

# County commissioners hire 3 school resource officers

by Renée Shreve  
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — The Garrett County commissioners have approved the hiring of three new school resource officers for the sheriff's office.

"This is to keep in compliance with Senate Bill 1265, known as the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018," Commissioner Paul Edwards said during the commissioners' public meeting Tuesday afternoon at the courthouse.

The legislation was approved by the Maryland General Assembly this year in response to a school shooting in March at Great Mills High School in St. Mary's County and other

school shootings across the country.

"We currently have three SROs in our buildings," Edwards said. "This will authorize the sheriff's office to hire three more, which was requested by Sheriff Corley and agreed to by the superintendent of schools."

Edwards said SRO training takes time — almost one year. He noted, though, one of the new hires already has law enforcement and SRO training.

"I think the plan is to have him in place relatively quickly," Edwards said about the trained officer.

The Garrett County Sheriff's Office School Resource Officer program started in the

2013–14 school year.

"This is another move on behalf of us, in conjunction with the sheriff's department and public schools, to do our part to try to keep our kids safe," Edwards said.

In addition to the SRO announcement, the commissioners' meeting included a public hearing on a Community Development Block Grant application.

Garrett County Community Action is seeking \$420,000 through the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development's 2019 Homeless Initiative.

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Staff photo by Renée Shreve

**Gregan Crawford, vice president of strategic initiatives, provides an overview of Community Action's plan to provide transitional housing for homeless men. The agency is seeking \$420,000 from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. A hearing on the grant application was held Tuesday afternoon during the county commissioners' public meeting.**

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"The state of Maryland's allocation for federal funds for this homeless initiative is estimated to be \$2 million," said Cindy Sharon, Garrett County Department of Economic Development project manager. "Eligible activities include construction and renovation of shelters; acquisition, construction or renovation of houses to provide additional affordable housing options; and operating costs if there is a new and quantifiable increase in the level of services."

The Dove Center received a \$609,000 grant through last year's initiative to provide transitional housing for women and children. Community Action's goal is to help men.

"Currently, there is no capacity to serve homeless men in Garrett County," said Gregan Crawford, Community Action's vice president of strategic initiatives.

He said the issue of homelessness started to emerge from local opioid town hall planning meetings.

"It was a recurring theme," Crawford said. "We pulled together a subgroup to explore the idea of what we could do."

He explained that Community Action would use the grant to start a transitional home for up to four men who are exiting the local jail. In addition, the home would be a resource for those exiting inpatient recovery program.

"It would be staffed 24/7/365 by Community Action," Crawford said.

He stressed there would be a strict vetting process

for potential residents, who would need to demonstrate a readiness to be accepted. In addition, the residents would have to abide by house rules, perform household duties and follow other established protocols.

Community Action already has a four-bedroom house in mind for the new project.

"It's a property that we own and could easily convert for this use," Crawford said.

He indicated such groups as the Garrett County Health Department, State's Attorney's Office, Garrett County Department of Social Services, Dove Center and Mountaintop Ministerial Association have been involved in "conversations" about the initiative.

"There is about a 75 percent recidivism rate in the county jail," Crawford said. "We see this as an interventional opportunity."

Counseling, transportation to appointments, job training and other services would be available to the residents, he indicated.

Crawford noted the grant does not require matching funding.

The CDBG application will be available for public review Aug. 27–31 between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. in Room 208 at the courthouse in Oakland, Sharon said.