



City of Tampa

Jane Castor, Mayor

Tampa Police Department

Lee Bercaw

Chief of Police

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Mayor Jane Castor, Tampa City Council, Officers, Professional Staff, and Our Community:

After more than 30 years of service with the Tampa Police Department, including the last three and a half years as Chief of Police, it is with deep gratitude and a full heart that I announce my retirement, effective August 6, 2026.

This department has been my life's work. I grew up here, from a young officer learning the streets of Tampa to having the privilege of leading the finest police department in the nation. Leaving this organization is the hardest decision of my career.

However, I have been afforded a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to continue serving the profession as an Associate Professor of Instruction at the University of South Florida's College of Behavioral and Community Sciences, Department of Criminology, where I will help instruct and coordinate the Master of Arts in Criminal Justice Administration program. Teaching, mentoring, and developing future leaders have always been among the most rewarding parts of my career, and I look forward to helping shape the next generation of criminal justice professionals through research, experience, and with integrity.

Serving as Chief of Police under Mayor Jane Castor's leadership has been one of the greatest honors of my career. Her support made our progress possible. She believes in our vision, encourages innovation, and champions investments in training, technology, officer wellness, and community-based programs. Because of her leadership, we moved forward with purpose, confidence, and the resources needed to succeed, helping make Tampa one of the safest major cities in America.

Together, we grew this department alongside a prosperous, growing city, adding more than 40 sworn positions. We are projected to be fully staffed by early this fall and project a double-digit over-hire before the end of the year, helping to ensure a strong foundation for public safety well into the future. I am equally grateful to the Tampa City Council for your trust, partnership, and support of our officers and our mission.

I could not be more proud of what the men and women of this department have accomplished during my tenure as chief. We did not simply reduce crime; we

demonstrated what effective, modern policing can look like. Through a disciplined focus on community-oriented policing, data-driven strategies, and proactive engagement, we achieved historic reductions across all major crime categories, including extraordinary declines in violent crime and homicides, nearly doubling the national average for homicide reduction.

At the same time, we strengthened community trust, increased public satisfaction, reduced use of force, and saw measurable increases in de-escalation. Those outcomes reflect more than strategy; they reflect a culture of professionalism, restraint, accountability, and respect.

We also made deliberate investments in people - both inside and outside this organization. Through our many community policing principles, such as the Police Athletic League (PAL) and Midnight Basketball, we created meaningful opportunities for young people to connect with officers, build trust, and see a different path forward. These are not simply programs; they are relationships that are changing lives and strengthening our community.

Within the department, we focused on ensuring our officers had the tools, training, and support needed to succeed. We enhanced safety equipment, including rifle-rated body armor plating, expanded access to ballistic shields, and placed AEDs in all patrol vehicles. We are also transitioning to the latest generation of Glock handguns, equipped with enhanced safety features to ensure our officers have the best and safest equipment available.

We modernized technology and expanded training in meaningful ways, including immersive virtual reality training, scenario-based instruction, and enhanced de-escalation and communication principles. We strengthened officer wellness and peer support initiatives, recognizing that taking care of our people is essential to serving our community effectively.

What makes me extremely proud is the leadership we have developed throughout this department. Together, we built not only a strong police department, but a culture rooted in professionalism, integrity, innovation, and service. We are supported by an exceptional executive team and a deep bench of ethical, capable, and forward-thinking leaders who are committed to our officers, our community, and the future of this organization. Because of them, I have complete confidence that the Tampa Police Department will continue to grow stronger, build upon this foundation, and serve our community with excellence for years to come. I would proudly support any one of them to lead this organization forward.

The success of the Tampa Police Department has been recognized locally, statewide, and nationally. Those recognitions belong to our officers and professional staff. They are the ones who show up every day, do the job the right way, and represent this profession and this city with integrity.

To our officers and professional staff: Thank you. You are the reason Tampa is safer today and why this department is so respected. It has been the privilege of my life to serve alongside you.

To our community: Thank you for your trust, support, and partnership. We are safer because of what we have built together.

I firmly believe the future of policing depends on strong leadership - leaders grounded in research, committed to their communities, guided by integrity, and focused on building trust. I look forward to continuing to serve in that capacity. I leave my current role with confidence. This department is strong. The foundation is solid. The people are exceptional. And the future is bright.

It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve the City of Tampa. I am proud of what we have accomplished together and grateful beyond words for the opportunity.

With gratitude,



Lee Bercaw
Chief of Police