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More than 500 cops have the coronavirus, so N.J. making it easier for retired officers to return

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More than 500 New Jersey cops have tested positive for the coronavirus and thousands more are quarantined, prompting state leaders develop new ways for departments to cope with short staffing.

Statewide, 562 police officers have tested positive and another 2,941 are quarantined, according to Col. Patrick Callahan, acting superintendent of the State Police. The number of COVID-19 cases within law enforcement was an increase from almost 400 a week ago, although the number of quarantined officers dipped slightly.

“They’re putting themselves in harm’s way, and they’re doing this at less than capacity,” Gov. Phil Murphy said Tuesday at his daily coronavirus press briefing in Trenton.

A Newark cop, a Hudson County jail correctional officer and a canine handler who worked at Newark’s airport died last week.

Callahan said 111 officers currently out of commission will be back to work within 48 hours.

The numbers came a day after state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal advised departments about short staffing.

In a letter, Grewal reiterated that struggling agencies can both rely on other towns and hire “special officers,” which are sometimes retired cops stationed at schools.

He also said limits on how many special officers a town may hire, and how many hours they’re allowed to work don’t apply during the public health emergency. Towns may also expand a special officer’s duties more quickly, Grewal wrote, because the Police Training Commission was waiving some training requirements.

The commission had already granted 200 waivers, he said.

Retired officers who can’t resume patrol may still do administrative work, Grewal wrote, as can police recruits. Police training has largely stopped in the state.

A retiree’s pension won’t be affected, according to an executive order Murphy signed Monday, and new state hires will be immediately enrolled in the State Health Benefits Plan.

Grewal's office also announced that it would train military police and National Guard security in case they were ever needed for law enforcement.

The pandemic was creating "a perfect storm when it comes to manpower," Grewal said in a statement.

"Not since 9/11 or Superstorm Sandy have law enforcement across our state experienced such strain, and some of the steps we are outlining to address the manpower challenges mirror the steps we took after those events."

There are about 36,000 full-time police officers in New Jersey.

The state, which has about 9 million residents, now has at least 44,416 cases and at least 1,232 deaths, officials announced Tuesday.

NJ Advance Media staff writer Brent Johnson contributed to this report.