

BREAKING NEWS

Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb discusses citizen posse in response to protests



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When Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb decided to form a civilian posse, he had two specific groups in mind: residents frustrated with the protests of law enforcement and those looking to improve policing.

The Pinal County Sheriff's Office announced on Wednesday it will form a civilian posse to assist deputies with law enforcement, especially during emergencies.

The move to reinforce the ranks of the Pinal County Sheriff's Office comes when protests against police have swept through Arizona and across the country, drawing increased scrutiny toward police shootings and use of deadly force.

Lamb on Friday spoke with The Arizona Republic on why he started a posse.

"First and foremost, all agencies right now are looking at ways to improve community relationships," Lamb said. "I think that's been a hot topic, especially with defunding the police."

Lamb said his office already has received more than 400 emails about the posse, and the agency expects more interest.

"I think that shows that already, this program is headed towards success," he said.

However, there have been no reports of unpeaceful protests in Pinal County. In fact, there have been just a handful of Black Lives Matter protests across the county with no rioting or arrests.

Still, Lamb said a posse is needed

to provide an outlet to make everyone feel more comfortable.

"I can call on command any of the inhabitants of the county to assist me in completing my mission, hence the posse," Lamb said. "And we wanted to be prepared should anything bad come."

Maricopa County Sheriff Paul Penzone oversees a similar civilian posse that has a controversial past. One posse member was accused of holding people at gunpoint under the guise of being a sworn officer in 2017. In 2019, an internal audit of the posse found that less than 2% of members were qualified to be in the program.

Pinal County already has a patrol posse that is armed and assists deputies by booking people in jail. Other police agencies have a similar citizen's academy.

"It's just an opportunity to get them to more education," Lamb said. "They can hopefully squelch some of the frustration that they're feeling right now in these uncertain times and at the same time get some training."

Posse members will need to complete a four-hour training session that the sheriff's office said will teach constitutional law, search and seizure, the use of deadly force and other police tactics. Applicants will have to pass a minimal background check and will receive a certificate and ID.

Lamb added that he doesn't care if training attendees have a felony, he just wants to make sure people have no outstanding warrants.

"Everyone has the right to learn more and be educated," Lamb said.

However, he added felons will not be able to join the posse.

Lamb pointed to Portland, Oregon, where

residents have been taking to the streets for nearly two months to call for police reform following the death of George Floyd as a reason for the posse as arrests and the use of less-lethal ammunition have been used.

"We have a lot of people chime in on things they don't have any clue about," Lamb said. "I see so many people talking about police work, and they don't have the slightest clue about what it's like to go out and do the job, yet they're out there running their mouth about it."

Lamb added that he thinks cities have become completely overrun, so it's his job to suppress riots and insurrections to avoid situations like Portland.

"I think we've got to do a better job in America of staying in our lanes," Lamb said. "If you don't like how police are then come be a cop and help us change it."

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