

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing

Listening Session: Training and Education

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Commissioner Ramsey, Professor Robinson, Director Davis, distinguished members of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, it is an honor to be with you today. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. Most importantly, thank you for your valuable service on this important Task Force.

My name is Cheryl May. I am Director of the Criminal Justice Institute (CJI) and National Center for Rural Law Enforcement (NCRLE). We are one of 18 campuses under the University of Arkansas System. Since 1994 we have provided advanced and specialized training and educational opportunities for law enforcement professionals in agencies of all sizes in Arkansas and non-metropolitan police nationally. Our goal is to enhance the proficiency and professionalism of police through training, education, resources and collaborative partnerships.

During my 35 year career as a forensic professional and my 20 years as a police trainer, I have worked closely with law enforcement professionals who go to work every day prepared and willing to risk their lives to save a complete stranger. Through these interactions I have gained incredible respect and admiration for the men and women of all ranks that are dedicated and committed to strengthening and ensuring the safety of and high quality of life for their community.

Utilizing classroom-based, online and practical hands-on oriented programs, CJI trains and educates law enforcement professionals in the general topical areas of leadership, supervision and management, crime scene and death investigation, computer technology, professional development, drug investigation, and school, traffic, and officer safety. CJI's Rural Executive Management Institute (REMI) is one of a few programs in the country to provide needed leadership training to law enforcement executives serving non-metropolitan communities. Rural communities in 48 states and 2 U.S. Territories have benefitted from the leadership training provided by REMI. Through a partnership with 22 institutions of higher education in Arkansas, select CJI practitioner-focused courses are combined with general education courses such as English, Speech, Business, Psychology, and Sociology to provide a unique opportunity for law enforcement professionals to enhance their proficiency while also achieving educational goals. In doing so, these officers gain critical technical, supervisory, policing and leadership

skills while also expanding their world view and enhancing interpersonal communication and critical thinking skills.

Importance of In-Service Training

Education and training at the academy, in-service and leadership levels are critically and equally important in enhancing the ability of law enforcement agencies to professionally and safely meet the ever changing and unique needs of the communities they serve and protect. Much of the testimony you have heard in previous listening sessions has pointed to the importance of training in improving police and community interactions through the implementation of policies and new technology. Failure to adequately train can result in higher crime rates, poor department morale, poor or inadequate services to the community, terminations, and fiscal liability for the department and /or city or county. While state and local academies across this country are important in preparing new recruits for their roles and responsibilities, the curricula tend to be constrained by the inherent need to focus on the fundamentals of law enforcement and officer safety. The inability of recruits from major and non-metropolitan departments to be away from their agencies for an unlimited amount of time further complicates the ability of academies to cover many additional topics in-depth. Longer academy sessions create great challenges for all departments, particularly during difficult economic times, and are an especially difficult routine challenge for agencies serving non-metropolitan communities.

In-service training supplements academy training and is critical in providing the non-recruit officer, deputy, supervisor, or leader the opportunity to more effectively implement new technology, best practices and departmental policies, enhance their level of proficiency and professionalism and provide opportunities for professional growth. All of which enhance the ability of departments to professionally meet the safety and service needs of their communities.

Expanded training in effective written and verbal communication skills, cultural competence, conflict resolution, social intelligence, ethics, community policing concepts and strategies, and emerging community issues such as working with the mentally ill and others can assist non-recruit personnel in developing and sharpening skills to enhance interpersonal and professional interactions with individuals within their department and communities. Unfortunately, access to programs such as these is not mandatory and may be limited based on the priorities of their supervisor, law enforcement executive, mayor or county quorum, which may be dictated by funding and staffing considerations.

In-service and leadership training for frontline and mid-level supervisors, including FTOs, is critically important in helping to shape the culture of the department. Supervisors and FTOs are not only responsible for ensuring services are delivered effectively, but they also set the

tone with the officers/deputies they mentor, coach, and evaluate. Basic supervision skills coupled with effective written and verbal communication, ethics, interpersonal and conflict resolution skills are key elements to establishing the level of professionalism within the department. The role of supervisors is essential in appropriate discipline. Without fair and consistent supervision, bad habits are likely to prosper within the agency and undermine the ability of the agency to adequately and professionally serve their communities.

In-Service Training Delivery Strategies

A variety of strategies can be utilized to make in-service opportunities more accessible. Such strategies include roll call training, webinars, synchronous and asynchronous online courses, traditional classroom and blended learning approaches. Each of these approaches has merits and limitations. Implementation of all strategies may be necessary to maximize the number of personnel trained. CJ's online programs have greatly expanded access for non-recruit personnel in departments of all sizes. Non-metropolitan departments have benefitted the greatest. While traditional classroom instruction can be more expensive to implement, the benefits of face-to-face instruction can outweigh the costs. Interacting with diverse members of the law enforcement community having different opinions, backgrounds and experiences and the ability to establish a network of professional contacts with different mindsets and world views are two such benefits.

Recommendation #1:

Advocate for Funding for In-Service Police Training

Despite the importance of training in developing a proficient and professional police force, in more difficult economic times the reduction or elimination of training budgets is likely. In a 2010 report published by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) entitled *Is the Economic Downturn Fundamentally Changing How We Police?*, two-thirds of the responding departments reported that they had reduced or discontinued training programs.¹ The reduction or elimination of training ranked second only to reduced out-of-town travel when law enforcement executives were asked about the impact of budget cuts on departmental policies.

Access to training has been traditionally difficult in both good and difficult times for non-metropolitan departments. Non-metropolitan agencies account for more than 90% of the law enforcement departments within the U.S., and serve 20% of the U.S. population.² Forty-nine percent (49%) of the total number of state and local law enforcement departments employed less than 10 full-time officers, with 30% (5,400) having less than 5 full-time sworn personnel.³ Unlike their urban counterparts, rural police, by necessity, tend to be generalists. As in urban areas, rural communities can vary significantly with respect to crime rate and socioeconomic profile. However, non-metropolitan agencies, due to the smaller number of constituents, have

lower tax bases and limited staffing. Both of these variables significantly restrict training and education opportunities for officers and deputies serving the non-metropolitan areas of the U.S.

Recommendation #2:

Encourage and Facilitate Partnerships with Universities and Community Colleges to Make Educational Opportunities More Accessible and Meaningful for Police in Agencies of All Sizes

Promoting and providing educational opportunities for the police can enhance community relations in departments of all sizes. The Criminal Justice Institute has had a long history of working with law enforcement professionals and institutions of higher education to provide meaningful practitioner-focused educational programs for Arkansas law enforcement personnel. When we have asked police executives about those traits officers with some education exhibit which they think are very beneficial to the profession, the following are consistently mentioned: 1.) exposed to more; broader worldview, 2.) tend to think outside of the box, 3.) problem solvers, 4.) more analytical, 5.) embrace technology, 6.) better interpersonal skills, 7.) good written and verbal communication skills, and 8.) used to diversity. These traits are conducive for community-oriented policing programs and enhance decision making abilities and interpersonal skills. Having officers in the ranks with some education is seen as a clear benefit by these executives.

In the November issue of *The Police Chief*, Dr. Deborah Newman discusses the “disconnect” between police and institutions of higher education with respect to academic programs which emphasize theory as opposed to more police practitioner-focused curricula. From the perspective of the officers, the pay offs do not outweigh their investments in time and cost.⁴ Educational programs which incorporate in-service and leadership training along with general education courses can enhance the proficiency of officers while also providing them with better communication and interpersonal skills and broader world views, and in doing so better position them for professional interactions with their community. The expansion in the availability of online academic courses makes practitioner-focused certificate and associate degrees more realistically obtainable for the law enforcement professional.

Endnotes

¹Police Executive Research Forum. (December 2010). *Is the Economic Downturn Fundamentally Changing How We Police?* Washington, DC

² National Law Enforcement Corrections and Technology Center. (August 2010). *Report on the National Small and Rural Agency Summit* (as cited in Weisheit, Falcone & Wells, 1999). Cheney, WA. Sale, Jeffry.

³Bureau of Justice Statistics. (July 2011). *Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 2008*. (NCJ Publication 233982). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁴Newman, Deborah W., (November 2014). Evaluating and Utilizing Specialized College Courses for Police Officers. *Police Chief*, 81, 36-39.