

Law Enforcement and its Recruiting Dilemma

Law enforcement agencies across the United States are facing some extraordinary challenges. We face heavy public scrutiny when wrongdoings and disgraceful behaviors of those in uniform are heavily publicized. Law enforcement agencies struggle to rebuild community trust and law enforcement legitimacy. However, what may be characterized as an even greater challenge to law enforcement is recruiting new officers. The enigma facing all of law enforcement is the need to uphold the highest standards of professionalism in an increasingly violent society while ensuring that the applicant pool is sufficient to meet the needs of the communities they serve. *(Smith, 2016)*

In order to address the need to increase interest in the law enforcement profession we must first understand and confront the issues having adverse effects on the applicant pools. To handle our current needs, we must focus on officer's safety, mental health, suitable training, and an increase in pay and ancillary benefits.

The occupational fatality rate for law enforcement is three to five times greater than the national average for the working population. The officers who protect us must also be protected against incapacitating physical, mental, and emotional health problems, as well as against the hazards of their job.

A well, healthy officer and agency is a safer officer and agency. Health and wellness must receive the same level of attention as any other aspect of policing. Not only will the individual officer benefit but so will their agency and the community they serve. Law enforcement agencies need to procure funding and consider implementing physical fitness programs to serve the interests of the agency, its individual officers, and the community it serves.

Mental health issues pertaining to the individual police must confront during an emergency and the mental health of police officers themselves has become a major concern. Recently, police agencies have been inundated with incidents dealing with mental health. These incidents have exhausted public resources designed to bring relief and coping mechanisms to the affected individual. As a

Chief of Police, I have found it crucial to have my officers trained in responding to citizens experiencing a behavioral crisis.

I am having my officers receive the CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) training. CIT is an innovative program of police-based crisis intervention involving community health care and advocacy partnerships and is based on a nationally recognized model. The emphasis is on mental health knowledge, crisis resolution skills and access to community services. I was able to obtain this worthwhile training for several of my officers but additional funding is needed for me to achieve my goal of having all of our officers educated in the CIT concepts.

Mandating exposure to mental health training and services has an educational impact on officers responding to mental health crisis calls. Exposure to the methods designed to cope with stress will also prove beneficial to the officer him or herself. If an officer lives in an environment where their whole health matters, including brain health, the officer will perhaps be more open to helping a person deal with a matter that generated the 911 call and police presence. Skills to which an officer is exposed in mental health maintenance can be reflected in encounters with those who have a mental health crisis. (Shults, 2022).

Modernized equipment is a necessity to maintain a professional law enforcement agency. Providing officers with essential tools to perform their duties not only provides our stakeholders a proficient service but is also crucial toward officer safety. A vital concern for many police departments is costs associated to communications, namely, portable radios and replacement batteries. Costs of radios and batteries have skyrocketed over the past couple of years. Financial support is critical toward the operational budgets of police agencies.

Police salaries and benefits are lacking when one considers the responsibilities associated to policing. The training and education required to become a police officer on a reputable department is costly. Many agencies are requiring four-year college degrees and specialized training and certifications. It would be of great assistance to both the applicant and the community to which they want to serve if funding was available to pay for, or at least off-set the costs of police academy certification.

The aforementioned concepts dealt with the law enforcement professions current needs. I would advocate for a more pioneering approach to increase interests in the law enforcement profession for the future.

By employing School-Resource officers and through a collaborative effort between the schools and the law enforcement agency, they're placed inside the classroom periodically where they can have an impact on our impressionable youth. The job of the modern public safety officer is more than just responding to calls for service—there is an urgent need for officers to function as recruiters, mentors, and role models, in spite of the negative press that appears almost daily in the media (Smith,2016). Implementing programs related to the School Resource Officer and combining them with vocational-based learning can help us succeed in our long-term recruitment needs.

Sid Smith, "A Crisis Facing Law Enforcement: Recruiting in the 21st Century," *The Police Chief* 83 (June 2016): web only.

Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D, "Why officer Wellness programs are no longer optional," *Police1* (April 2022).