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## Middle Cities Police Chiefs: Facing Economic Challenges

**BOSTON** – *Facing the Economic Crisis: Challenges for Massachusetts Police Chiefs*, the latest white paper from Pioneer’s Middle Cities Initiative, details the extraordinary struggles that police chiefs across the state currently face. More than simply “top cops,” today’s police chiefs must serve as public safety executives who identify ways to maintain and improve public safety in the face of rapidly declining resources, increasing costs, and limited flexibility in this time of economic adversity.

The report is authored by Brenda Bond, PhD, Assistant Professor of Public Management at the Sawyer Business School, Suffolk University. Dr. Bond’s area of expertise is police management and change, and inter-organizational approaches to public safety. Co-author Gabrielle Aydnwylde is a Research Assistant at the Center for Public Management and a Master in Public Administration/Mental Health Counseling dual-degree candidate at Suffolk University.

“In the past few years, the state government has made localities bear a disproportionate burden in facing down a financial crisis,” says Jim Stergios, executive director of Pioneer Institute. “With larger cuts to non-school services, such as public safety, we need to learn from experience how best to manage through this crisis.”

“This policy paper captures the voice and experiences of several Massachusetts police chiefs as they confront the harsh economic realities facing communities today,” says Dr. Bond. “With fewer resources available, Massachusetts police chiefs have made reductions in staffing and services, but they are relentlessly working to adequately equip the men and women providing public safety services to the community. They are creatively accessing resources outside the department to meet important department and community needs. This paper describes their recent decisions and outlines options for facing the expected financial reductions of the future.”

Interviews with police chiefs in six of the 14 Middle Cities (Brockton, Fitchburg, Lawrence, Lynn, New Bedford, and Springfield) produced these findings:

- **The Police Chiefs:** Four of the six chiefs had “risen through the ranks” in their current organizations, with the remaining two having been brought in from outside the organization. Of the six, four had experience serving as the fiscal oversight officer over the course of their careers, some of those experiences preparing them for the financial crisis they experience today. Only one chief has experience of longer than 5 years in his current position.
- **The Budget Process:** As chiefs work through budget preparation and identify potential cost saving measures, they must also tackle the realities of operationalizing these measures in real-time.
- **Data-Driven Decisions:** In a time of limited resources and increased demands for efficiency and effectiveness, chiefs must use data in a variety of ways to improve public safety outcomes.

- **Other Factors:** The chiefs expressed two other concerns outside of the interview parameters: 1) how the community will perceive the reductions in personnel, a shift in priorities, and reduced participation in community events; and 2) the substantial reductions of “stabilization” or “rainy day” funds used in the past for public safety budget emergencies.
- **Cost-Cutting Strategies:** These chiefs agreed that there have been, and will continue to be, significant reductions in funds for public safety from local and state government, and that reductions and elimination of staff and services are unavoidable.
- **Resourceful Solutions:** The chiefs reported the use of management practices from the private sector, by gathering their own group of internal managers to forecast, project and reflect on the organization’s operations and deliverables. Each chief noted that they meet regularly with their staff to review and analyze a variety of data points in their decision-making.

Police chiefs in Massachusetts today must balance unrelenting public safety demands with the need to face reductions in resources. The general public may not instinctively think of local police chiefs as executive-level managers who oversee the financial and operational effectiveness of their organizations, but high expectations remain from local officials. Chiefs are determined to find new and creative, yet financially prudent ways, to deliver efficient and effective public safety services to their citizens.

View an introductory video from author Brenda Bond [here](#).



[The Middle Cities Initiative](#) focuses on Massachusetts historic industrial centers. Middle Cities are defined as older industrial cities in a state of political uncertainty due to their position between the traditional power base of greater Boston and the growing political strength of the suburbs, and transitioning between their former industrial role and newer market functions.



[Pioneer Institute](#) is an independent, non-partisan, privately funded research organization that seeks to change the intellectual climate in the Commonwealth by supporting scholarship that tests marked solutions against the conventional wisdom of more governmental involvement in Massachusetts public policy issues.