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## Editorial: State money must mean more police on streets

### **Lawrence is in the middle of a public safety crisis.**

The city has lost nearly one-third of its police force to layoffs and budget cuts. The city is under siege from violence and mayhem associated with its out-of-control nightlife. There have been three murders this year — two in the past week. A near-riot one recent weekend left several people beaten in the streets, including a woman who had her face slashed with a razor.

Now comes news that Lawrence is slated to receive an unexpected \$1.2 million in additional state aid this fall. Yet rather than use this money to rehire some police and give law enforcement a fighting chance against this wave of violence, city officials plan to use the money to pay for past snow removal bills and legal settlements.

Oh, and maybe some police overtime.

There are no plans to use the \$1.2 million to restore police positions, said Robert Nunes, the city's state-appointed financial overseer.

"This is the mayor's budget which the City Council approves," Nunes said.

Are they out of their minds?

Public safety is the primary duty of any municipal government. The first use of the additional state aid should be to provide enough police to restore public order. Anything else is irresponsible.

State Rep. Paul Adams, R-Andover, understands that. Adams, who represents a portion of Lawrence, spoke out recently to say he wants to see the state money used to hire 17 to 20 more police officers to regain control over the city.

"This is huge. We need to get those police officers back. ... There is no excuse," Adams said.

It is refreshing to hear a local elected official express an opinion on the violence plaguing Lawrence and offer proposals to address it. Others — Mayor William Lantigua, some members of the City Council and the rest of Lawrence's legislative delegation — have been silent while the city they were elected to serve tears itself apart.

The no-comment contingent in Lawrence's legislative delegation roused itself from its slumber long enough to dump cold water on Adams' recommendation.

These leaders, who previously have been willing to spend millions on whatever fly-brained scheme flits into view, suddenly have been transformed into fiscal conservatives. They caution that the \$1.2 million from the state is one-time money. Hiring police now will leave Lawrence on the hook when the extra money is gone.

"It's very easy for Rep. Adams to tell the city what to do. ... The City Council, mayor and overseer have a handle on the budget," said state Rep. David Torrisi, D-North Andover.

If the mayor, the council and the overseer truly had a handle on Lawrence's budget, there would be enough police on the streets to quell the mayhem that occurs when the nightclubs close for the night.

Clearly, that isn't the case right now. The added state aid gives Lawrence leaders an opportunity to protect better the lives and property of city residents.

Failing to seize that opportunity is an abdication of their primary responsibility to those they were elected to serve.

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