

Luzerne County Sheriff's Office Press Release

By Bob Kalinowski , Staff Writer [Citizen's Voice](#)

Luzerne County Sheriff Michael Savokinas wants area legislators to support a bill that would give his deputies broader investigative and arrest powers.

Right now, they hold some powers in crimes they witness, but are limited in scenarios that might require some extra legwork.

"Some crimes we can't investigate because we didn't see it," Savokinas said.

Savokinas said his roster is filled with people who also serve as municipal police officers. But when they come to work at the sheriff's office, their powers are limited, he said.

Several court rulings have sparked confusion about the powers of sheriff's deputies and initiated the current call to increase their powers.

The state Supreme Court ruled sheriffs are not investigative or law enforcement officers under the Pennsylvania Wiretapping Act, which Savokinas said hurts the ability of the sheriff's office to conduct drug investigations.

Several months ago, the court ruled the sheriffs only have arrest authority for breaches of the peace and felonies committed in their presence.

Following the ruling, the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office removed sheriff's deputies from its drug task forces across the state.

The Pennsylvania Sheriff's Association wants the decision put in the hands of legislators instead of the courts.

"This will completely define our powers once and for all," Savokinas said.

There are 2,300 sheriff's deputies in Pennsylvania. The proposal, House Bill 466, is touted as a necessary tool to help fight crime, especially in rural areas.

Outside the sheriffs union, there has not been much public support for the law. The Pennsylvania State Police Troopers Association and the state Fraternal Order of Police are against the bill.

Currently, the main duties of the sheriff's department is courtroom security, prisoner transport, execution of warrants, real estate processing, administering protection from abuse orders and issuing gun permits.

Savokinas, a local police officer before becoming sheriff, said he can't understand why the troopers and municipal police are against the extra help they would receive.

"It could help our communities. In no way could it hurt. We are so busy doing our own work, I'm not looking to go into a town and say, 'We're taking over your police work.'"