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Concealed Carry Weapon Licenses

*Sheriffs Have Implemented Their
Local Programs Inconsistently
and Sometimes Inadequately*

Background

To carry a concealed firearm in California, individuals must have a concealed carry weapon (CCW) license. A licensing authority—the county sheriff or head of a municipal police department—may issue licenses, which are generally valid for up to two years. State law allows licensing authorities to issue CCW licenses to individuals who demonstrate that they meet the four criteria of good moral character, good cause for a license, residence in the county or city within the county, and completion of training on firearm safety and permissible use. Within certain limitations, agencies that have a role in licensing applicants may recoup their costs through applicants' license fees. We reviewed the practices at the sheriffs' departments at Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego counties.

Key Findings

- Though the sheriffs' departments we reviewed have policies for evaluating CCW applicants, those policies differ and none of the departments consistently follow their policies when issuing licenses.
 - » Sacramento's definition of *good cause* was markedly different than the other counties'—it permits applicants to simply state that they want the license for self-defense or defense of their families, while the other two counties require more documentation.
 - » While all three counties did not always follow their CCW policies in issuing licenses, Los Angeles County was the most problematic—it did not follow its policies on issuing licenses for any of the 25 licenses we reviewed.
 - » Sacramento issued a far larger number of CCW licenses than did the other two counties, likely because of its *good cause* definition.
- Despite the fact that all three departments charge application processing fees for CCW licensing, the fees do not appear to cover the costs of the programs.
 - » Los Angeles and San Diego do not specifically track CCW-related expenses; however, based on our analysis, it is likely that the CCW program costs the two departments more than their receipts.
 - » Sacramento's CCW program had a deficit in each of the last three fiscal years.
- While all three departments charged fees for CCW licenses within the maximum amount allowed, Los Angeles overcharged applicants by charging three unallowable fees on top of its processing fee.

Key Recommendations

- The Legislature should clarify that licensing authorities can increase fees above the maximum if fees do not exceed their costs or the consumer price index.
- The departments should ensure the following:
 - » CCW licensing decisions align with their public licensing policies.
 - » Staff obtain enough evidence from applicants to demonstrate residency, good moral character and firearms training by creating formal CCW processing procedures, training staff, and conducting regular reviews of some of the license files.
 - » Staff appropriately renew CCW licenses and departments establish a routine supervisory review to ensure policies are followed.

Number of Files That Did Not Demonstrate That the Department Adhered to Its Policies, Procedures, or Stated Practices.

