

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Port Lavaca Police Department Staffing Assessment

Port Lavaca, Texas

Texas Police Chiefs Association

Consultant: Chief Martin Birkenfeld (Ret.)

August 2026

Purpose of the Assessment

At the request of Police Chief Tobie Bias, the Texas Police Chiefs Association conducted a comprehensive review of the Port Lavaca Police Department (PLPD) to evaluate staffing, deployment, workload, organizational structure, and operational practices. The assessment considered department data, crime and calls-for-service information, employee interviews, and direct observation of patrol operations.

Executive Assessment

The Port Lavaca Police Department's greatest strength is its people. Employees were observed to be committed, motivated, and strongly connected to the department and community. The organization has a positive culture and employees expressed pride in serving Port Lavaca.

The principal concern is staffing. PLPD is authorized for 21 sworn positions but had 19 officers employed at the time of the assessment, including two officers still in training. The patrol function is carrying the staffing shortage, resulting in minimum staffing, frequent supervisory involvement in calls, mandatory overtime, difficulty taking leave and training, and limited capacity for proactive policing.

The assessment concludes that PLPD needs additional personnel and a revised organizational structure to provide sustainable officer safety, supervision, proactive policing, training, and service delivery.

Key Findings

Measure	Finding
Current authorized sworn staffing	21 positions
Officers employed at assessment	19, including 2 in training
Current patrol allocation	14 positions; 12 available
Minimum patrol coverage	2 officers day / 3 officers night, including supervisor
Patrol availability factor	69%
Current uncommitted patrol time	Approximately 35%
Desired uncommitted time	60%
Long-term patrol requirement	Approximately 20 officers
Recommended total sworn positions	27

The staffing analysis found that at least 15 officers are needed in patrol simply to maintain minimum 24/7 coverage without routinely relying on overtime. The workload model indicates approximately 19.6 patrol officers are needed to achieve the department's desired 60 percent proactive/uncommitted time.

Major Operational Findings

1. Patrol Staffing and Supervision

The department should increase patrol staffing to at least 15 officers as soon as practical, with a long-term goal of approximately 20 patrol officers. The assessment also recommends a four-team patrol model with four sergeants, providing clearer supervisory responsibility for each team. Two corporal positions could be converted to sergeant positions through attrition.

2. Recruitment and Retention

Starting pay of \$52,124 is below the comparable agencies examined in the report, whose starting salaries ranged from approximately \$57,907 to \$65,000. The assessment recommends increasing base salaries and establishing incentive pay for longevity, TCOLE certification, education, and Field Training Officer responsibilities.

3. Crime and Community Safety

Port Lavaca's overall crime rate is below the Texas statewide average, but violent crime warrants attention. The 2025 violent crime rate was reported as 15.7 percent below the statewide rate. The assessment recommends hot-spot policing, initially focused on locations associated with violent crime and disproportionate calls for service.

4. Growth and Workload Monitoring

New housing, business development, industrial activity, changing student patterns, and transient populations may increase demand for police services. PLPD should conduct biannual reviews of calls for service, crime, and traffic crashes to keep staffing and deployment aligned with changing community conditions.

5. Traffic Safety

Traffic safety remains an important operational priority. In 2025, Port Lavaca recorded 142 reportable crashes, including three fatal crashes and 88 injury crashes. The department should use crash data to identify hot spots and conduct high-visibility enforcement at the times and locations where crashes are concentrated.

6. Criminal Investigations

The assessment does not recommend an immediate increase in CID staffing. Current detective caseloads are just below the recommended threshold of 15 cases per month per general detective. PLPD should monitor caseloads on a rolling six-month basis and improve digital evidence and case-processing efficiency.

7. Professional Staff Capacity

The three civilian employees perform essential functions, but responsibilities are concentrated heavily in the office manager and records functions. The department should audit professional-staff duties, consider moving sex-offender registration to CID, and consider part-time assistance for the front counter and evidence-management functions.

Recommended Staffing Structure

Position	Current	Recommended
Chief	1	1
Lieutenant	2	2
Sergeant	2	4
Detective	4	4
Corporal	4	0
Officer	8	14
Cadet Officer	0	2
Total sworn	21	27
Professional Staff	3	3 + 1 PT

Recommendations

1. Increase base salaries and address potential pay compression.
2. Establish incentive and certificate pay for experience, education, certification, and specialized responsibilities.
3. Increase patrol staffing to at 15 officers as soon as practical, with a long-term goal of 20.
4. Add six sworn positions, including two cadet positions.
5. Transition toward a four-team patrol structure with four sergeants.
6. Use biannual workload, crime, and crash analysis to guide staffing and deployment.
7. Implement data-driven crime and traffic hot-spot strategies.
8. Streamline digital evidence and case-processing procedures.
9. Audit professional-staff responsibilities and workload.
10. Evaluate moving sex-offender registration responsibilities to CID.
11. Consider part-time administrative support for front-counter and evidence functions.

Conclusion

The Port Lavaca Police Department is a strong organization with committed employees and a positive culture. The assessment did not identify a fundamental organizational problem; rather, it identified a department whose staffing model has not kept pace with operational demands and changing community conditions.

The central issue is sustainability. PLPD is currently relying on minimum staffing, overtime, supervisory participation in calls, and constrained leave and training capacity to maintain service. A phased increase in staffing supported by competitive compensation, stronger patrol supervision, improved administrative capacity, and regular workload analysis would allow the department to move from simply maintaining minimum coverage toward a sustainable model that supports officer safety, proactive policing, traffic safety, training, community engagement, and long-term service delivery.

Source: Review of Staffing for the Port Lavaca Police Department, Texas Police Chiefs Association, August 2026.