

When you see one of my deputies out and about, you no doubt notice the uniform and a lot of gear. You might wonder, “What does all that cost?” Today, I will give you the financial lowdown.

Let’s assume a crisp November morning. The deputy leaves home in a long-sleeved shirt wearing their duty jacket. The cost of footwear, slacks, shirt, jacket, belts, and hat comes to \$881.39. I say belts because a deputy generally wears two – a regular one and a duty belt designed to carry equipment. The duty belt clips around the wearer’s waist; it is linked to the inner belt by four small rings called belt keepers. This \$881.39 price tag also includes the deputy’s badge, patches, and credentials. Aside from tactical boots (\$135.00), the campaign hat is the most expensive article. This distinctive headwear readily identifies the wearer as law enforcement, and it shields the deputy from sun and rain. Such a hat costs \$115.15 plus \$127.00 for the badge, cords, and a rainproof cover.

Earlier this year, I implemented a significant uniform change. Deputies now wear an outer carrier vest over their uniform shirts; this vest contains custom fit bullet-resistant panels. Additionally, it allows deputies to remove some gear from their duty belt, and carry it in the vest pockets. Deputies used to wear this protection under their shirts. This compressed the wearer’s ribcage, and it did not expand or contract as the deputy changed position. Moreover, all gear needed to hang on the deputy’s belt, which made it difficult to sit comfortably while driving or maintain appropriate posture while standing. The new outer carriers result in less hip and back pain; they help a deputy stay cooler; and they minimize fatigue caused by the physical compression of the older style vests. The protective panels cost \$670.00, the outer carrier is \$75.00, and the deputy’s name plate is \$20.00. Grants help pay for this protection. The cost thus far for our deputy’s attire is \$1626.39.

A deputy carries certain tools at all times. Some are small and relatively inexpensive, such as a pouch for latex gloves, a set of handcuffs, and a handcuff carrier. A can of pepper spray and a holder adds another \$45.00. The tally for these smaller items is \$120.00. Each deputy also has items for occasional use: a rain jacket, a traffic safety vest, and a tie for formal duties such as funeral escorts. Combined, these cost \$181.53.

Body cameras are also new to our agency this year; we started using Motorola Remote Speaker Mic Cameras in June. These combine a high resolution camera, a microphone, and a speaker into a compact device placed on the deputy’s chest. We were slow and deliberate in approaching this new frontier in law enforcement. Such cameras are a significant investment; we therefore gathered feedback from other agencies about various models before making our selection. The \$880.00 price tag includes the camera, the battery, and a cord to tether the device to our radios.

Speaking of radios, it may surprise some to learn the radio is our most vital piece of equipment. The ability to communicate immediately without “dead zones” is essential for safety and service. A deputy must be able to hear calls as they are dispatched, communicate with each other, ask for help, or radio for additional resources ALL of the time, no matter where they are in the county. My deputies carry Motorola APX 8000 radios; each costs \$6,831.25 including a service contract. Lieutenant Whitehurst works with our radio vendor to negotiate the best price. He frequently tells me, “It is not a radio. It is a computer you talk on,” and he is right. The technology in these things is amazing, lifesaving, and expensive.

All deputies carry a Glock .40 semi-automatic handgun. With a holster, ammunition, and magazines this weapon costs \$612.00. If certified, a deputy also carries a Taser, a conducted electrical weapon, providing the option to subdue someone in a dangerous situation using less-than-lethal force. Tasers are \$1400, plus another \$30.00 for the holder.

Returning to our initial question about cost, a deputy leaves home with \$11,681.17 in clothing and equipment. Almost all of this is required by the North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission for a certified deputy; every penny helps deliver service and reduce risk. The deputy then climbs into a patrol vehicle. For the lowdown on the cost of that, tune in next month!