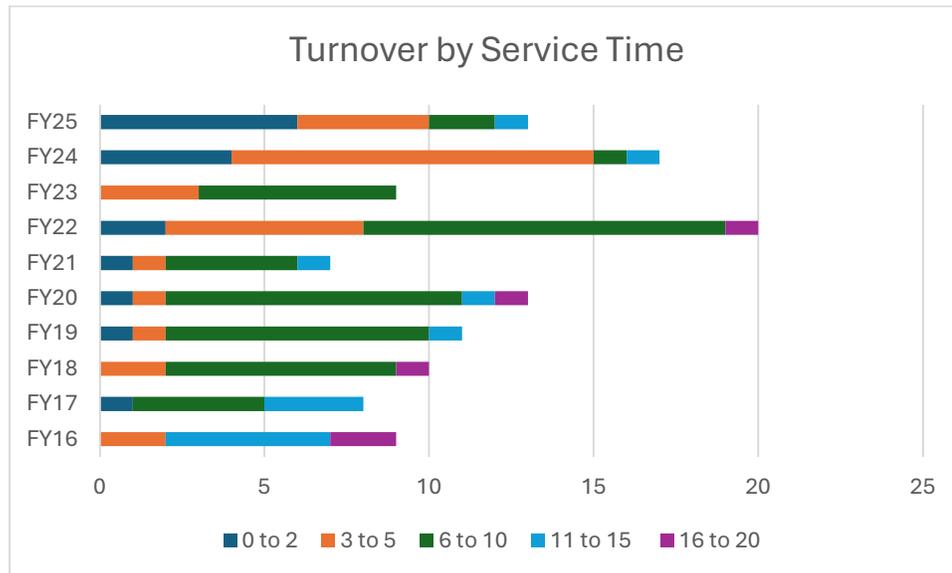


Further investigation revealed that following the 2015-2016 increases, the turnover rate dropped considerably from 27.8% in Fiscal Year 2015 to a low of 11.11% in Fiscal Year 2017. After a period of economic changes in 2018, the State of Georgia did not issue any pay increases, which led to an increase in the turnover rate. During this time, the nation was faced with tariff anxiety, rising interest rates, and uncertainty about the economy (Frazee, 2018). At the end of Fiscal Year 2020, the rate reached 15.48% leading to the Covid-19 pandemic, followed by a new low of 8.24% for GPSTC.

This is attributed to employees seeking job security based on the economic and health threats from the virus. Following large turnover across the workforce for state employment, the Governor and Legislature initiated several one-time bonuses to quell the departure of state employees which brought GPSTC's turnover rate down in Fiscal Year 2023. In fiscal year 2024, the state focused on state law enforcement turnover and initiated a pay increase for July 1, 2023. Prior to the increase, the turnover rate was 9.09%, but the year of the pay increase, the turnover rate increased to 16.83%, demonstrating that the additional \$2,000 provided was not enough to keep public safety employees from leaving employment.

Of concern while reviewing the GPSTC turnover rates, is the rising trend of employees with 5 years or less service leaving (Chart 2 below). In Fiscal Year 2024, 88.24% of departures had 5 or less years of service, and in Fiscal Year 2025, 76.9% of the departures came from the same group. Particularly, when reviewing the data, the rate of employees with 3 to 5 years of service leaving GPSTC employment has been steadily increasing.

Chart 2



The subject of turnover and how to combat the exodus of newer employees is a topic for future continued research with planned in-depth interviews of employees who responded to the 2025 survey, allowing participants to discuss their reasoning behind the responses they provided.

Lastly, although not a hypothesis, the survey results were expected to indicate that instructors feel the pay adjustments have successfully leveled the playing field in terms of marketability. This means that GPSTC instructors believe the agency is more competitive in the public safety job market due to the salary increases and are less inclined to leave for other opportunities. This would reinforce the idea that financial incentives make GPSTC an attractive and competitive employer within the State of Georgia. The 2016 survey revealed that 74.29% of respondents agreed or strongly agree that GPSTC became more competitive after the base pay increase. The results of the 2016 survey were a 3.94 mean score on the 5-point Likert scale and was accepted

that respondents agreed with the statement. However, the 2025 survey revealed that only 25.72% of respondents now agree or strongly agree that GPSTC is competitive after the 2016 and 2024 pay increases. This newest survey resulted in only a 2.39 mean score on the 5-point Likert scale and as a result, respondents did not agree with this statement. This demonstrates that GPSTC may experience a difficult time retaining or attracting individuals to work for the agency.

Overall, the findings were expected to support the hypothesis that higher pay improves morale and reduces turnover, creating a stable and satisfied workforce at GPSTC. Both hypotheses were accepted from the 2016 survey and the 2025 survey. When viewing the results by tenure for the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), employees in the 0-2 and 3-5 tenures responded more positively to the two hypotheses questions, as well as the general question, than did those with 6-10, or 11-15 tenures.

Table 3

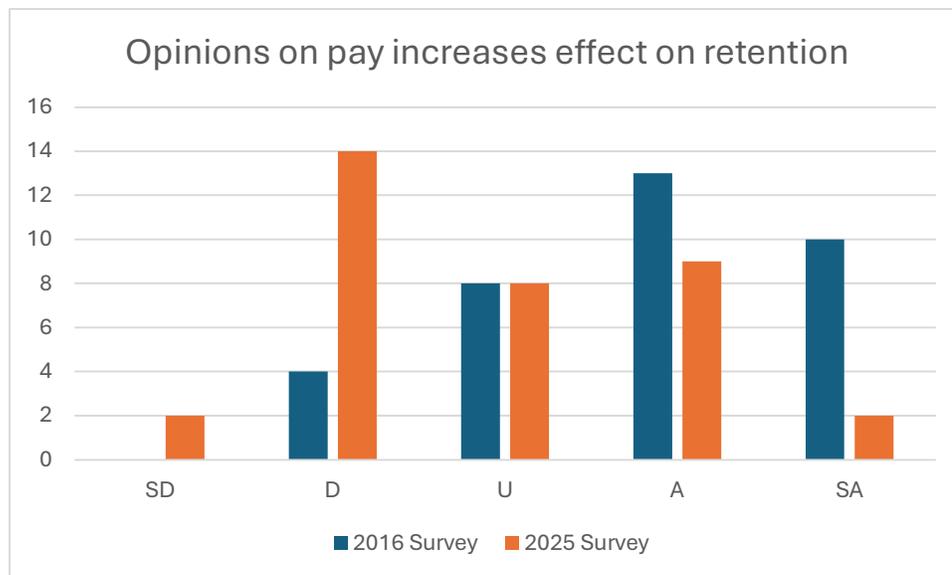
Table 3: Results by Tenure						
<i>Hypothesis question 1: Results by Tenure</i>						
Tenure	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
0-2	0	4	2	7	1	14
3-5	0	1	1	5	1	8
6-10	0	2	4	4	1	11
11-15	0	1	0	0	0	1
16-20	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	0	8	7	17	3	35
<i>Hypothesis question 2: Results by Tenure</i>						
Tenure	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
0-2	2	3	3	5	1	14
3-5	0	2	2	3	1	8
6-10	0	8	3	0	0	11
11-15	0	1	0	0	0	1
16-20	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	2	14	8	9	2	35
<i>General Question 3: Results by Tenure</i>						
Tenure	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
0-2	3	3	5	3	0	14
3-5	1	3	1	2	1	8
6-10	4	4	1	2	0	11
11-15	0	1	0	0	0	1
16-20	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	8	11	7	8	1	35

Future research potential that delves deeper into the opinions of the instructors that responded to the 2025 survey may assist the researcher with understanding the factors related to job satisfaction and why the participants responded to the survey questions as they did. These opinions can then be used to assess how pay satisfaction affects employee morale and enables retention of valued staff.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

The research findings indicate that while Georgia made strides in addressing turnover and improving morale and job satisfaction among state public safety personnel, the results of the survey of GPSTC staff instructors are mixed. Specifically, 57.14% of respondents strongly agree or agree that morale has improved due to the pay increases. However, the survey results demonstrated declining responses regarding the effectiveness of the pay increases in turnover.

Chart 3



When comparing the 2016 survey to the 2025 survey, participants in the older survey were more inclined to report a positive opinion on pay increase effects of retention. As discussed previously, this may be attributed to the fact that the 2015 pay increases were the first substantial pay raises ever experienced by GPSTC. However, for 2025, 59.26% of respondents reported not believing the pay increases helped with

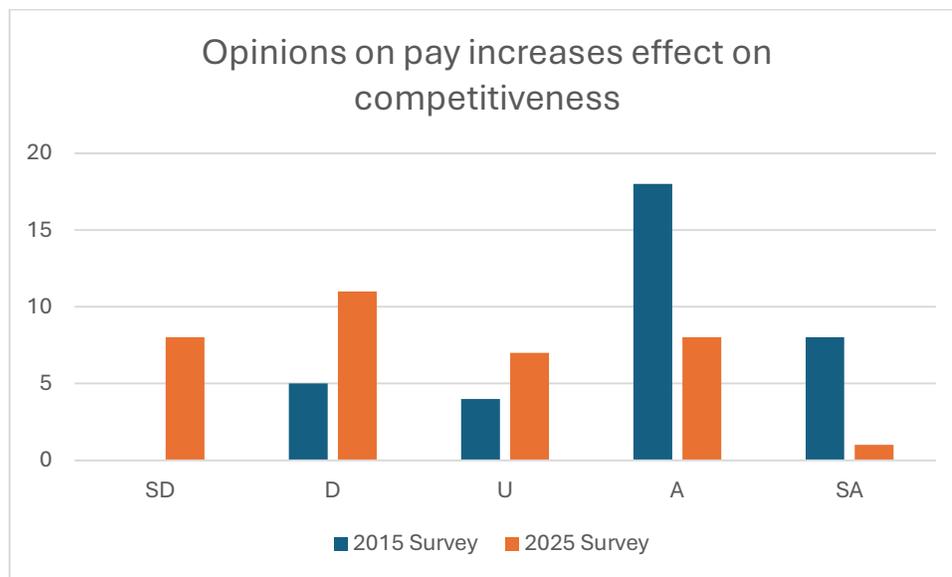
retention, compared to 14.81% reporting the same opinion nine years prior (chart 3 above). This outcome can be theoretically attributed to the initial satisfaction derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), as referenced within Jones' theory. While increases in compensation address physiological and safety needs, the initial, short-term improvement in job satisfaction and potentially retention is not sustained.

Sustaining these positive organizational outcomes requires a shift to the structural contingency portion of Jones' theory. Specifically, the long-term impact of compensation increases cannot be maintained by salary alone. Instead, prolonged improvements necessitate changes in structural factors such as career development and work-life balances.

Additionally, while not a hypothesis, the opinion on GPSTC's competitiveness was similar. In the previous survey, only 16.12% of respondents believed the pay increases did not affect agency competitiveness. That number deteriorated to a whopping 67.86% in 2025 (chart 4 below)! Salary increases authorized by Georgia's government has inadvertently exacerbated perceived compensation inequity among various public safety agencies. This action has intensified the phenomenon of comparative salary analysis among employees, who now regularly benchmark their compensation not only against other state agencies, but also against municipal and county public safety entities. These local agencies, aiming to maintain a competitive labor pool, respond to state pay increases, with their own commensurate pay increases, creating a persistent cyclical effect of competitive escalation that perpetually challenges pay equity.

This environment has created an unfavorable impact on the instructional staff's perception of job-market competitiveness at GPSTC. The sustained cycle of competitive responses effectively nullifies the motivational impact of pay increases. Future in-depth interviews with surveyed instructors are recommended to gather additional information on the opinions on the factors influencing their perception of market competitiveness and gathering input on potential actionable strategies for improvement beyond compensation changes.

Chart 4



Also of note, the lower response rate in 2025 raises the possibility of nonresponse bias. Those who participated may have held stronger opinions related to the hypotheses, potentially influencing the overall results. Another limitation of this study is the potential impact of survey fatigue on instructor responses. Although the instrument only included eight questions, the requirement to respond to each item

before submission may have contributed to participant fatigue or disengagement, particularly towards the end of the survey. The effect may be more pronounced in the 2025 survey where the response rate was lower. Survey fatigue can lead respondents to answer less thoughtfully, rely on neutral options, or rush through the survey, all of which may affect the validity of the data, especially responses to Likert-scale items used to evaluate the research hypotheses.

The survey results show that while pay increases have had a positive impact on morale, the limited effect from the perspective of responding instructors is that retention and competitiveness is still lacking. To further investigate whether these perceptions were accurate, a review of turnover statistics for GPSTC provides some insight into the impact of the pay increases. Between July 1, 2015, and June 30, 2016, the year of the 2016 pay increase, the turnover rate was almost cut in half from 27.8% to 14.29% for staff instructors demonstrating that the 20% pay increase had at least a temporary effect on turnover. The turnover rate in Table 4 demonstrates that the rate continued to fall the following year to 11.11%, but after a few years with no pay increases, turnover began to increase again, signifying that effects from the large pay increases of 2015 and 2016 were not sustained. The rise in turnover is likely attributed to other agencies raising their pay rates in response to the state's increase, furthering the competition.

Table 4

Table 4: Turnover			
	Departing	Total	% turnover
FY16	9	63	14.29%
FY17	8	72	11.11%
FY18	10	83	12.05%
FY19	11	88	12.50%
FY20	13	84	15.48%
FY21	7	85	8.24%
FY22	20	92	21.74%
FY23	9	99	9.09%
FY24	17	101	16.83%
FY25	13	131	9.92%

*Excludes Dismissals and Retirements

In fiscal year 2021, a statewide cost of living adjustment (COLA) was provided to all staff resulting in a reduction in turnover from 15.48% to 8.24%. However, again, the relief proved to be short-lived. In the year following the COLA, the turnover rate surged to a high of 21.74%. This suggests that while COLA provides relief, that relief is temporary and does not provide sustained long-term retention. Just the opposite effect recently occurred when just prior to the focused pay increase provided July 1, 2023, a rate of 9.09% preceded the increase and rose to 16.83% during the year of the increase. This data all highlights the challenges that GPSTC continues to face in combating staff attrition despite the efforts by the Governor and Legislature to increase the pay.

The findings point to a key issue, as the state increases pay to improve retention and competitiveness, other public safety agencies may follow suit, making it difficult for

GPSTC and other state public safety agencies to stay ahead in the market for qualified instructors. The continued pay escalation cycle could result in continuous movement of talent across various state and local agencies, without resolving the retention issues.

Future research should consider broadening the scope by including comparative analyses with public safety training agencies in other states. Such cross-jurisdictional studies could uncover broader trends in instructor perceptions and organizational culture, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, incorporating market rate comparisons across states would also provide valuable insights into how compensation, benefits, and resource allocation influence instructor retention, satisfaction, and performance. Over time, these studies could form the basis for longitudinal research that tracks policy effectiveness and workforce development across public safety training environments.

Implications for Public Safety:

The implications of poor morale and low retention are significant for public safety policies and practices with consequences that could impact how public safety agencies approach employee retention, recruitment, and morale and compensation structures moving forward. The first key implication includes an enhanced focus on competitive compensation, including policy adjustments for compensation and the need to regularly review and increase pay in line with inflation, industry standards and employee expectations. This is especially significant in public safety fields that are experiencing high turnover and have critical needs to retain specialized and skilled personnel like instructors. If agencies are experiencing high turnover and cannot retain specialized

personnel, the downstream effects are significant, as public safety personnel across the state may be unable to obtain proper training due to limitations in training staff.

The second key implication includes the need for implementation of more strategic retention policies that focus on career development programs, mentorship opportunities, and performance-based pay increases. These should also be supported by a competitive pay structure and supplements for specialty certifications necessary to teach high-risk topics. This would help agencies such as GPSTC, not only keep employees satisfied with pay but also create long-term career paths within their agency.

Finally, agencies should prioritize the implementation of work-life balance programs to enhance agency flexibility. For agencies such as GPSTC that require annual course refresh activities, it is incumbent upon managers and supervisors to ensure these activities are conducted in an environment conducive to focused concentration, with minimized interruptions and necessary support. Additionally, if a task is demonstrably more suitable for a telework arrangement, employees should be supported in completing the review within that environment.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

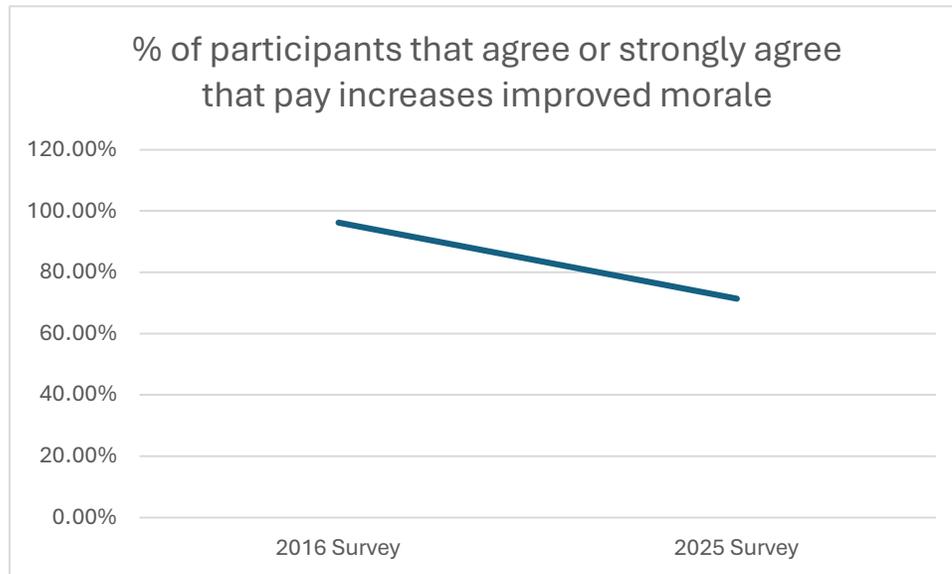
This program evaluation examined the impact of pay increases on morale, retention, and recruitment specifically at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC). The findings of this research offer valuable insight into the perspectives of instructional staff at GPSTC, documented through two surveys administered nine years apart. The longitudinal data reveal a complex picture of the impact of pay increases on this specific population of public safety employees. The findings provided a nuanced answer to Hypothesis 1, which posited a positive correlation between pay increases and instructor morale. While the historic compensation adjustments from 2014-2015 did yield an overwhelmingly positive response, with 96.30% of instructors in 2016 agreeing that morale had improved, the rate of agreement was not sustained over time.

The first significant increase in GPSTC's history, which established new base pay amounts, proved highly effective at resetting positive instructor perceptions. However, the period leading up to the 2025 survey, characterized by smaller and frequently inconsistent increases, revealed a decline in opinions. The rate of agreement that morale had improved dropped to 71.43%, representing an almost 25% decrease (Chart 5 below). This outcome decisively demonstrates that although the initial pay changes successfully spurred morale, GPSTC was unable to sustain this motivational momentum. The data suggests that for compensation to act as a consistent positive driver, the increases must be perceived as continuous and significant, not sporadic.

This conclusion is further contextualized by the absence of a public safety pay increase for GPSTC in Fiscal Year 2026, while other state public safety agencies received specific increases provided to address high turnover rates. This disparity

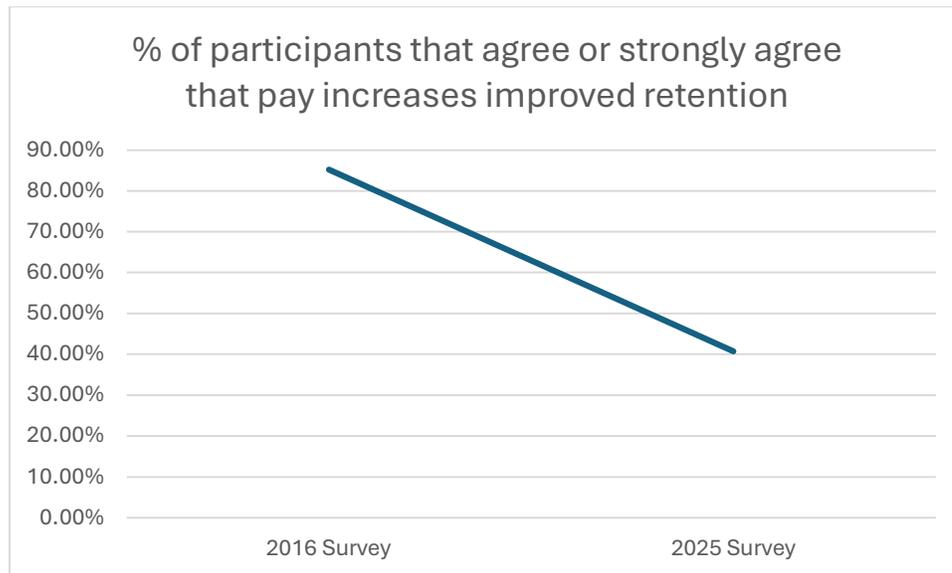
creates a crucial point of focus for subsequent research. Future in-depth, qualitative interviews are warranted to explore the specific impact of pay raises on instructor morale.

Chart 5



The results pertaining to Hypothesis 2 illustrate a critical challenge in leveraging compensation for long-term retention. While the initial pay increases were strongly perceived as helping GPSTC retain quality instructors in the 2016 survey (with 85.19% agreement), this positive sentiment was not sustained. By the 2025 survey, the agreement rate had declined substantially to only 40.74% (Chart 6 below).

Chart 6



This quantitative shift corresponds with the observed turnover rates. The data shows that the initial pay adjustments temporarily halved the turnover rate; however, subsequent pay increases failed to maintain this reduction in turnover. When analyzing data from Fiscal Years 2016 through 2025, the initial reduction in turnover for each pay increase is short-lived. This suggests a pattern where the positive impact of compensation on retention quickly diminishes when not followed by continuous, significant pay increases. This erosion of positive sentiment indicates that a baseline expectation for continuous compensation increases may have been established among instructors, making salary increases insufficient as a sole long-term strategy for retention of staff making it difficult to compete with other public safety agencies. This conclusion is evident in both the survey responses and the un-sustained reduction in GPSTC's turnover rate.

Given that compensation is a factor largely outside of GPSTC's direct control, GPSTC must pursue alternative strategies for maximizing retention. While GPSTC successfully enjoyed a reduced turnover rate following the 2014-2015 changes and short-term gains from later adjustments, achieving long-term retention requires recognizing the full potential of non-monetary incentives. Specifically, the GPSTC executive team should prioritize investments in career development opportunities for valued instructors, acknowledging that professional growth can be a powerful retention tool. This can include working with the Governor's Office and Legislature to continue the development of a formal career mapping plan outlining specific training, certifications, and experience. The initial work on this mapping was completed with new job codes set up to allow for more instructor growth at GPSTC. Additional work is needed to secure funding to allow for step increases while instructors progress from Public Safety Trainer 3 to the newly created Public Safety Trainer 4 position, as well as the new steps for Manager level positions.

Furthermore, since GPSTC executive team cannot independently adjust compensation or benefit packages, they must continue to engage key external stakeholders. Ongoing efforts to provide tours and informational sessions to the Governor's Office, Legislators and other public safety partners, are critical to demonstrate the vital component GPSTC provides to the state's public safety infrastructure. Knowledge of this work can help provide awareness and demonstrate the need for competitive compensation. To support these advocacy efforts, further research should expand the salary comparison between GPSTC and similar public safety training facilities across the nation. Providing this comprehensive data could significantly

enhance the awareness of the Governor and Legislature regarding the necessary compensation required to maintain competitiveness in the current market.

In conclusion, while pay increases can improve morale, they do not fully address the broader challenges of retaining qualified instructors or remaining competitive with other state or local public safety agencies. The findings point to a need for a multifaceted approach to retention, including the need for state assistance with more competitive compensation, but also to foster a more attractive and supportive work environment. If GPSTC continues to face escalating turnover, the agency will need to develop additional strategies that include furthering career development through training and professional development, creating opportunities for employees to build camaraderie between divisions through group activities or retreats to enhance work relationships, and encouraging employee feedback to increase employee satisfaction with their work.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Survey of Opinions Regarding the State of Georgia’s 2015-2016 and 2024-2025 focused pay increase impacts on morale and retention.

Your name is not required for this survey. Please complete the request for demographic information for tracking purposes by selecting the appropriate response.

1. Age: 21-30 _____ 31-40 _____ 41-50 _____ 51-60 _____ 60+ _____
2. Race/Ethnicity: White _____ Black _____ Hispanic _____ Other _____ Prefer not to answer _____
3. Education: High School/GED _____ Associate Degree _____ Bachelor Degree _____ Master Degree _____ Doctorate _____
4. Years in Employed with GPSTC: 0-2 _____ 3-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21-25 _____ 26-30 _____ 30+ _____
5. Gender: Female _____ Male _____

Please select the response to the following statements that most closely reflects your opinion in the individual subject area.

1. The 2015-2016 and 2024-2025 Focused Public Safety base pay increases improved morale.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

2. The 2015-2016 and 2024-2025 Focused Public safety base pay increases improved Georgia Public Safety Training Center's ability to retain quality instructors.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

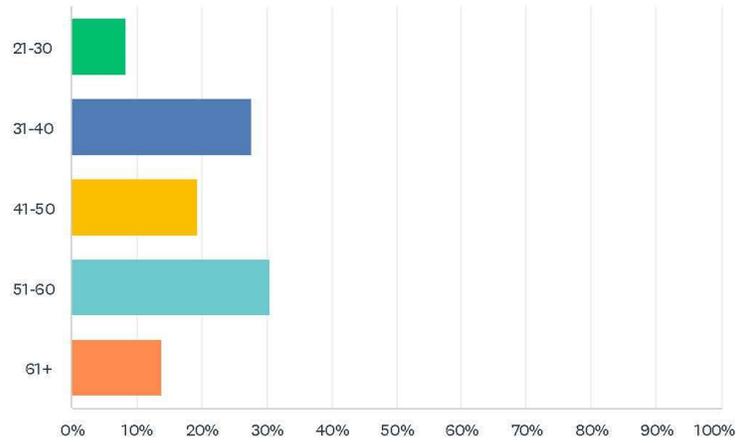
3. The 2015-2016 and 2024-2025 Focused Public Safety base pay increases made Georgia Public Safety Training Center more competitive in the job market.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

Untitled

Q1 AGE:

Answered: 36 Skipped: 0

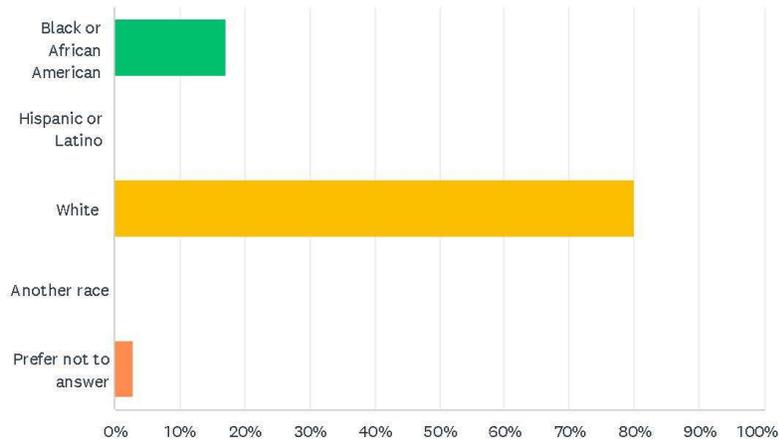


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
21-30	8.33%	3
31-40	27.78%	10
41-50	19.44%	7
51-60	30.56%	11
61+	13.89%	5
Total Respondents: 36		

Untitled

Q2 Race/Ethnicity

Answered: 35 Skipped: 1

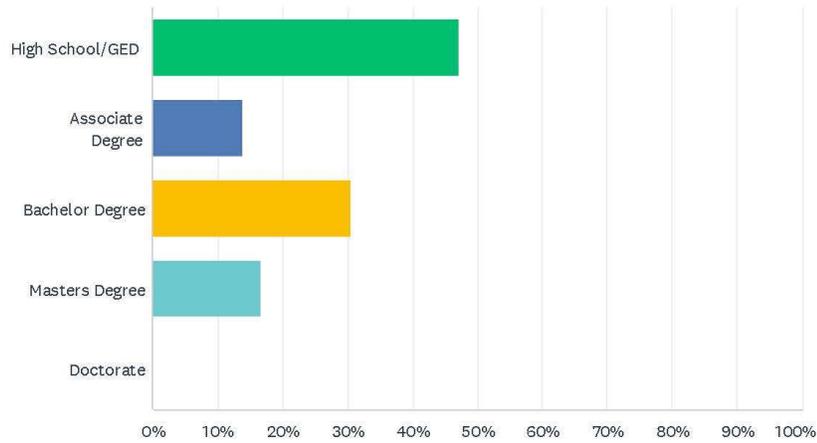


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Black or African American	17.14%	6
Hispanic or Latino	0.00%	0
White	80.00%	28
Another race	0.00%	0
Prefer not to answer	2.86%	1
Total Respondents: 35		

Untitled

Q3 Education

Answered: 36 Skipped: 0

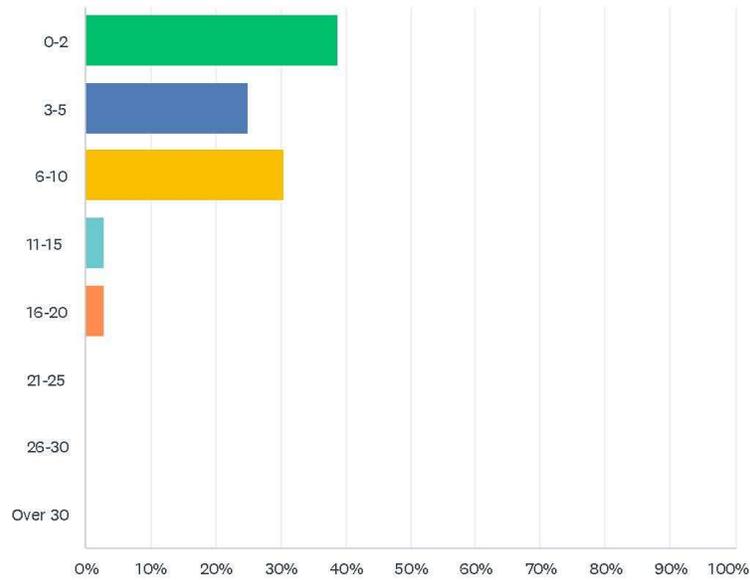


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
High School/GED	47.22% 17
Associate Degree	13.89% 5
Bachelor Degree	30.56% 11
Masters Degree	16.67% 6
Doctorate	0.00% 0
Total Respondents: 36	

Untitled

Q4 Years Employed with GPSTC

Answered: 36 Skipped: 0

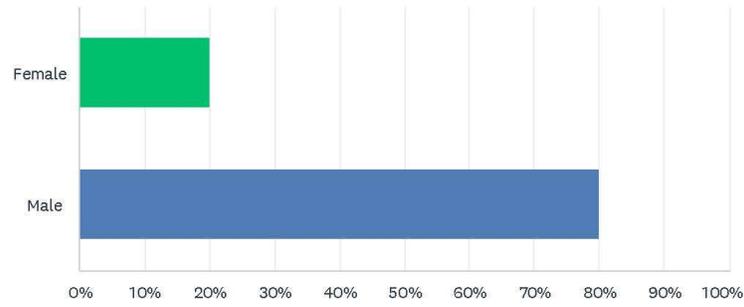


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-2	38.89%	14
3-5	25.00%	9
6-10	30.56%	11
11-15	2.78%	1
16-20	2.78%	1
21-25	0.00%	0
26-30	0.00%	0
Over 30	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 36		

Untitled

Q5 Gender

Answered: 35 Skipped: 1

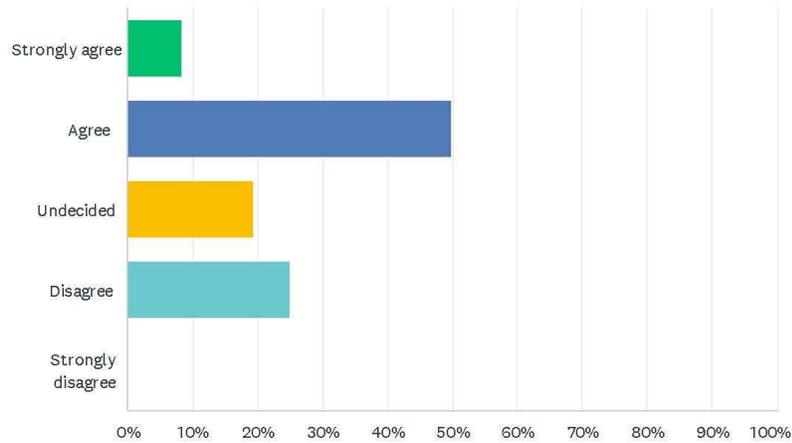


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	20.00%	7
Male	80.00%	28
Total Respondents: 35		

Untitled

Q6 The 2016 & 2024 focused Public Safety pay increases improved morale.

Answered: 36 Skipped: 0

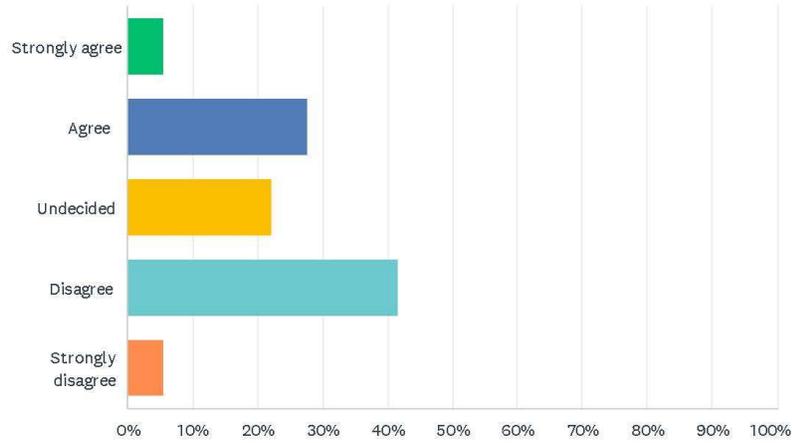


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	8.33%	3
Agree	50.00%	18
Undecided	19.44%	7
Disagree	25.00%	9
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 36		

Untitled

Q7 The 2016 & 2024 focused Public Safety pay increases improved GPSTC's ability to retain quality instructors.

Answered: 36 Skipped: 0

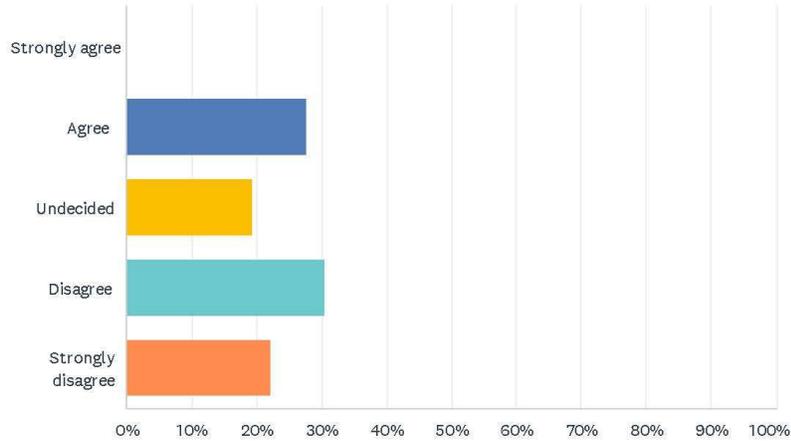


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	5.56%	2
Agree	27.78%	10
Undecided	22.22%	8
Disagree	41.67%	15
Strongly disagree	5.56%	2
Total Respondents: 36		

Untitled

Q8 The 2016 & 2024 focused Public Safety pay increases made GPSTC more competitive in the job market.

Answered: 36 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	0.00% 0
Agree	27.78% 10
Undecided	19.44% 7
Disagree	30.56% 11
Strongly disagree	22.22% 8
Total Respondents: 36	

Appendix B

Tables and Charts

Table 1

Table 1: Summative Scaling of Hypotheses questions by all respondents to the 2025 survey.						
<i>The 2015-2016 & 2024-2025 focused Public Safety pay increases improved morale.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	0	8	7	17	3	28
Likert Value	0	16	0	68	15	99
		99/28=				
		MEAN		3.54		
<i>The 2015-2016 & 2024-2025 focused Public Safety pay increases improved GPSTC's ability to retain quality instructors.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	2	14	8	9	2	27
Likert Value	2	28	0	36	10	76
		76/27=				
		MEAN		2.82		
<i>The 2015-2016 & 2024-2025 focused Public Safety pay increases made GPSTC more competitive in the job market.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	8	11	7	8	1	28
Likert Value	8	22	0	32	5	67
		67/28=				
		MEAN		2.39		

Table 2

Table 2: Summative Scaling of Hypotheses questions by all respondents to the 2016 survey.						
<i>The 2015 Instructor base pay increase improved morale.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	0	1	8	11	15	27
Likert Value	0	2	0	44	75	121
121/27=						
MEAN 4.48						
<i>The 2015 Instructor base pay increase improved GPSTC's ability to retain quality instructors.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	0	4	8	13	10	27
Likert Value	0	8	0	52	50	110
110/27=						
MEAN 4.07						
<i>The 2015 Instructor base pay increase made GPSTC more competitive in the job market.</i>						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Number	0	5	4	18	8	31
Likert Value	0	10	0	72	40	122
122/31=						
MEAN 3.92						

Table 3

Table 3: Results by Tenure						
<i>Hypothesis question 1: Results by Tenure</i>						
Tenure	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
0-2	0	4	2	7	1	14
3-5	0	1	1	5	1	8
6-10	0	2	4	4	1	11
11-15	0	1	0	0	0	1
16-20	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	0	8	7	17	3	35
<i>Hypothesis question 2: Results by Tenure</i>						
Tenure	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
0-2	2	3	3	5	1	14
3-5	0	2	2	3	1	8
6-10	0	8	3	0	0	11
11-15	0	1	0	0	0	1
16-20	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	2	14	8	9	2	35
<i>General Question 3: Results by Tenure</i>						
Tenure	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
0-2	3	3	5	3	0	14
3-5	1	3	1	2	1	8
6-10	4	4	1	2	0	11
11-15	0	1	0	0	0	1
16-20	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	8	11	7	8	1	35

Table 4

Table 4: Turnover			
	Departing	Total	% turnover
FY16	9	63	14.29%
FY17	8	72	11.11%
FY18	10	83	12.05%
FY19	11	88	12.50%
FY20	13	84	15.48%
FY21	7	85	8.24%
FY22	20	92	21.74%
FY23	9	99	9.09%
FY24	17	101	16.83%
FY25	13	131	9.92%

*Excludes Dismissals and Retirements

Table 5

Survey Results - Demographic Questions

Table 5: Demographic Results

Q1: Age	2016	2025
21-30	0	3
31-40	10	10
41-50	16	7
51-60	7	11
60+	2	5

Q2: Race/Ethnicity	2016	2025
White	32	28
Black	1	6
Hispanic	2	0
Other	0	0
Prefer not to answer	0	1

Q3: Education	2016	2025
HS/GED	18	17
Associate degree	5	5
Bachelor's degree	7	11
Master's degree	5	6
Doctorate	0	0

Q4: Years Employed with GPSTC	2016	2025
0-2	19	14
3-5	9	9
6-10	5	11
11-15	1	1
16-20	0	1
21-25	1	0
26-30	0	0
30+	0	0

Q6: Gender	2016	2025
Female	7	7
Male	28	28

Table 6*Survey Results - Hypotheses and General Questions***Table 6: Hypotheses & General Question Results**

Q6: Pay increases improved morale	2016	2025
Strongly Disagree	0	3
Disagree	1	10
Undecided	8	7
Agree	11	11
Strongly Agree	15	5

Q7: Pay increased improved retention	2016	2025
Strongly Disagree	0	2
Disagree	4	14
Undecided	8	8
Agree	13	9
Strongly Agree	10	2

Q8: Pay increases made GPSTC more competitive	2016	2025
Strongly Disagree	0	8
Disagree	5	11
Undecided	4	7
Agree	18	8
Strongly Agree	8	1

Table 7

Table 7: Frequency Distribution of Hypotheses and General Questions

2016 Survey						
Hypothesis 1: The 2015 Instructor base pay increase improved morale.						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
Number	0	1	8	11	15	35
Percentage	0.00%	2.86%	22.86%	31.43%	42.86%	100%

Hypothesis 2: The 2015 Instructor base pay increase improved GPSTC's ability to retain quality instructors.						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
Number	0	4	8	13	10	35
Percentage	0.00%	11.43%	22.86%	37.14%	28.57%	100%

General: The 2015 Instructor base pay increase made GPSTC more competitive in the job market.						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
Number	0	5	4	18	8	35
Percentage	0.00%	14.29%	11.43%	51.43%	22.86%	100%

2025 Survey						
Hypothesis 1: The 2015-2016 & 2024-2025 focused Public Safety pay increases improved morale.						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
Number	0	8	7	17	3	35
Percentage	0.00%	22.86%	20.00%	48.57%	8.57%	100%

Hypothesis 2: The 2015-2016 & 2024-2025 focused Public Safety pay increases improved GPSTC's ability to retain quality instructors.						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
Number	2	14	8	9	2	35
Percentage	5.71%	40.00%	22.86%	25.71%	5.71%	100%

General: The 2015-2016 & 2024-2025 focused Public Safety pay increases made GPSTC more competitive in the job market.						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
Number	8	11	7	8	1	35
Percentage	22.86%	31.43%	20.00%	22.86%	2.86%	100%

Chart 1

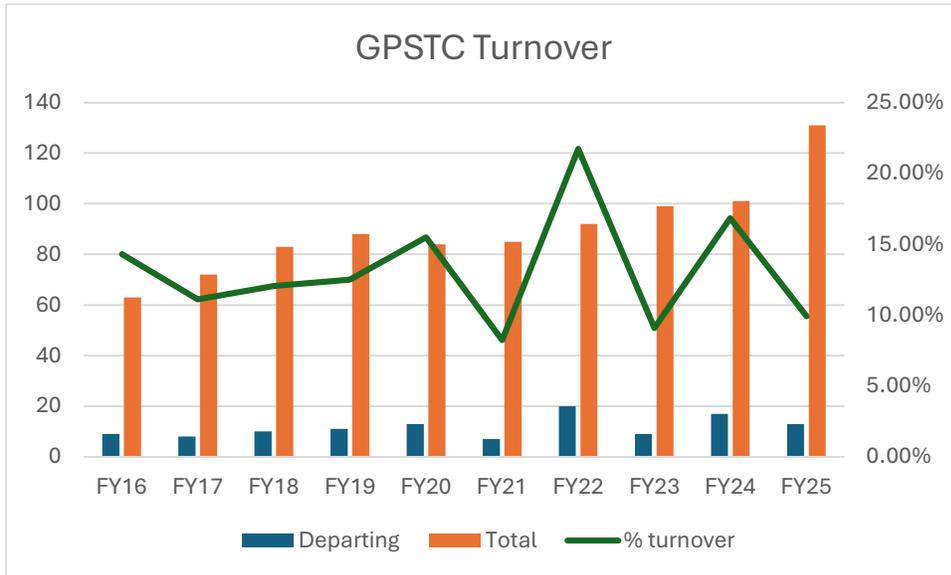


Chart 2

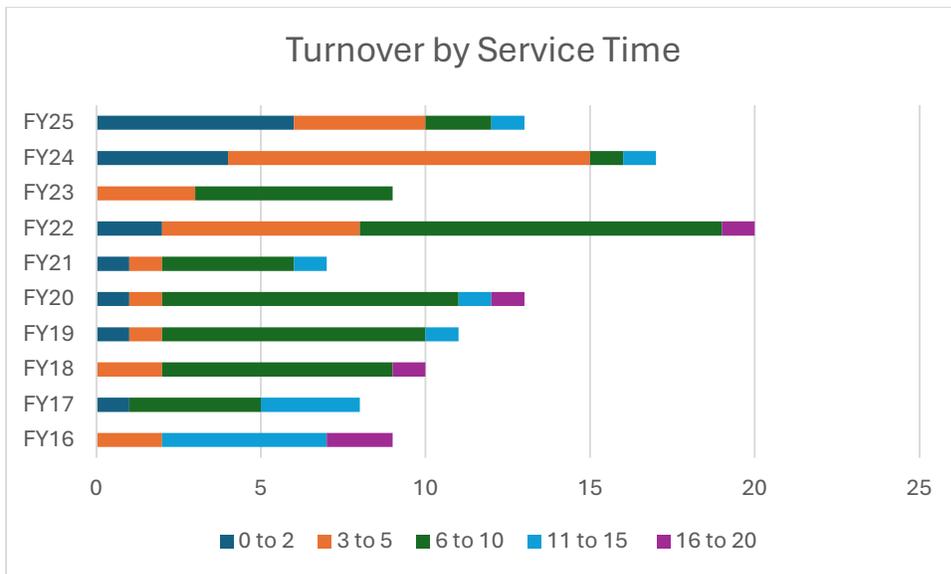


Chart 3

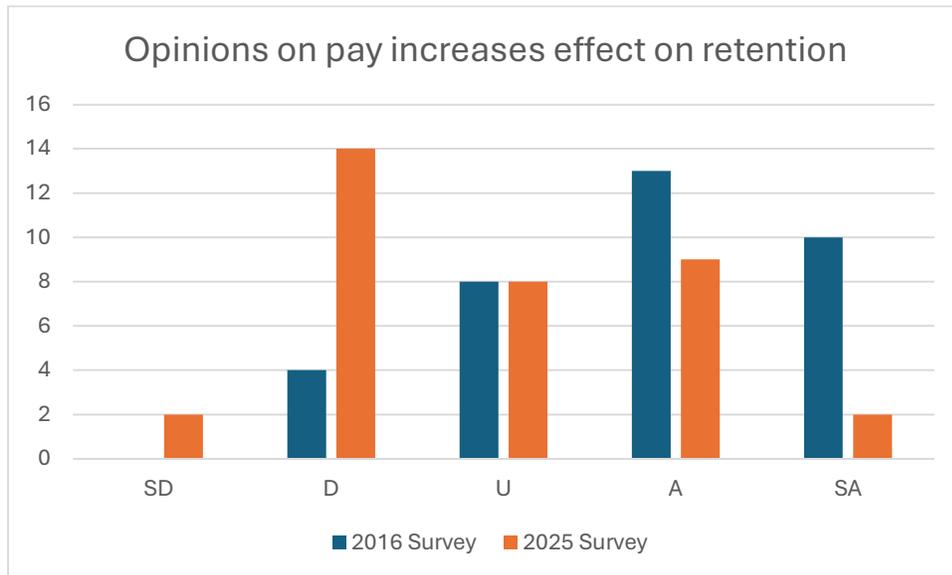


Chart 4

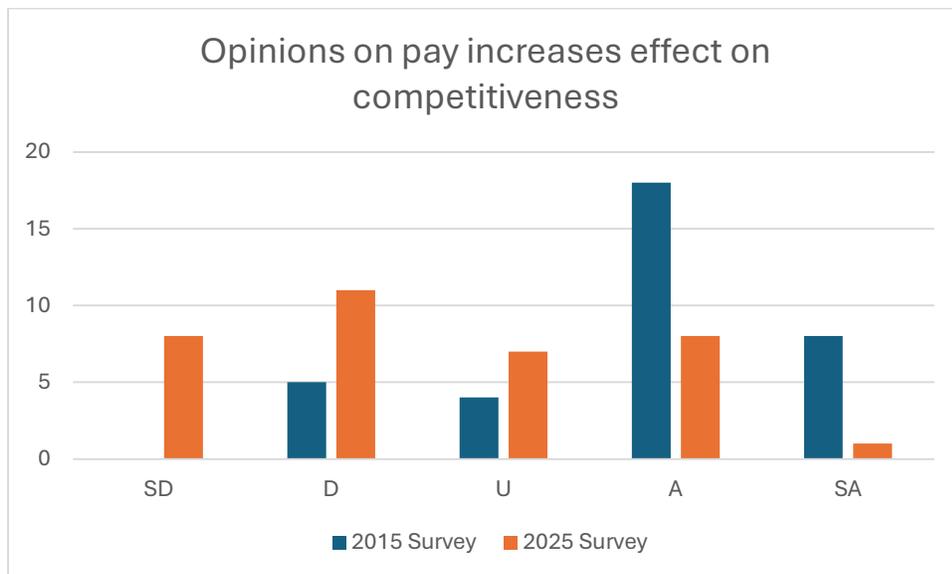


Chart 5

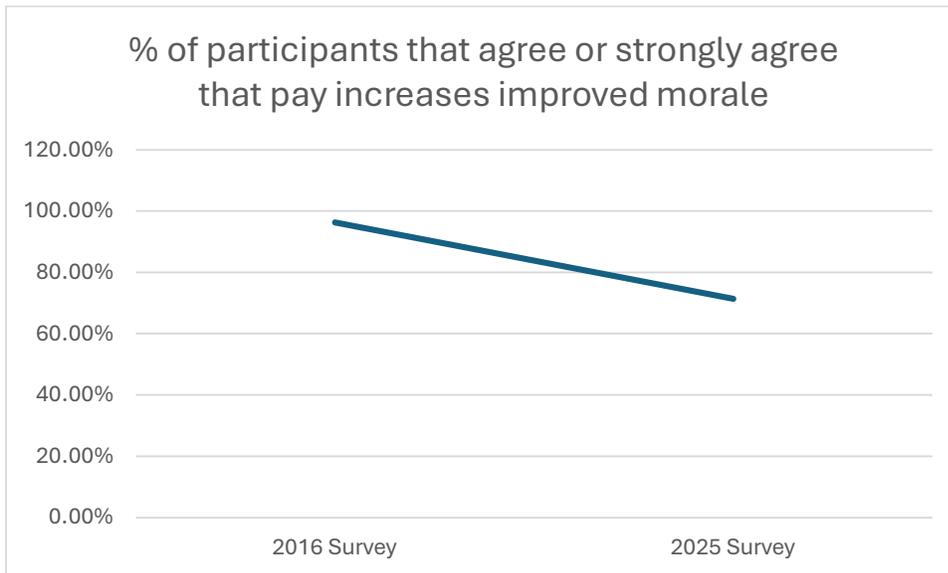
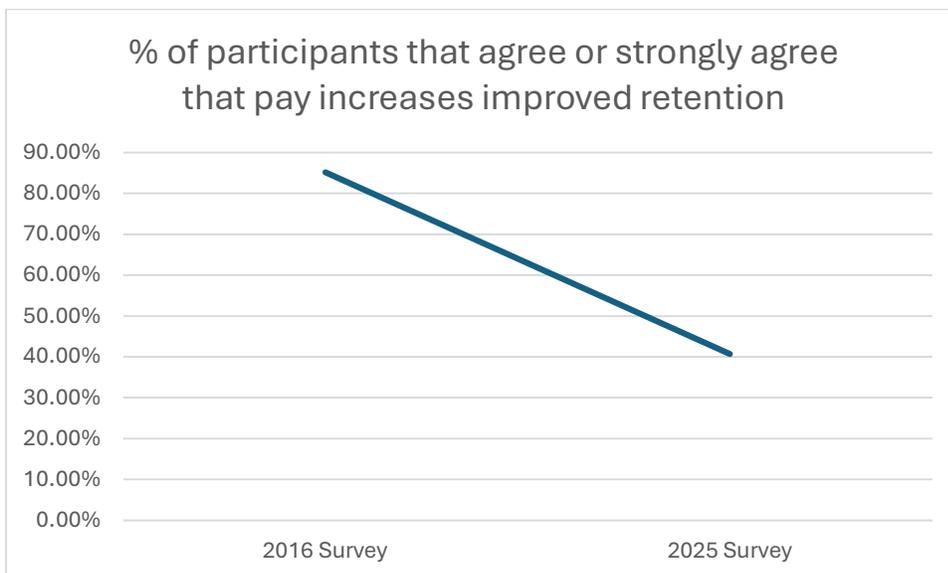


Chart 6



Appendix C

BRIAN KEMP
Governor



CHRIS WIGGINTON
Director

August 19, 2025

Subject: Authorization to Access GPSTC Instructor Data

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter serves as formal authorization for Cynthia Jones, Operations Bureau Director of the Georgia Public Safety Training Center, to access and utilize specific data for the Georgia Public Safety Training Center.

The data authorized for use includes:

- Turnover Rates
- Instructor names and contact information
- Survey data from 2016 and 2025 for morale, retention, and competitiveness
- Instructor salary information
- Agency Documentation on requests for pay rate changes
- Agency email addresses

This information is to be used solely in support of the Georgia Public Safety Training Center and specifically for the purposes of completing a capstone program evaluation project through Middle Georgia State University Doctor of Science in Public Safety, a doctoral-level graduate program.

All data will be handled in accordance with GPSTC privacy and confidentiality standards. Access and use of this information are restricted to the scope of the authorized project and are not to be shared or disseminated beyond the requirements of the capstone evaluation.

Should you have any questions or require further clarification, please contact my office at (478) 993-4405 or cwigginton@gpstc.org.

Sincerely,



Chris Wigginton, Director
Georgia Public Safety Training Center

Proudly serving those who serve

MAIN CAMPUS 1000 Indian Springs Drive, Forsyth, GA 31029

PHONE (478) 993-4000

FAX (478) 993-4407

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