U.S. Justice Department Reports on Trends in Women in Federal Law Enforcement

By Lynn Langton, Statistician

Bureau of Justice Statistics

Among the 53 federal agencies that were consistently organized and consistently provided gender data, the percentage of female sworn officers increased by about 1% over 10 years, from 14% in 1998 to just over 15% in 2008. Between 1998 and 2008, the average increase in the percentage of female officers in federal agencies was just over one-tenth of one percent per year.

In 2008, an average of 20% of the sworn law enforcement officers working for all federal agencies in the United States and the territories were women.

(WIFLE Editors Note: There were five major federal law enforcement agencies that did not report statistics to BJS for the 2008 study, thereby skewing the numbers upward and only accounting for a total of 90,000 federal law enforcement officers. Of the 90,000 sworn officers, BOP employees represent 17,000 and the AOUSC account for 4,800 sworn personnel.

The total sworn federal officer population in 2004 was 105,000 federal officers. Four of the five missing agencies reported an estimated 11,000 sworn officers in 2004.

The missing data is crucial to accurately measure the numbers of women in federal law enforcement. WIFLE is working closely with BJS to gain a more accurate accounting of the numbers. Even without statistics from these five agencies, WIFLE is concerned that the report indicates the total increase of female sworn officers among the consistently reporting agencies was only 1% in the past 10 years. However, WIFLE is encouraged that some federal agencies did show an increase, particularly the Inspector General agencies and certainly with the IRS, USPIS, FBI, U.S. Park Police and U.S. Capitol Police. See Table 1 of BJS report for your agency’s representation.)

Federal agencies in 2008 employed a greater percentage of female officers than state (6%) and local (12%) police departments and sheriffs’ offices (12%) reported in 2007.

The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) released these findings in June in a report titled, Women in Law Enforcement, 1987-2008. The BJS report, available at http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/wle8708.pdf, presents information from several BJS data sources on trends in the number and percent of sworn law enforcement officers who are women across federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. Data on female officers in federal agencies was collected through the BJS Census of Federal Law Enforcement Officers (FLEO),

The most recent 2008 FLEO data collection revealed that larger federal agencies generally employ a greater percentage of sworn officers who are women than smaller agencies. Federal agencies with over 2,000 sworn officers were comprised of more than double the percent of female officers (21%) than agencies with fewer than 100 officers (10%). Offices of Inspector General (IG) had the highest percent (24%) of female officers compared to all other federal agencies. In 2008, over 700 of the approximately 3,000 sworn IG’s were women. Outside of the IG offices, the largest employers of female officers in 2008 were the Federal Bureau of Investigation (about 2,400 female officers), Bureau of Prisons (about 2,300), Administrative Office of the US Courts (about 2,200), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (about 1,100).

While there was substantial variation in agency-specific trends in the number and percent of female officers from 1998 to 2008, when federal agencies were categorized by size and further examined, interesting growth trends emerged. Among the seven largest reporting agencies – those with more than 2,000 sworn officers – the number of female officers increased by about 1,800 from 1998 to 2008, approximately 22% of the total growth in sworn officers. Large agencies with between 500 and 2,000 sworn officers employed a median of about 110 female officers in 2008, compared to a median of 90 officers in 1998. Female officers accounted for 28% of the growth in total sworn officers in large agencies from 1998 to 2008. Medium-sized agencies with between 100 and 500 sworn officers increased in size by about 200 sworn officers during the 10-year period and over 70 (37%) of those additional officers were women. Finally, among the smallest agencies with fewer than 100 sworn officers, approximately 40 sworn officers were added from 1998 to 2008 and about 20% (8 officers) were women.

Overall, the review of 10-year trends in the number and percent of sworn officers who are women suggests a pattern of general growth from 1998 to 2008. Future studies will be needed to examine the extent to which this trend will continue. For more information about the BJS or the Census of Federal Law Enforcement Officers, please visit the BJS website at http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/ or email questions to askbjs@usdoj.gov.