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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

# NEWS RELEASE

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[www.sgeu.org](http://www.sgeu.org)

1011 Devonshire Drive North  
Regina, SK S4X 2X4  
(p) 522.8571  
1.800.667.5221  
(f) 352.1969

1114-22nd Street West  
Saskatoon, SK S7M 0S5  
(p) 652.1811  
1.800.667.9791  
(f) 664.7134

33-11th Street West  
Prince Albert, SK S6V 3A8  
(p) 764.5201  
1.800.667.9355  
(f) 763.4763

## Deputy Sheriff job cuts ill-informed and unjustified

The provincial government is misinforming the public, and trying to downplay the risks involved in cutting Deputy Sheriff positions, according to SGEU.

Government is cutting the jobs of 12 workers in courthouses around Saskatchewan.\* In recent media reports, Justice Minister Gord Wyant has claimed those staff were unarmed, and that replacing them with unarmed private contractors will not reduce courthouse security.

According to information provided to SGEU, this is incorrect. While the positions cut from the Weyburn courthouse are unarmed administrative jobs, the other nine positions being terminated belong to Deputy Sheriffs of Court Security. These Deputy Sheriffs are highly-trained, carefully-screened individuals who carry firearms as a job requirement.

The provincial government's Competency Profile for the Deputy Sheriff of Court Security position specifies that "Deputy Sheriffs are required to carry firearms for all duties not directly involving contact with prisoners ... The ability to use a firearm is a required qualification of the position as Deputy Sheriffs have the responsibility to intervene in situations where lethal force is required to protect life."

"Deputy Sheriffs of Court Security are trained, screened, and equipped to very high standards. They can ensure that any safety threat at a courthouse is dealt with quickly and effectively," says SGEU President Bob Bymoer. "To suggest that their work can be contracted out to the lowest bidder, without court security being compromised, shows a lack of understanding of the vital work these sheriffs do."

The need for well-trained and well-equipped court security staff has long been recognized by the Ministry of Justice. As the Regina *Leader-Post* reported in December 2015, individuals regularly attempt to enter Saskatchewan courthouses with knives and other weapons. Some have attempted to enter courthouses while carrying replica firearms.

SGEU also questions the wisdom of turning security work over to contractors to save money, when government isn't even aware of what the costs will be. Wyant told the *Leader-Post* recently that he didn't "want to give any general numbers, but [the savings] wouldn't be certainly in the millions dollars."

“The Ministry of Justice is making a decision that will definitely reduce security in our courts, based on the assumption that it will save some small, unknown amount of money,” says Bymoer. “There is a definite cost, in terms of safety, to these cuts. How can they decide the savings justify the risk when they don’t even have the numbers available, and don’t appear to understand the job they’re replacing?”

\*In SGEU’s Nov. 2 media release, the number of job losses was given as 14 Deputy Sheriffs. This has since been clarified to 12 jobs lost, including three administrative positions.

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For more information contact:

Susan Dusel  
Communications Officer, SGEU  
306-775-7249

Or

Bob Bymoer  
President, SGEU  
306-539-0030