

# 2012 ANNUAL CITIZEN SURVEY



**A Survey of Citizen Attitudes  
Concerning the Springfield Police Department**  
February 2012

Conducted by:  
**The Springfield Police Department  
Police Planning Task Force**



## **INTRODUCTION**

The Springfield Police Department Long Range Plan includes as one of its goals that the Department use “periodic surveys to determine citizen attitudes, areas of concern and issues. Each year the Department conducts a written survey to measure citizen attitudes toward the Department and safety in the community. Several questions on the survey have been consistent over the years, and are therefore useful for identifying trends in citizen attitudes toward the Police Department.

## **DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY**

This year’s survey consisted of 20 questions designed to allow the community to rate the services of the Police Department and the effectiveness of the Department’s response to calls for service. Respondents were asked about their perceptions of safety in their home, neighborhood, and the city in general; changes in crime rates and the Department’s ability to respond; priorities for using available resources; and how aware they were of certain services provided by the Department, including Neighborhood Watch, Safety Town, Bicycle Patrol, Hispanic Community Outreach efforts, Citizen Police Academy and Traffic Team responses to driving complaints. New to the survey this year were questions about the perceived impact of the Municipal Jail.

In early February, 2012 surveys were mailed to Springfield addresses chosen at random from the residential address database. Random addresses were chosen as the data source instead of registered voter lists, in the hopes of eliciting more responses from renters and young people, who are in general less likely to vote than stereotypical homeowners. Of the 900 surveys sent out, a total of 242 (27%) were completed and returned. This rate of return is comparable to other mailed surveys conducted in recent years by the Department, and is within the expected return rates for mailed surveys in general (25% to 40%).

For the first time, the 2012 survey was also made available through the MyPD website and smartphone app, allowing citizens to voluntarily respond to the survey. An additional 51 responses were gathered through the electronic survey. Those results will be summarized at the conclusion of this report.

## **RESULTS OVERVIEW**

Not all respondents answered all questions. In the following summary, all calculations are based upon the number of respondents actually answering the question unless otherwise indicated. Reported data is from the mailed surveys, although relevant data from the online survey will be mentioned throughout this report.

The first series of questions are intended to ask the respondents how we, as a Department, are doing in providing services.

**Question 1** asked: “Have you, or any member of your household, called or had contact with the Springfield Police Department for assistance within the last year?”

40% of respondents indicated that they had called for police assistance, and 60% said they hadn't.

**Question 2** asked respondents to “rate the Springfield Police Department in the following areas:” and listed eight areas to be evaluated. Each area was rated on a scale from excellent to poor. The average of all answers fell in the excellent to good range. “Professional Competence”, “Use of Force”, and “Ability to handle serious situations” were the strongest service categories, with 87% rating the Department as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’, while “Preventing Crime” rated the lowest, with 72% rating the Department as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’.

**Question 3** asked “How satisfied are you with the service provided by the Springfield Police Department?” 91% of respondents indicated they are satisfied or very satisfied, with 9% reporting they are unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the Department’s service.

**Question 4** asked respondents what their primary source of information is about the Springfield Police Department. 57% of respondents indicated that either the television or the newspaper is their primary information source. 31% indicated that either personal contact or friends and neighbors are their primary source, and 12% indicated that either radio or internet is a primary information source.

The second section of the survey is intended to measure perceptions of community safety.

**Questions 5 and 6** asked how likely respondents felt it would be that the Springfield Police Department would catch persons who committed crimes against persons and crimes against property, respectively.

Respondents were much more confident that offenders committing crimes against persons would be caught (86% indicating it was at least likely) than offenders committing crimes against property (57% indicating it was likely).

**Question 7** asked a series of questions regarding how safe the respondent felt in their neighborhood and home during the day and at night; and how safe they felt generally in other parts of the city. As one might expect, respondents felt most safe at home during the daytime, with 98% feeling safe or very safe, and only 2% indicating feelings of being only unsafe. Nighttime produced slightly lower results, with 94% indicating feelings of safe or very safe and 6% reporting feeling unsafe or very unsafe.

Respondents also felt generally quite safe in their own neighborhoods during the day, with 96% feeling safe or very safe. At night, 69% reported feeling very safe or safe.

When asked about the city as a whole, 75% of respondents reported feeling safe or very safe, 23% reported feeling unsafe and only 2% reported feeling very unsafe in other parts of the city.

**Question 8** asked respondents to consider how the danger from crime, the Department's speed of response, and the Department's follow up efforts have changed over the last 5 years.

69% of respondents feel that crime danger is greater than it was 5 years ago, 70% feel that the Department responds faster compared to the same period, and 63% feel that follow up efforts are greater.

The third survey section attempts to measure the expectations and priorities of the community, and asks respondents about their awareness of specific programs.

**Question 9** asked respondents to rank on a scale of importance five non-emergency services provided by the Department. Of the choices given, investigating suspicious conditions and addressing suspicious behavior, such as loitering, were ranked as the most important, while nuisance complaint such as barking dogs, and removal of abandoned vehicles were least important. An interesting note on this question is that abandoned vehicles and barking dogs consistently rate low in priority on annual surveys, while in actual practice the department receives more complaints about cars and dogs than any other single issue.

**Question 10** asked Respondents how likely they felt residents would feel safer in their neighborhood; that misdemeanor offenders would be incarcerated; and that the overall quality of life for families and businesses would improve in Springfield as a result of the Municipal Jail operation.

78% of survey respondents indicated that residents are likely or very likely to feel safer in their neighborhoods because of the jail. 81% felt that it is likely or very likely that the quality of life in Springfield will improve, and 68% of the respondents indicated that they believe misdemeanor offenders will be incarcerated because of the jail operation.

**Question 11** asked respondents how aware they were of 10 different services provided by the Springfield Police Department.

Of the services listed, Neighborhood Watch and the Municipal Jail Operation were the most well-known, with more than 80% of respondents indicating they knew of those services. The School Resource Officer and Bicycle Patrol programs are also well known, with more than 60% of respondents indicating awareness. The program with the lowest level of recognition is the Hispanic Community Services program, with only 14% of respondents indicating they were aware of the service.

**Questions 12 through 19** collect demographic data on the respondent pool. This data is useful for determining how successful the survey method is in capturing a cross section reflective of the entire Springfield community.

The typical respondent is more than 50 years old, and has lived in Springfield for more than ten years. The majority are homeowners (71%) who are retired (30%) or working in a professional capacity (28%). A significant majority of the respondents were females (64%), and 30% indicated that they have dependant children living in their household.

**The final question** asked the respondent to make one recommendation to the Springfield Police Department about how to improve services to the community. Half of all respondents included comments ranging from positive feedback to criticisms of the Department.

### **SUMMARY OF ELECTRONIC SURVEY RESULTS**

This is the first year that the Department has offered the Citizen Survey in an online format. No attempt was made to randomize the response pool...citizens who already follow the Department on Facebook or on the MyPD smartphone app could follow a link to a website and answer the survey questions. As might be expected, respondents were generally much more satisfied overall with Department operations (98% at least Satisfied), and much more likely to rely on the Internet for their primary information source (32%).

In contrast with mail survey respondents, the internet respondents felt (in Question 8) that the danger from crime is less than it was 5 years ago (64%), but agreed that the Department's response is greater (86%) and that follow-up efforts are greater (85%).

Internet respondents also indicated a significantly higher level of awareness of Department programs, with every listed program except for two (Neighborhood Dispute Resolution and Hispanic Community Outreach Coordinator), being recognized by at least 50% of respondents.

Demographically, the internet responses came from a younger group, with 42% in the 35-49 age bracket, but still from longer-term residents (73% having lived in Springfield for more than 10 years). The split between males and females was more even, with 53% male and 47% female respondents. Homeowners represented 78% of the internet responses.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this survey are consistent with the results from previous years. Community satisfaction with the Police Department remains high, and respondents feel relatively safe in their homes and neighborhoods. A significant majority of respondents feel that the addition of the Jail operation is improving feelings of safety, quality of life and that the Jail will hold offenders accountable for their crimes.

**\*\*The raw data gathered during this survey effort is available for review by contacting the Services Bureau Manager at the Springfield Police Department.\*\***