

June 2008

*Do More By
Doubling Up:
Providing Iowa
Law Enforcement
Protection More
Efficiently*

POLICY

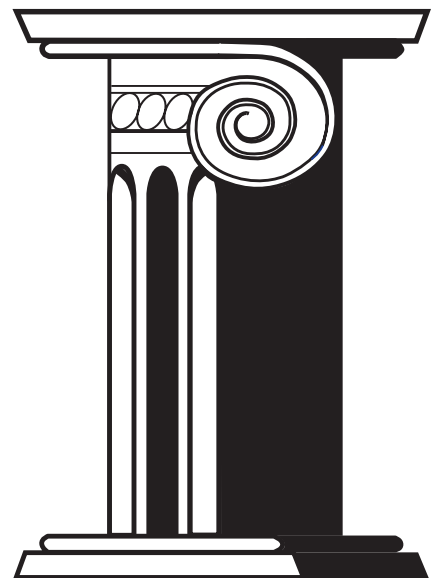
STUDY

No. 08-5

by

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PUBLIC INTEREST



I N S T I T U T E

POLICY STUDY

June 2008

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Public Interest Institute

**Dr. Don Racheter,
President**

POLICY STUDIES are published as needed. They are longer, analytical articles on important public issues.

POLICY STUDIES are published by Public Interest Institute at Iowa Wesleyan College, a nonpartisan, nonprofit, research and educational institute whose activities are supported by contributions from private individuals, corporations, companies, and foundations. The Institute does **not** accept government grants.

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Do More By Doubling Up: Providing Iowa Law Enforcement Protection More Efficiently

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Law enforcement is an important aspect of every community's safety. The first obligation of government is to protect citizens, private property, and the rule of law. Local governmental entities often find their budgets stretched to the max and face fierce competition for every tax dollar. This leads to the question of how Iowa's law enforcement can be made more efficient and less costly.

The State of Iowa has 374 law enforcement agencies made up of city police forces and county sheriff's departments. Each of the 99 counties in the state has one sheriff's department. All but five counties (Ida, Osceola, Ringgold, Van Buren, and Wayne) have one or more city police forces located within. There are 4,829 Police Officers, Sheriffs, and Deputies in Iowa.

Recently, counties have begun to cut costs and make law enforcement more efficient by consolidating joint communication centers with other emergency and law enforcement agencies within the county. This consolidation results in more taxpayer dollars being saved and more efficient means of protecting the public and responding to emergencies.

Consolidation of any local government entities is never an easy process, whether it is school district consolidation or emergency services, because groups do not want

to lose their identities as a governmental unit. One of the many success stories in the area of consolidation is Westcom Dispatch Center, a joint facility that covers Clive, Urbandale, and West Des Moines. Before the three communities joined forces in 2001, each entity had their own dispatch center with their own staff to operate each center. The creation of Westcom not only improved communications, technology, and emergency response, but also saved taxpayers money.

Five counties (Dubuque, Jackson, Polk, Scott, and Woodbury) were selected by this Policy Study's author to show a sample of budget information for law enforcement in Iowa. Law enforcement costs are much lower per capita in Dubuque and Jackson Counties, which have one dispatching center, than in Polk, Scott, and Woodbury Counties, which have more than one dispatch facility.

Taxpayer pressure for fast, effective, and organized emergency response along with tightening budgets are leading localities to work together to share emergency response coordination and dispatching. Consolidation of law enforcement and emergency response services is an effective means of coordinating communications as well as saving local taxpayer dollars.

Executive Summary

“Recently, counties have begun to cut costs and make law enforcement more efficient by consolidating joint communication centers with other emergency and law enforcement agencies within the county.”

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“When counties consolidate law and emergency response communication centers it will result in more taxpayer dollars being saved and more efficient means of protecting the public and responding to emergencies.”

Introduction

Law enforcement is an important aspect of every community’s safety. County sheriff and city police officers patrol Iowa’s roads, streets, and highways twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. Law enforcement never takes a day off. The first obligation of government is to protect citizens, private property, and the rule of law. Local governmental entities often find their budgets stretched to the max and face fierce competition for every tax dollar. Counties are not only required to provide funding for the needed law enforcement protection, but also for roads (transportation), education, and economic development, among others. Each year countless tax dollars are spent keeping law enforcement in the state of Iowa running smoothly. This leads to the question of how law enforcement can be made more efficient and less costly.

Recently, counties have begun to cut costs and make law enforcement more efficient by consolidating joint communication centers with other emergency and law enforcement agencies within the county. In late May, Johnson County Board of Supervisors voted to approve a “\$17 million joint public safety communications center,” which “will unify a dispatch center for fire and police with the Johnson County sheriff’s department.”¹

When counties consolidate law and emergency response communication centers it will result in more taxpayer dollars being saved and more efficient means of protecting the public and responding to emergencies.

Johnson County is the most recent example of a county mobilizing to initiate a joint communication center, but this trend is not new. In July 1979, the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice published *Small Police Agency Consolidation: Suggested Approaches*, which analyzes law enforcement consolidation.² Although the report addressed several issues that will not be discussed in this study, it argues that the main factors leading to the contemplation of consolidation are the public demand for efficient and “quality law enforcement services,” “declining local financial capability,” and “interjurisdictional overlapping” of services.³ The authors also use the word “jealousies,” because often localities and larger cities do not want to surrender control of any governmental operations, whether a school or emergency response services. Nevertheless, taxpayer pressure for fast, effective, and organized emergency response along with tightening budgets are leading localities to work together to share emergency response coordination and dispatching.

**Characteristics of Iowa
County Law Enforcement
Operations**

The State of Iowa has 374 law enforcement agencies made up of city police forces and county sheriff’s departments. Each of the 99 counties in the state has one sheriff’s department. All but five counties (Ida, Osceola, Ringgold, Van Buren, and Wayne) have one or more city police forces located within. There are 4,829 Police Officers, Sheriffs, and Deputies in Iowa. This number includes all Sheriffs, Chiefs, Lieutenants, Sergeants, Investigators, Patrolling Officers, and Road Deputies. Several small towns in Iowa have police

departments consisting of only one Officer, and many agencies have Reserve Officers that volunteer their time helping out their community and make one dollar per year for their services. Canines are used in nearly every county, either by the County Sheriff or a police force. Larger agencies tend to have more than one canine.⁴

Dispatching is mainly done through the sheriff’s office. Other counties have joint communications dispatch centers for the sheriff and police departments. Larger counties such as Polk, where the city of Des Moines is located, have more than one dispatch center. Towns

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Table 1. State of Iowa Law Enforcement Employees

Position	Employees	Percent
Sheriff/Officers	4,829	63.2%
Reserves	165	2.2%
Dispatch/Jailers	273	3.6%
Dispatch	634	8.3%
Jailers	1,059	13.9%
Administrators	594	7.8%
Cooks	38	0.5%
Mechanics	27	0.4%
Maintenance	19	0.2%
Total	7,638	100.0%

Source: Author’s phone interviews with law enforcement agencies in each county of the state, January - March 2008

“The State of Iowa has 374 law enforcement agencies made up of city police forces and county sheriff’s departments.”

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“The effort to consolidate emergency response services ‘tends to be tricky both politically and managerially.’”

like Johnston and Ankeny within Polk County have police departments that share dispatching duties with surrounding cities. A total of 28 counties have dispatchers that work as jailers as well.⁵

Jailing in most counties is handled through the sheriff’s department. Every county except for two have a county jail, and those two (Calhoun and Franklin) transport arrested individuals to neighboring county jails for lock up. Some jails contract their food service out to local hospitals, nursing homes, restaurants, or Hy-Vee grocery stores and others prepare it on site. Lock-up capacity within each county jail ranges from less than 10, in counties with low crime rates, up to the largest facility, Polk County, which houses 600 inmates.⁶

Vehicle maintenance for Iowa law enforcement agencies is usually not contracted out, but is handled by local shops or dealerships.. Larger police and sheriff agencies in the counties of Linn (where Cedar Rapids is located), Polk (Des Moines), and Scott (the location of Davenport) have their own garages with mechanics.⁷

Benefits of Consolidation: The Westcom Model

Consolidation of any local government entities is never an easy process, whether it is

school district consolidation or emergency services, because groups do not want to lose their identities as a governmental unit. This is especially the case with many school districts. In addition, a problem occurs over who will have control after consolidation. Kurt Thurmaier, of Northern Illinois University, examined the consolidation and cooperative efforts by three Iowa cities that are located in the western suburbs of Des Moines: Clive, Urbandale, and West Des Moines.⁸ Thurmaier argued that the effort to consolidate emergency response services “tends to be tricky both politically and managerially,” but the three communities have built a cooperative relationship based on trust.⁹ Clive, Urbandale, and West Des Moines joined together to form “Westcom Dispatch Center, a consolidated public safety dispatch facility that receives public safety-related calls and dispatches police, fire, and EMS.”¹⁰

Westcom is located in West Des Moines, but the three cities share in the financial expenses of the center based “upon a percentage breakdown of the total number of calls for service received by the center.”¹¹ The Center is governed by representatives of the three communities and is chaired by a city manager.¹² Before the three communities joined forces in 2001, each entity had their own dispatch center with their own staff

to operate each center. The process of consolidation itself took “eighteen months of planning, policy development, legal processes, and much discussion,” before Westcom became official.

The creation of Westcom not only improved communications, technology, and emergency response, but also saved taxpayers money. “This merger allows the agencies to directly communicate with one another during large-scale incidents rather than attempting to communicate via the three separate radio systems.”¹³ The Iowa League of Cities reported that the “primary cost of Westcom was \$291,053.93, and each year it will cost approximately \$130,000 to maintain the system.”¹⁴ Taxpayers in the city of Clive saved an estimated \$30,250 in fiscal year (FY) 2001-2002, and “West Des Moines and Urbandale won’t experience significant cost savings initially, but as each city grows, the savings will accrue.”¹⁵

The Westcom center has proven successful, and the city leaders from each of the three communities are building on the trust gained from working together to facilitate other consolidating efforts, such as EMS and fire service. Another cooperative venture is West Help, a consolidated effort between the cities of West Des Moines, Clive,

Urbandale, Windsor Heights, and Johnston “whose goal is to facilitate housing repair and rehabilitation within the member communities.”¹⁶ In addition, “West Des Moines and Clive are also involved in a jointly owned water tower with Des Moines Water Works, West Des Moines Water Works, and Waukee.”¹⁷

Developing trust and sharing power has led to the success of Westcom, and the city leaders of the communities that formed Westcom argue that “control is at once the biggest and smallest issue.”¹⁸ Westcom’s success comes from joint ownership and equal control by the three partners.¹⁹ City leaders “argued that one reason there is less collaboration between Des Moines and its suburbs is its unwillingness to relinquish control and participate in shared governance.”²⁰

A Comparison: A Single Dispatching Center vs. Multiple Centers

Five counties (Dubuque, Jackson, Polk, Scott, and Woodbury) were selected by this Policy Study’s author to show a sample of budget information for law enforcement in Iowa. Dubuque and Jackson County each have one dispatching center. Polk, Scott, and Woodbury have more than one dispatching center handled by different police and sheriff’s departments. Stephen

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“This merger allows the agencies to directly communicate with one another during large-scale incidents rather than attempting to communicate via the three separate radio systems.”

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“Polk County will save money if they can limit their dispatching services.”

Ford, the City Budget Director for the Iowa Department of Management, provided the law enforcement budget reports for the five counties containing the projected expenditures for police department and crime prevention for FY 2008 and the actual expenditures for FY 2006.²¹ Expenditures include wages, FICA/IPERS, employee benefits, equipment costs, and building costs.²²

The Dubuque County Sheriff’s Department handles the dispatching capabilities for the entire county. The Sheriff’s Department and the Dubuque Police Department share the same building. According to the U.S. Census Bureau the city of Dubuque had an unadjusted population of 57,686 in 2000.²³ The City of Dubuque reported expenditures of \$9,491,553 for FY 2006 for the Police Department and crime prevention.²⁴ The estimated law enforcement budget for the city of Dubuque for FY 2008 is \$10,427,719.²⁵ The U.S. Census Bureau estimates the population for Dubuque County was 92,384 in 2006.²⁶ The total expenditure for all cities in Dubuque County during the FY 2006 for Law Enforcement amounts to \$10,603,657.²⁷ The estimated budget for 2008 totals \$11,824,989.²⁸

Jackson County has the lowest population of the five selected counties at 20,243 residents.²⁹ However, Jackson’s population ranks 35th among the 99

counties in Iowa.³⁰ Maquoketa is the largest city in Jackson County with a population of 6,112.³¹ The Maquoketa Police Department (PD) and Jackson County Sheriff’s Departments have skillfully merged dispatching duties for the county into one facility, and the Jackson County Sheriff’s Department shares the same building as the Maquoketa PD. Law enforcement expenses for the fiscal year of 2006 in Maquoketa were \$872,229.³² Maquoketa’s estimated 2008 expenses were reported to be \$857,203.³³ Jackson County estimates a fiscal year law enforcement expenditure of \$1,415,310 for 2008.³⁴ This number is slightly down from the actual 2006 FY expense totaling \$1,426,976.³⁵ The budget report shows Jackson County cut costs for 2008.³⁶

The U.S. Census Bureau shows the largest populated county in Iowa is Polk County with a population estimate in 2006 of 408,888.³⁷ Seventeen cities make up this county’s landscape, including Des Moines, the state capitol. Multiple dispatching units are serviced in Polk County, and several cities within the county share dispatching services. Polk County reported a total of \$74,305,326 was spent on law enforcement during FY 2006.³⁸ An estimated 2008 budget is set for \$79,099,502.³⁹ Polk County will save money if they can limit their dispatching services.

Scott County has an estimated population of 162,621 — the third highest in Iowa according to the U.S. Census Bureau.⁴⁰ Dispatching is united between the Scott County Sheriff's Department and the Davenport Police Department. However, in Bettendorf, another city in Scott County, the Police Department handles dispatching within their jurisdiction. Ford's report shows Scott County had an actual 2006 FY law enforcement expenditure of \$27,764,300, and the 2008 budget is set at \$28,523,376.⁴¹ If the Scott County Sheriff's Department handled dispatching duties for the entire county, budget numbers would be much lower.

The northwest side of Iowa is home to Woodbury County and the location of Sioux City. The U.S. Census Bureau shows an estimated 102,972 people residing in Woodbury County.⁴² Ford reported that in FY 2006, Woodbury County spent \$16,934,289 on law enforcement.⁴³ The estimated budget for 2008 totals \$17,125,699.⁴⁴

Law enforcement costs are much lower per capita in Dubuque and Jackson Counties, which have one dispatching center, than in Polk, Scott, and Woodbury Counties, which have more than one dispatch facility. Calculations made using law enforcement budget information from the Department of Management

and population estimates from the Census Bureau show that Dubuque County has a cost per capita of \$127.⁴⁵ Jackson has a per capita cost of only \$69.⁴⁶ Polk's per capita cost is \$193, Scott's is \$175, and Woodbury's is \$166.⁴⁷

Balancing Needs and Taxpayer Costs

Several Iowa counties have recently proposed plans addressing law enforcement needs. County and city officials are assessing the proposals based on needs and safety of the people and the departments, as well as the costs. It is important that officials find a balance within the overall goals of the proposed plan.

Christinia Crippes, a writer for *The Burlington Hawkeye*, wrote an article about the sheriff's and police departments in Des Moines County working on a plan for building a joint law enforcement center. County Supervisor Jeff Heland claimed the facility would be more of a co-location than a joint operations center. Both the sheriff's department and Burlington Police Department are located in older buildings that are showing their age. Sheriff Mike Johnstone and Burlington Police Chief Dan Luttenegger agreed that joining facilities would be good for both departments because it would save money and help communication. The county

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“In the long run, this will save money because the cost of running a joint facility will be less than the cost of running two older buildings.”

has set aside \$50,000 for planning a new facility in the budget starting July 1, 2008. Since this is a joint facility, the city of Burlington will help with the costs and has set aside \$10,000 for the planning.

Obviously a new law enforcement center is going to cost money. As Supervisor Heland said, “Nobody goes into this with blinders on, [believing] that it’s going to be cheap.” However, in the long run, this will save money because the cost of running a joint facility will be less than the cost of running two older buildings.⁴⁸

In February of 2008, *The Cedar Rapids Gazette* reported Delaware County and the city of Manchester signed an extension to their cost-sharing agreement for dispatching services. The Manchester Police Department currently provides the dispatching services, however the County has indicated in interest in taking over the service before the end of the agreement period. The city and county will each provide about \$120,000 for the dispatch service in 2008.⁴⁹

Black Hawk County and the cities of Waterloo and Cedar Falls have also discussed sharing services to save tax dollars. Pat Kinney reported in the *Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier* that Black Hawk County’s Board of Supervisors

approved an agreement for county vehicles from different departments to use city fuel pumps. Those fuel pumps are five blocks from the county jail. A similar arrangement was agreed upon with the city of Cedar Falls to use city pumps as well. This plan could save county taxpayers \$5,000 to \$6,000 a year.⁵⁰

Jesse Helling, a writer for the *Fort Dodge Messenger*, wrote that Webster County has recently presented a plan to refurbish their current jail and add an annex to it, a project that would cost \$11,947,762. The Webster County jail has a lack of space and outdated fixtures. Currently the county spends \$77.20 a day per inmate, but Helling states that total would drop to \$67.30 a day per inmate with the refurbished jail and annex. This means the possibility of housing more inmates more effectively. Currently the Webster County Jail contains 51 beds, and prisoners are sent to other counties if space is not available. Helling’s article reported that the new plan would hold 120 beds and could even house prisoners from other counties, generating revenue. There is another proposal to build a new jail, which would cost about 7 million dollars more and the daily cost per inmate would be \$84.79. Discussions are still continuing and no set decisions have been made. However, it is good to see officials viewing

cost-effective plans. Webster County is addressing their need for a bigger jail as well as assessing what it is going to cost.⁵¹

Nicholas Bergin wrote an article in *The Burlington Hawkeye* reporting that the Fort Madison City Council proposed a plan in January 2008 to cross-train police officers as firefighters. The fire department in Fort Madison, located in Lee County, proposed a budget for the 2008-09 FY totaling \$1.17 million. According to Bergin's article, this is a cut from \$1.4 million in the previous year. As part of the cut, the city council will not fill an opening on the force and said a firefighter would be laid off July 1, 2008. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards require that four firefighters are present when entering a structure fire. The Fort Madison Fire Department would be in a position of only having three men on duty when a firefighter is on vacation or sick time. Since police are usually the first on the scene, they could be trained as the fourth man. Council members proposed that those officers who volunteer to cross-train receive a raise between \$1.50 and \$3.00 an hour. Bergin also mentions the Cedar Falls Police Department is two years into their program and has 4 out of 42 officers cross-trained as firefighters.⁵²

Similar programs of cross-training can be established within law enforcement agencies in order to create a more productive system. Every county, especially smaller populated counties, can benefit from the cross-training plan. Volunteers do a good job of contributing to their local law enforcement, fire, and emergency dispatch departments. However, in the event of an emergency, police and sheriff officials are usually the first to respond and arrive on the scene. If sheriff deputies and police officers can perform other duties and tasks, it will eliminate down time as well as create more efficiency among the departments. Cross-training will decrease fire department spending, saving tax dollars.

Cross-training can be made easier among those departments with joint and co-location facilities. Since several county sheriff and police departments share buildings and dispatch services, this allows an easier cross-training transition within those departments.

As current law enforcement buildings continue to age, more county officials will assess and propose joint or co-locations in the future. These joint locations can house one dispatch center for the entire county. One dispatch facility in each county eliminates the expense of paying for unneeded communications workers and buildings. Currently there are

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124 emergency call centers in Iowa. This number could be decreased to 99 if each county implemented one dispatch facility. There are approximately 634 dispatchers working in Iowa, and an additional 273 law enforcement personnel that perform the duties of both dispatcher and jailer. That number would be reduced, eliminating the cost of paying salaries for duplicative dispatchers.

Dubuque and Jackson County, along with others across the state, have benefited from one dispatch center. As mentioned above, the cost per capita in Dubuque and Jackson County is much lower than counties with more than one dispatch center. If all 99 counties in the state of Iowa had only one communication center, the overall law enforcement budget cost would decrease.

Iowa has begun to address a need for improving technology within the dispatching system according to a May 2008 article by Dan Gearino in the *Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier*. Gearino's article mentions that safety officials have nearly completed an expansion of the 911 system that will allow law enforcement to trace cell phone calls. All 124 emergency call centers in Iowa have the software to enable tracking of cell phone calls and most cell phone service providers have the technology to share location information. However,

dispatch systems in Iowa cannot receive text messages. Officials are addressing the questions of how the system can be set up across the state and how it can be funded.⁵³

Conclusion

Consolidation of law enforcement and emergency response services is an effective means of coordinating communications as well as saving local taxpayer dollars. The example of Westcom Dispatch Center demonstrates that not only can communities work together and consolidate services to increase efficiency and performance, but also continue to work together to reorganize other areas of local government to better serve the taxpayers. Westcom can not only serve as a successful blueprint for emergency response consolidation, but the actions of city leaders from each of the participating entities also demonstrate that cooperation can lead to further consolidation and making local government more efficient.

“If all 99 counties in the state of Iowa had only one communication center, the overall law enforcement budget cost would decrease.”

Endnotes:

¹Ashley Hinson, "New Joint Communication Center Greenlighted," Associated Press, May 30, 2008, <<http://www.kcrg.com/news/local/19385554.html>> (May 30, 2008).

²Terry W. Koepsell and Charles M. Girard, *Small Police Agency Consolidation: Suggested Approaches*, National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, July 1979, p. ix.

³Ibid.

⁴Numerical information obtained in this paragraph was formulated through an extensive phone interview process from January through March 2008 in which all sheriff and most police agencies were contacted. The data obtained is a result from the author's phone interviews.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Kurt Thurmaier, "High-Intensity Interlocal Collaboration in Three Iowa Cities," *Public Administration Review*, December 2006, pp. 144-145.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid. p. 145.

¹¹City of West Des Moines, "Westcom (911 Dispatch)," <<http://www.wdm-ia.com/Index.aspx?page=559>> (June 3, 2008).

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Iowa League of Cities, "Cities working together to reach a common goal," <<http://www.iowaleague.org/aboutcities/CIA.aspx?id=74>> (June 3, 2008).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Thurmaier, p.145.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹In some cases, expenses under the police could be the sheriff department's. Those would show up on smaller cities who contract with the county to provide law enforcement protection. There is no way to tell from this budget form.

²²E-mail exchange with Stephen Ford, City Budget Director, Iowa Department of Management, in regard to law enforcement expenditures, April 2, 2008.

²³"Iowa County Population" State and County Quickfacts, U.S. Census Bureau, <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/19/19193.html>> (March 20, 2008).

²⁴Law Enforcement (FY 2006) expenditure information provided by Stephen Ford, City Budget Director, Iowa Department of Management.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Iowa County Population, U.S. Census Bureau.

²⁷Law Enforcement (FY 2006) expenditure information provided by Stephen Ford, City Budget Director, Iowa Department of Management.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Iowa County Population, U.S. Census Bureau.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Law Enforcement (FY 2006) expenditure information provided by Stephen Ford, City Budget Director, Iowa Department of Management.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Iowa County Population, U.S. Census Bureau.

³⁸Law Enforcement (FY 2006) expenditure information provided by Stephen Ford, City Budget Director, Iowa Department of Management.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Iowa County Population, U.S. Census Bureau.

⁴¹Law Enforcement (FY 2006) expenditure information provided by Stephen Ford, City Budget Director, Iowa Department of Management.

⁴²Iowa County Population, U.S. Census Bureau.

⁴³Law Enforcement (FY 2006) expenditure information provided by Stephen Ford, City Budget Director, Iowa Department of Management.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Author's calculations based on County Law Enforcement

Expenditure Report obtained from Stephen Ford, City Budget Director, Iowa Department of Management, April 2, 2008.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Christinia Crippes, "Police, sheriff begin sharing talks: Co-location in a joint law enforcement center would save money, help communication, officials say," *Burlington Hawkeye*, March 19, 2008, p. 1A.

⁴⁹Orlan Love, "County, Manchester OK sharing dispatch costs," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, February 10, 2008, p. 2B.

⁵⁰Pat Kinney, "Cities, counties look at sharing to cut costs," *Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier*, June 11, 2007.

⁵¹Jesse Helling, "Webster Co. Jail unable to meet the needs: Consulting group outlines two solutions for County," *Fort Dodge Messenger*, May 4, 2007, p. 1A.

⁵²Nicholas Bergin, "Police ponder new duties: F.M. council asks officers to cross-train as fill-in Firefighters," *Burlington Hawkeye*, January 30, 2008, p. 1A.

⁵³Dan Gearino, "State gets message of outdated 911 system: Official says Iowa's system can't receive text messages," *Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier*, May 16, 2007.

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