

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28TH, 2025

THE BADGER PROJECT



Nonpartisan, nonprofit, investigative journalism in Wisconsin

INVESTIGATIONS

Four officers fired, forced out from policing back on job in NW Wisconsin

ON [OCTOBER 17, 2023](#) • ([1 COMMENT](#))

The state DOJ tracks police who leave employment with law enforcement agencies under negative circumstances. The Badger Project found these officers analyzing that database.

Never miss one of our stories!

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Your email address here...

Sign Up

Unsubscribe at any time.

optinmonster



Clockwise from top left, Hurley Police Officer Noah Bunt, UW-Superior Police Officer Damen Rankin, Bayfield County Sheriff’s Deputy Brittany Letica and Price County Sheriff’s Deputy Jay Thums.

By Peter Cameron, THE BADGER PROJECT

Wandering officers, problem police who get fired or forced out from one department, then go work at another, are a problem across the country.

To help prevent these officers from bouncing between Wisconsin Department of Justice maintains a database enforcement agencies can flag officers they fired or Police and sheriff’s departments can check the database considering hiring a new officer.

Also, the Wisconsin State Legislature passed a law in (<https://thebadgerproject.org/2022/02/16/legislature-quietly-and-unintentionally-passed-legislation-intended-to-improve-policing-hiring-transparency-red>) that requires law enforcement agencies to maintain a work history

Never miss one of our stories!

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Unsubscribe at any time.

optinmonster

file for each employee and creates a procedure for law enforcement agencies, jails, and juvenile detention facilities to receive and review an officer candidate’s file from previous employers.

Previously, some law enforcement agencies had agreed to seal a fired officer’s personnel file in exchange for leaving quietly, so potential law enforcement employers couldn’t see why the officer had left their last job.

Nearly 300 officers currently employed in the state were fired or forced out from previous jobs in law enforcement, according to data from the state DOJ that The Badger Project obtained through a records request.

The number of total law enforcement officers in Wisconsin has fallen to a record low, according to data from the state DOJ, as agencies struggle to find and retain good candidates. That may be pushing chiefs and sheriffs to lower their standards to fill spots, experts say.

The state of Wisconsin currently has about 15,000 certified active law enforcement officers, including jail officers, according to the state DOJ, so fired or forced-out officers make up nearly 2 percent of the total.



Badger Stripes

Deep coverage of Wisconsin sports

Some of those flagged officers were simply novices who didn't perform at an acceptable level during their initial probationary period, when the bar to fire them is very low, experts say. Sometimes the bosses simply don't like a new hire and they're gone. Or the officer couldn't handle the high pressure of working in a busy urban area, and do better in slower-paced police agencies, says Steve Wagner, a longtime police officer who is now an administrator for the state DOJ.

Never miss one of our stories!

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Unsubscribe at any time.



But others lost their jobs for more negative reasons.

The Badger Project looked at the state DOJ's database and found four officers working in northwestern Wisconsin who had been fired or forced out from another law enforcement agency. A fifth officer was forced out from a police department in the area and moved one county over to continue work in law enforcement.

All the officers were given the chance to comment for this story. Those who provided them were included.

Noah Bunt

- Shawano Police Department – May 2006 to November 2018
- Resigned prior to completion of internal investigation
- Now employed by Hurley Police Department

Bunt was accused of having a sexual relationship with another officer's wife, and of communicating with her in a "sexual nature" while on duty with the Shawano Police Department, according to text messages collected from their phones.

Bunt was placed on administrative leave and resigned before the investigation concluded.

The Hurley Police Department hired Bunt on Nov. 30, 2018, 11 days after his last official day at the Shawano Police Department.

Hurley Police Chief Chris Colassaco and Bunt did not respond to messages seeking comment.

Brittany Letica

- Superior Police Department – January 2021 until
- Resigned in lieu of termination
- Now employed by Bayfield County Sheriff's Department

Letica "was released from probation" from the Superior Police Department because she was not meeting the standards of the department, said Assistant Police Chief John Kiel.

Never miss one of our stories!

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Unsubscribe at any time.

optinmonster

In an email to The Badger Project, Letica said she was “set up to fail from the beginning without any help from the department.”

“I was not treated fairly at this department and I realized, is this what I really want anyway?” she continued.

The Bayfield County Sheriff’s Office hired Letica in October 2022 as a full-time sheriff’s deputy.

Bayfield County Sheriff Tony Williams noted that Letica was hired before he became sheriff, but said she has “been doing great for us.”

The administration was aware of her exit from the Superior Police Department, and an “extensive background check” is conducted by the department’s investigator lieutenant before anyone is hired, Williams said.

“Deputy Letica is performing outstanding,” Williams said. “Deputy Letica is very professional and is fair with people, levelheaded and quick to respond to calls.”

Damen Rankin

- Superior Police Department – April 2018 to January 2019
- Resigned in lieu of termination
- Now employed by UW-Superior Police Department

Rankin briefly worked for the Superior Police Department but “was released from probation because he was not meeting the standards of our department,” said Assistant Police Chief John Kiel.

The UW-Superior Police Department hired him to the staff in November 2020.

Jordan Milan, a spokesperson for UW-Superior, said he is unable to discuss “information gathered through the internal process,” but noted all applicants go through the same application review, interviews and reference checks.

“We conduct extensive background checks on all police officers, including physical and psychological assessments,” Milan said.

Never miss one of our stories!

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Unsubscribe at any time.

optinmonster

“Officer Rankin has met job performance expectations during his employment at UW-Superior,” she added.

Jay Thums

- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources – May 2016 to February 2022
- Terminated for Cause
- Currently employed by the Price County Sheriff’s Office

Thums started working for both the Wisconsin DNR and the Price County Sheriff’s Office in 2016. In February 2022, he was terminated from his limited-term position as a conservation officer with the DNR due to “failure to follow supervisory directive related to the use and parking of the department squad (vehicle) that you are assigned to use during your shift,” according to a letter he received from his supervisor that The Badger Project obtained through a records request.

Thums told The Badger Project in an email that the DNR supervisor had allowed several full-time officers to take their squad vehicles home, an exception to the department’s rules. He also said supervisors told him they terminated him because he continued to take his squad home after a warning, but Thums said he never received a warning.

Thums remains employed as a deputy with the Price County Sheriff’s Office.

About Thums, Sheriff Brian Schmidt said “his performance is good. He’s doing what we ask and doing his job. What’s expected of him.”

Never miss one of our stories!

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Unsubscribe at any time.

optinmonster

Grant Schueneman n



- Park Falls Police Department in Price County – December 2017 to March 2020
- Resigned in lieu of termination
- Currently employed full-time by the Three Lakes Police Department in Oneida County and part-time by the WisDOTourism State Fair Park Police

Schuenemann, who is now working outside Price County, did not complete his probationary period with the Park Falls Police Department. In records obtained from the department in a records request, Schuenemann was reprimanded for not completing some reports, not completing reports in a timely manner, submitting reports with misspellings and other errors, missing a scheduled training session, and misusing department property.

Regarding the property issues, he lost control of a patrol vehicle and it slid off the road, taking him out of service until it could be towed back onto the road, according to the records, which note he may have been violating the law by driving too fast for conditions. He also closed an automatic garage door on a vehicle.

The Three Lakes Police Department hired him in November 2019.

“The Three Lakes Police Department is pleased that Grant Schuenemann has chosen to join the Three Lakes Police Department and look forward to his opportunity to join the Three Lakes community,” Police Chief Scott Lea said in an email. The Badger Project.

Never miss one of our stories!

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Unsubscribe at any time.

optimmonster

“Applicants that choose to apply to our agency are evaluated and vetted through the hiring process and determining the reasons for an officer leaving an agency are evaluated as part of the process,” the chief added.

In response to a question about Schuenemann’s job performance, Lea said his department “does not comment on employees.”

This story was funded in part by the Wirtanen Fund at the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation.

The Badger Project is a nonpartisan, citizen-supported journalism nonprofit in Wisconsin.

Never miss one of our stories!

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Unsubscribe at any time.

optinmonster

 1 reply »

Not meeting the standards of our department. That's a little vague.

Reply

★ Loading...

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. [Learn how your comment data is processed.](https://akismet.com/privacy/) (<https://akismet.com/privacy/>)

 SHARE

Never miss one of our stories!

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Unsubscribe at any time.

optinmonster