



Posted on Mon, Aug. 10, 2009

Sheriffs miss out on \$25 million in stimulus \$\$\$; Justus, Hertz not happy

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News-Democrat

Not one Illinois sheriff's office will share in the more than \$25 million in federal stimulus money to be distributed among law enforcement agencies in the state, and that doesn't make sense to two area sheriffs.

St. Clair County Sheriff Mearl Justus and Madison County Sheriff Robert Hertz hoped to receive funding toward filling some positions that have been lost due to the economic downturn. Neither received anything, and they wonder what criteria was used to determine the distribution.

Justus noted that 50 Illinois sheriff's offices applied for the money.

"Out of 378 applications from Illinois, only 21 departments received awards. And, out of the 21 awardees, not one sheriff's office was included," Justus said. "Every sheriff's department I am familiar with assists communities located within their county. We help anybody we can, and of course, they help us."

The money is part of \$1 billion in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds earmarked to help pay the salaries and benefits of 4,699 police officers at 1,046 agencies nationwide. In the metro-east, Alton, East St. Louis, Granite City and Alorton police departments received a total of nearly \$2.2 million to hire a total of 10 officers.

Justus said he doesn't have a problem with the cities that received funding, but he said his department sorely needs the two MetroLink positions it sought to fund. And he said he doesn't understand the rationale used in the distribution.

"It's obvious that mass transit is not something they looked at," he said, adding that there were originally 16 MetroLink positions before the economic downturn.

"That number was cut to 14, and at the end of June, we lost two. Now, we're down to 12," he said. "We know Metro fell on hard times, so we're not knocking Metro. We feel we severely have a need for these positions in light of all of the crime that has occurred on and around the MetroLink."

In Madison County, Hertz's office applied for money to fund seven jobs and got nothing.

"I don't know what formula they used," he said. "Some departments got 50 while others got nothing. I wish it could have been more equally distributed so everybody else could get something."

Like Justus, Hertz pointed to the wide variety of services sheriff's offices must provide.

"Sheriff's offices do a lot of work that a lot of municipal police departments don't do," he said. "The operation of the jail is major. Sheriff Justus' population is 400, mine is 280. We answer and investigate service calls. We investigate burglaries, robberies and sex crimes, and we chase sex offenders."

Hertz also said he doesn't begrudge communities the funding they received, but he believes the distribution could have been handled in a more equitable manner.

"I understand that the operation in St. Louis City is much bigger, but they get 50 and I get nothing," he said. "I would've been a lot happier if they got 49 and I got one."
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