

**Best Practices Guide  
for Recruitment and Retention Report**



**March 2022**

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## *Foreword*

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The Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission regulates the training and certification of law enforcement officers, probation parole officers, corrections officers, and juvenile justice officers, in this state pursuant to N.C.G.S. 17C. The North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission is responsible for the certification of all justice officers, including deputy sheriffs, detention officers and telecommunicators, who are employed in the 100 Sheriffs' Offices in this state pursuant to N.C.G.S. 17E.

The Criminal Justice Standards is supported in their work by the staff of the Criminal Justice Standards Division. The Sheriffs' Standards Commission is supported in their work by the staff of the Sheriffs' Standards Division. Both Divisions are within the Department of Justice. The Commissions meet quarterly to discuss training and certification topics and to hear cases of officers accused of violating commission rules.

Development of this report is in response to criminal justice reforms to provide North Carolina law enforcement agencies with best practices to adopt for recruiting and retaining employees. North Carolina [Session Law 2021-138 \[Senate Bill 300\]](#) mandated the Commissions publish a report on these topics by April of 2022. Criminal Justice Commission Chair, Chief Chris Blue, Sheriffs' Commission Chair, Sheriff Alan Cloninger, organized an Advisory Group to begin work on mandates from [Session Law 2021-138](#) and review recommendations in the [North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice \(TREC\) report](#).

The dedicated work of criminal justice professionals who served on this Advisory Group integrates industry expertise and workplace knowledge with the best practices published in this report. The recruitment and retention advisory group utilized resources from numerous professional organizations, academic resources, and State commissioned reports in considering guidance for this publication. The advisory group focused on three primary areas that include agency practices, health and wellness, and training. These components incorporate a variety of approaches to recruitment and retention of criminal justice employees. Criminal Justice executives are encouraged to utilize this report in considering appropriate reforms, training, practices, and programmatic elements of health and wellness.

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### *Recruitment and Retention Advisory Group*

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CJ Commission Chair	Commissioner Chris Blue, Chief of Police
Sheriff Commission Chair	Commissioner Alan Cloninger, Sheriff
Advisory Group Chair	Commissioner David L. Hess, Chief of Police
Director Trevor Allen	North Carolina Justice Academy
Advisory Member	Commissioner Joe Cotton, Major, NC State Highway Patrol
Advisory Member	Commissioner Stephanie Freeman, Director, NCDPS Office of Staff Development and Training, Chairperson of Education and Training Committee
Advisory Member	Commissioner Robert Hassell, Chief of Police, Vice Chair of Planning and Standards Committee
Advisory Member	Commissioner Teresa Jardon, Warden, NCDPS Division of Adult Correction
Advisory Member	Commissioner Tracy McPherson, Director of Public Safety Training Programs, NC Community College System
Advisory Member	Commissioner Doug Doughtie, Sheriff
Staff	Deputy Director Richard Squires



Thank you to the entities who provided input and guidance for this publication.

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## *Executive Summary*

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### **Diversity Recruitment Recommendations**

- 1) The Commission should work with the Community College System and agency BLET sites to publish a BLET Recruitment video
- 2) Provide the video to local agencies, state agencies, and Community Colleges to promote BLET on social media, internal resources, and other forms of broadcasting
- 3) Maintain existing efforts to recruit a diverse workforce reflective of the State's population

### **Agency Practice Recommendations**

- 1) Consider adopting the military model of recruitment and retention
- 2) Increase leadership training for all personnel
- 3) "Tell your story" in the media, both social media and traditional media
- 4) Implement employee recognition programs
- 5) Increase correctional facility security procedures and workplace practices
- 6) Ensure policies meet or exceed nationally recognized best practices
- 7) Maintain competitive market rate salary for positions
- 8) Continue efforts to ensure hiring practices are constitutional and reflective of the candidate applicant pool for hiring qualified candidates
- 9) Considering adopting the CALEA standard for diversity in recruiting

### **Training Recommendations**

- 1) Ensure officers receive de-escalation training
- 2) Ensure officers receive CIT training
- 3) Provide annual ethics training
- 4) Ensure use of force policies comply with N.C.G.S. 15A-401 (d)
- 5) Ensure policies and training on minority sensitivity and duty to intervene are provided
- 6) Consider robust training programs to enhance knowledge, skills, and abilities of law enforcement officers
- 7) Utilize scenario-based training when feasible

### **Wellness Recommendations**

- 1) Provide regular training on the resources available to law enforcement for mental health wellness, such as peer support networks
- 2) Agency leaders should incorporate policies and training that support officers use of mental health wellness resources
- 3) Agencies should adopt local practices to debrief officers after traumatic events to promote mental wellness resiliency

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### *Criminal Justice Standards Division Data*

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The current structure of Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) in North Carolina allows Commission approved agencies to deliver BLET curriculum. The North Carolina community college system collaborates with the Commission to host BLET programs at fifty-five community colleges throughout the State. Several law enforcement agencies host their own BLET program, such as, North Carolina State Highway Patrol, Wake and Durham County Sheriff's Offices, Chapel Hill, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Durham, and Raleigh police departments. The administrative code requires delivery of the full course content approved by the Commission. These sites may add additional courses of instruction based on local or agency needs. This structure allows the BLET program to reach metropolitan and rural communities of the State to teach a standardized BLET training program. Marketing BLET remains a burden for each agency or community college. Traditional methods of recruiting students for BLET include word of mouth, program ads, and agency recruitment efforts. With a younger workforce entering law enforcement, enhancing traditional recruitment methods to market BLET would diversify recruitment opportunities.

The advisory group wanted to understand the gravity of current recruitment and retention data from the Division to gain insight into BLET enrollments, attrition rates, and graduation rates. Advisory Group members believed that more officers exited the criminal justice system during the post George Floyd era than entered and the Division data validated this belief. Based on Division data found in Table 1, from 2020-2021 the division processed 841 more separations than certifications issued. A major concern identified with the data is less than one BLET graduate was available to hire per law enforcement entity statewide. More alarming is the 11% attrition rate out of the law enforcement profession. This means there are more vacancies than available certified applicants to hire.

Table 1	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
BLET Enrollment numbers	1791	1957	1950	2649	2255	1788
BLET Graduation numbers	1703	1819	1806	2012	1786	1435
Number of Certifications Issued	1194	1332	1324	1297	1317	1167
Number of Retired/Resigned	2061	1972	2147	2093	2139	1186

The advisory group also reviewed the diversity of BLET students. The Division provided student demographics to include education, age, and ethnicity. When compared to the US Census data the State's ethnicity data shows that law enforcement students in BLET mirror that of our state (Shown in Table 2). The state percentage data in Table 2 obtained from the July 1, 2019 US Census report reflects 110% total.

Ethnicity / Race							Table 2	
White	Black	Hispanic / Latino	Asian	American Indian or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Other		
940	259	103	24	24	3	28		
67%	18%	7%	2%	2%	0%	2%	BLET Percentage	98%
71%	22%	10%	3%	2%	0%	2%	State Percentage	110%

Division data also shows the average age of BLET students is 21-25 years old. Most BLET students have a high school education and the profession remains predominantly male, with 1,116 males enrolled in BLET compared to 294 females.

**Basic Law Enforcement Demographics 2021**

**Table 3**

Male	Female	GED	High School	Associates	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate			
1116	294	50	783	156	336	34	3			

  

Age										
19	20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	55-60	61-65
18	117	645	323	142	63	30	28	13	4	4

## Recommendations

- 1) The Commissions should work with the Community College System and agencies that host BLET to produce and publish a BLET Recruitment video.
- 2) Provide the video to local agencies, state agencies, and community colleges to promote BLET on social media, internal resources, and other forms of broadcasting.
- 3) Maintain existing efforts to recruit a diverse workforce reflective of the State's population.



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## *Professional Law Enforcement Association Recommendations*

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### North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police

On September 1, 2020 the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police (NCACP) published “Workforce on Police Professionalism Recommendations on the Evolution of 21st Century Policing.”

That report recognized that the Criminal Justice Fellows Program provides a pipeline for highly qualified college educated and diverse law enforcement recruits, and should be expanded in eligibility and funding, which was done by the 2021 General Assembly.

Implemented in 2018, the CJ Fellows program mirrors the Teaching Fellows program allowing applicants to attend college and obtain a field related college degree with loan forgiveness. The CJ Fellows program provides an opportunity to recruit and retain highly trained criminal justice employees. The CJ Fellows program is an opportunity to develop a well-trained law enforcement workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities they serve.

Other ways to develop a diverse work force is for agencies to develop programs such as police explorers, cadets, and internships.

NCACP recommends the State establish a grants fund for police cadet programs and continued support for the CJ Fellows program.

### North Carolina Sheriffs’ Association

On October 21, 2020, the North Carolina Sheriffs’ Association published a Report on Law Enforcement Professionalism with recommendations on: (1) North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Program; and (2) Best-Practices for Law Enforcement Recruitment.

North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Program - The purpose of the North Carolina Criminal Justice Fellows Program (CJ Fellows Program) is to recruit talented high school seniors into the criminal justice profession. The CJ Fellows Program seeks to draw seniors who are dedicated to community service, academic achievement, and a desire to serve the citizens of the State of North Carolina. The CJ Fellows Program provides those seniors with forgivable educational loans upon entry into the criminal justice profession in North Carolina.

Currently, the CJ Fellows Program will fund a two-year, Applied Associates Degree in Criminal Justice (or an approved related field of study) from a North Carolina Community College. Students who receive the fellowship will have that loan forgiven if they enter and remain in the criminal justice profession for four years in an eligible North Carolina county.

The Association recommended that: (1) Adequate funding for the CJ Fellows Program be provided by the General Assembly; (2) Eligible counties include all 100 counties in the State; and (3) the Program also fund: (a) a four-year bachelor's degree program; and (b) BLET with loan forgiveness after one year of employment.

Best-Practices for Law Enforcement Recruitment - The Association believes law enforcement would benefit from a professional analysis of law enforcement recruiting as it relates to diverse populations. The analysis should result in a guide for law enforcement agencies outlining best practices in law enforcement recruiting.

Law enforcement agencies want to recruit a professional workforce made up of the most qualified individuals regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Agencies also realize the difficulty in recruiting from communities of color. The Association is hopeful a best practices guide for law enforcement recruiting will positively impact their recruiting methods and ability to recruit a more diverse workforce. The Association recommends that the Commissions, in consultation with appropriate professionals, design a best-practices guide for law enforcement designed to recruit a diverse workforce.

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### *Agency Practices*

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The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) published a [special report](#) on recruitment and retention on June 11, 2021. The report information involved surveying PERF members about five questions: 1) Current staff levels, 2) Number of authorized sworn positions, 3) Number of personnel hired, 4) Number of personnel resigned, and 5) Number of personnel who retired between April 1, 2020, through March 31, 2021.

The survey provided alarming national statistical data:

- The national trend shows high attrition rate for large metropolitan agencies. Smaller agencies have a hiring increase, likely hiring of officers leaving metro agencies.
- Retirements are up 45% nationally.
- There is a decrease of 5% in hiring of police officers from April 2019-March 2020, with an 18% increase of resignations in the same period.
- Hiring for agencies of 250 sworn or more saw a 29% reduction accompanied by 49% retirement rate; agencies of 500 sworn or more saw a 36% reduction in hiring, while experiencing a 59% retirement rate.
- Chiefs report attrition is creating a younger, less experienced work force, which may increase liability.
- Many resignations were of officers with fewer than 7 years of service.



- Survey respondents commented that negative media attention has adversely impacted recruitment.
- Survey respondents noted that many applicants do not meet the minimum requirements to enter law enforcement.
- Community support is vital to officer morale, feeling appreciated, and helping mitigate the negative media rhetoric.

Respected law enforcement leadership instructor and retired Police Chief Harry Dolan is the CEO of Dolan Consulting Group (DCG) which provides law enforcement leadership training nationally. His son, Matt Dolan is an attorney who specializes in training and advising public safety agencies in matters of legal liability.

In a January 26, 2021 DCG Article, [Considering the Military Model for Recruiting and Retention in Law Enforcement](#), Matt Dolan points out the military cycle of recruitment is on-going and data driven. Knowing that most recruits opt-out of reenlisting within the first five years, and to ensure their forecasted vacancies are quickly filled, the military begins recruiting for the expected vacancy the day the vacancy is filled. This model could provide a pipeline for law enforcement candidates for BLET and hiring. For example, a law enforcement agency that employs the military model for recruiting and hires an applicant in 2022 will begin planning to hire the potential vacancy before 2026.

With the decrease in recruit applicants and a higher attrition rate, law enforcement agencies must adapt quickly to this changed environment and embrace creative and alternative ways to recruit applicants. As noted in PERF's, [The Workforce Crisis, and What Agencies are Doing About It](#), report published in September 2019, the workforce crisis appears to be getting worse.

“Fewer people are applying to become police officers, and more people are leaving the profession, often after only a few years on the job. These trends are occurring even as many police and sheriffs’ offices are already short-staffed and facing challenges in developing a diverse workforce. The workforce crisis is affecting law enforcement agencies of all sizes and types—large, medium, and small; local, state, and federal. And it is hitting departments in all parts of the country. There are ominous signs that the workforce crisis in policing may be getting worse. Traditional sources of job applicants—the military and family members of current officers—are diminishing” (pg.7).

This message is consistent with the data published by the Division. A rising concern among law enforcement leaders attracting qualified candidates in the current climate. Agency heads are willing to consider candidates, who, historically, would be disqualified from consideration.

PERF addresses this concern in the September 2019 report. “Today’s police officers increasingly are being asked to deal with social problems, such as untreated mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness. As a result, the skills, temperament, and life experiences needed to succeed as an officer are becoming more complex. So even as police departments are struggling to get enough applicants in the door, they need to be raising the bar and looking for applicants with a wider array of talents and skills” (pg. 7).

With both the Commission data and PERF reports indicating a high attrition rate within the first seven years, the military model could provide one way for agencies to enhance recruitment. Law enforcement leaders recognize that lowering standards amid a hiring crisis will adversely impact public safety, and the safety of law enforcement officers, and create distrust in the community and lower retention of law enforcement officers. This need not be confused, however, with the need for diverse recruiting. As noted by the NCACP, law enforcement agencies should reflect the communities they serve.

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*“So even as police departments are struggling to get enough applicants in the door they need to be raising the bar and looking for applicants” (PERF 2019, pg. 7)*

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The concept of diversified recruiting was recommended by the North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice (TREC). See [TREC Report Recommendation #51 and Appendix C, p. 156](#). As discussed therein, reducing certain barriers to entry, diversifying command staff, and engaging in targeted recruiting could help expand the workforce. Additionally, TREC recommends adopting the CALEA standard 31.2.1 (LE 1) for diversity in recruiting to achieve these goals.

### **Partner with two- and four-year higher education institutions to implement high impact recruiting practices**

Within the past decade, there has been a movement to develop greater partnerships between the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), university system, and public sector to enhance the recruitment of qualified applicants into the criminal justice profession. One example of this partnership is for universities to provide students with access to Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) and a part- or full-time position at the University Police Department upon completion of BLET. The Appalachian State University Police Department operates its own accredited BLET program as part of their two-year Police Officer Development Program. App State students who participate in the program attend the App State Police Department’s BLET program and work for the App State Police Department as part-time officers while earning their academic degrees. The training curriculum exceeds the state’s minimum training standards, and participants emerge with college degrees, North Carolina police officer certification, and a minimum of two years of on-the-job training and experience. The program is the only one of its kind in our state, and one of two programs of this type in the United States. Other universities, such as Western Carolina University, sponsor students to complete BLET at a North Carolina

community college during times that are convenient for students (e.g., weekends, university breaks), and then allow BLET graduates to work at the University Police Department while finishing their academic degree. Agencies may consider partnering with universities to provide meaningful on-the-job experiences for students who are enrolled in these types of programs.

Other models for partnering with two- and four-year higher education institutions may involve agency staff engaging in high impact recruiting activities at these institutions. Before partnering with higher education institutions, agencies should carefully select and train recruiters on best practices in talent acquisition and retention. As stated in the International Association of Chiefs of Police’s Recruitment, Retention, and Turnover in Law Enforcement Personnel report, “organizational leaders must develop a perception throughout the department that recruitment is one of the most important functions in the agency<sup>1</sup>” (pg. 2). Once selected and trained, agency recruiters should employ a combination of traditional recruiting practices (such as classroom visits and job fairs) with more personalized contacts, such as providing students with the opportunity to participate in mock interviews, reviewing the student’s application and providing individualized feedback, and conducting follow-up phone calls to answer any additional questions. As the report titled High Impact Recruiting recommends, agencies and recruiters should “treat candidates like customers<sup>2</sup>” to increase engagement between students and the recruiting agency (pg. 5).

#### Department of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction

Recruiting and retaining staff for the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction is a vital component of the Advisory Group’s research. Commissioned by the North Carolina Governor’s Crime Commission, a December 2017 study from the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University considered meaningful ways of improving staffing and security in the corrections system. The report’s executive summary (pg. 5), notes several ways to enhance recruitment and retention of corrections staff.

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<sup>1</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police, Best Practice Guide, Recruitment, Retention and Turnover of Law Enforcement Personnel, Online at: <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/BP-RecruitmentRetentionandTurnover.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> HR Soft High Impact Talent Management, 2014, High Impact Recruiting, 5 Smart and Strategic Ways to Hire Highly Engaged Employees, Online at: <https://www.hr.com/en?t=/network/event/attachment.supply&fileID=1428589074680>

### **Invest in Personnel**

- 1) Leadership training
- 2) Employee wellness programs
- 3) Correction staff have lower life expectancy and higher rates of suicide, depression, and divorce than other law enforcement. Increase wellness training on this topic.

### **Improve Facility Safety**

- 1) Enhance intelligence gathering
- 2) Enhance perimeter security

The National Institute of Justice in partnership with the RAND Corporation and PERF, published a 2018 report on Building a High-Quality Correctional Workforce. The report discussed, in part, the impacts and influences of how media portrays the criminal justice system.

“Negative media attention influences the public’s perception of the corrections sector and those who work within it, which can be a serious impediment in efforts to recruit quality staff...to begin to change perceptions, the sector must actively communicate with both the media and the public. For many decades, agencies have adopted a “no news is good news” stance with respect to the media. Furthermore, there has been very little effort to share (non-sensitive) information with the public about policy; the challenges faced; and, most importantly, how the sector and its staff have a positive impact on their charges, the community, and public safety every day” (pg. 7).

In 2017, NCDPS authorized the National Institute of Corrections to conduct and publish a Security Operational Assessment<sup>3</sup>.

In the report related to retention, are three key recommendations:

- 1) Ensure up to date nationally recognized best practice policies exist (pg. 5); Recommends adopting American Correctional Association (ACA) standards (pg. 17)
- 2) Ensure adequate staffing to reduce overtime and workload burnout (pg. 5)
- 3) Enhance facility safety measures (pg. 29)

East Carolina University Department of Criminal Justice Professor, Dr. Heidi S. Bonner, published a report on February 10, 2017, evaluating recruitment and retention for NCDPS and the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice<sup>4</sup>. Employees of these divisions were surveyed to learn about morale and the reason for attrition.

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<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Corrections, Security Operational Assessment, November 6-10, 2017, Pasquotank Correctional Institution and Correction Enterprise and Nash Correctional Institution and Correction Enterprise

<sup>4</sup> East Carolina University, Heidi S. Bonner Ph.D, February 10, 2017, North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice Adult Institution Corrections Recruitment and Retention Evaluation

“When asked if they felt that the agency actively makes efforts to retain staff, 71% of respondents responded in the negative. Only 29% felt that adult institutional corrections leadership tried to retain personnel. Respondents were asked what efforts could be made to retain staff and provided several suggestions related to pay and benefits, supervisory support, and resolving staff shortages so time off for existing staff was not affected” (pg. 3).

“However, respondents also noted a number of concerns with institutional corrections employment including being short staffed, low salary, and being paid monthly. A perception that the administration was out of touch, and unconcerned with employee morale were also noted as negative aspects of the job. Additional areas of concern included poor management, favoritism, and stress (pg. 3).” The report noted Corrections recruitment enhancements include advertising at job fairs, word of mouth, career counselors, radio, and newspaper (pg. 12). Agencies have increased recruitment on social media. Retention of staff strategies include increasing salary, better benefits, maintaining staffing to allow staff to use approved leave, and recognizing the work of staff (pg. 12).

A common theme noted amongst a variety of academic, peer reviewed journals, and law enforcement association reports is negative media stories adversely impacts recruitment and retention of criminal justice employees. Leadership training, competitive market rate salary adjustments, and maintaining adequate staffing play a significant role in retention. Law enforcement personnel, including adult correction, work under extreme conditions.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) Consider adopting the military model of recruitment and retention.
- 2) Increase leadership training for all personnel.
- 3) “Tell your story” in the media, both social media and traditional media.
- 4) Implement employee recognition programs.
- 5) Increase Correctional Facility security procedures and workplace practices.
- 6) Ensure policies meet or exceed nationally recognized best practices.
- 7) Maintain competitive market rate salary for positions.
- 8) Continue efforts to ensure hiring practices are constitutional and reflective of the candidate applicant pool for hiring qualified candidates.
- 9) Adopt the CALEA standard for diversity in recruiting

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## *Training*

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A common theme throughout recent police reform reports has increasingly focused on innovative training. During the post George Floyd era, several North Carolina law enforcement associations, including the [North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police](#) and the [North Carolina Sheriffs' Association](#) published law enforcement reform reports. On the topic of training, both Associations' reports recommended training on use of force, de-escalation, implicit bias, duty to intervene, utilize scenario-based training, and policies banning chokeholds unless deadly force is lawful. The North Carolina Law Enforcement Accreditation program and the North Carolina Justice Academy BLET 2023 revision projects also supported these topical areas. These entities supported policies and training enhancements set forth in the TREC report (Recommendations 29; 31; 57 and 59). The combined efforts on these topics resulted in a Police Reform law, [Session Law 2021-138](#), signed by Governor Cooper on September 2, 2021. The law specified certain mandates, compliance, and policy changes for North Carolina law enforcement.

These important 21st century policing training concepts help agencies promote transparency, build community trust, emphasizes the sanctity of life, and promote accountability. The International Association of Chiefs of Police [Best Practices Guide on Recruitment, Retention and Turnover in Law Enforcement](#), notes that law enforcement officers regard training as highly beneficial to career development. "Quality training should be designed to ensure officers perform to established competency levels and build their confidence. Officers who receive increased levels of training feel valued and are more likely to stay" (pg. 10).

The North Carolina Community College System and the North Carolina Justice Academy provide outstanding continuing education training for law enforcement officers across the state, and most is offered free of charge to the officer and their agency. Training includes the topics outlined by the various associations and Session Law 2021-138. An on-going effort by the Justice Academy to provide standardized de-escalation training hopes to improve officer safety and preserve life. The Justice Academy collaborated with PERF in 2021 to train and certify 179 Integrating Communication Assessment and Tactics (ICAT) instructors, from 178 North Carolina law enforcement agencies to conduct ICAT training internally.

"ICAT is a training program that provides first responding police officers with the tools, skills, and options they need to successfully and safely defuse a range of critical incidents. Developed by PERF with input from hundreds of police professionals from across the United States, ICAT takes the essential building blocks of critical thinking, crisis intervention, communications, and tactics, and puts them together in an integrated approach to training. ICAT is designed especially for situations involving persons who are unarmed or are armed with weapons other than firearms, and who may be experiencing a mental health or other crisis. The training program is anchored by the Critical Decision-Making Model

that helps officers assess situations, make safe and effective decisions, and document and learn from their actions. ICAT incorporates different skill sets into a unified training approach that emphasizes scenario-based exercises, as well as lecture and case study opportunities<sup>5</sup>.”

The Burlington (NC) Police Department provides de-escalation training to their staff on a regular basis. Instruction efforts by Lieutenant Shelly Katkowski propelled the agency in the National spotlight for [receiving National recognition for de-escalation training](#). De-escalation training helps promote trust and legitimacy in local communities. Programs such as ICAT play a key role for training officers in de-escalation tactics. Supplementing that training with Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training helps officers divert mental illness patients from criminal justice interface, when possible, to appropriate medical treatment resources. The CIT course is highly recommended by law enforcement across the state. Provided in various regions of the state, clinical psychologist and medical personnel help train law enforcement to recognize the signs of mental health crisis. The course expands the training by connecting officers with their local mental health providers and treatment facilities.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) Ensure officers receive de-escalation training.
- 2) Ensure officers receive CIT training.
- 3) Provide annual ethics training.
- 4) Ensure use of force policies comply with N.C.G.S. 15A-401(d).
- 5) Ensure policies and training on implicit bias and duty to intervene are provided.
- 6) Consider robust training programs to enhance knowledge, skills, and abilities of police officers.
- 7) Utilize-scenario based training when feasible.

#### International Association of Chiefs of Police

“Quality training should be designed to ensure officers perform to established competency levels and build their confidence. Officers who receive increased levels of training feel valued and are more likely to stay”

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<sup>5</sup> Police Executive Research Forum, Integrating Communication Assessment and Tactics, Online at: <https://www.policeforum.org/icat-training-guide>



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## Wellness

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The International Association of Chiefs of Police published an [Officer Health and Wellness Agency Assessment Tool and Roadmap guide](#) for agencies. The tool incorporates 10 guiding principles for building a comprehensive wellness program. This tool focuses on physical and mental wellbeing. The comprehensive strategy reinforces the notion that officers who are mentally and physically well, will in turn be more likely to operate safely. “This strategy requires a cultural shift in which health and wellness is more openly discussed and accessing services becomes an accepted and commonplace practice” (pg.1).

With the rise of law enforcement officer suicides, agencies must begin to incorporate health and wellness components as an accepted agency culture. According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, law enforcement officers are five times more likely to kill themselves than to be killed in the line of duty. The Ruderman Family Foundation published a White Paper in 2018 on [Mental Health and Suicide of First Responders](#). According to the report,

- police officers witness 188 ‘critical incidents’ during their careers.
- professional suicide rate estimated at 28.2/100,000 for men and 12.2/100,000 for women, officer mental health and wellness needs to be discussed openly and honestly by the law enforcement field.

In releasing his foundation’s report on first responder suicide in April 2018, Jay Ruderman said, “law enforcement agencies across the United States, approximately 3-5% have suicide prevention training programs” (p .26). Dr. John Violanti analyzed suicide data between 1999-2013 (present data availability) and came up with a verifiable statistic from a Centers for Disease Control database- Police officers have a 54% higher probability for suicide than does the general U.S. working population- based on a sample of 5 million U.S. workers.

According to [bluehelp.org](#), in 2019, 239 current or former officers died by suicide, compared with 184 in 2018. As of November 1, 2021, the group reported 123 officers died by suicide. While duty deaths declined in 2019, the number of reported police officer suicides—including active-duty and recently retired—increased significantly. Compared to 239 in 2019, there were 184 reported

suicides in 2018. The number of reported suicide deaths was 174 in 2017 and 149 in 2016. Of the officers who died by suicide in 2019, approximately 90% were male and 10% were female. Veteran officers with between 20-25 years of service were most susceptible to suicide, with 59 deaths in that demographic segment. Reviewing this data compared to the line of duty deaths reported by the Officer Down Memorial Page, police officers take their own lives at a higher rate than felonious assaults in the line of duty. This data is alarming. The

information should cause law enforcement leaders to begin changing the culture of law enforcement to recognize warning signs of officer suicide as well as provide resources to help officers with mental wellness.

Peer support programs exist within the state. The NCDPS-DAC S.H.I.E.L.D. Program and the NCSHP LEEP program provide peer-to-peer support for corrections and law enforcement officers. Within Corrections and Law Enforcement, officers are more comfortable with peers who can relate to mental health recovery after a crisis.

An American Journal of Criminal Justice- Police Stress, Mental Health, Resiliency during the COVID-19 Pandemic study<sup>6</sup> notes that policing is one of the most mentally taxing occupations, contending with long and often rotating shifts, threats of violence, increased need for hypervigilance, and a lack of public support creating chronic stress. As a result, law enforcement officers suffer from mental health problems at a rate greater than the general population even before dealing with added pandemic challenges, stress, and uncertainty<sup>7</sup> (Hartley et al., 2011). Numerous studies on police mental health focused on factors that contribute to law enforcement suicide and mental health crisis. Factors include agency culture, rotating shifts, and frequent exposure to traumatic events. These events can have a detrimental impact on first responders and result in mental health problems and PTSD (Hartley et al., 2011). Even more challenging, if the traumatic circumstance isn't a singular event, but daily reinforced occupational stress over time due to a prolonged crisis, resiliency becomes a sustained process to try and maintain healthy prosocial behaviors (Stogner, et al., pg. 9). While it is too early to know the long-term mental health impacts on law enforcement from the COVID-19 pandemic and violence of the 2020 summer protests sparked after the death of George Floyd, it is reasonable to conclude the rate of mental health fatigue amongst law enforcement could cause a higher rate of attrition and potentially suicide than the cumulative trauma experienced by law enforcement in the past decade.

## **Recommendations**

- 1) Provide regular training on the resources available to law enforcement for mental health wellness, such as peer support networks.
- 2) Agencies' leaders should incorporate policies and training that support officers use of mental health wellness resources.
- 3) Agencies should adopt local practices to debrief officers after traumatic events to help promote mental wellness resiliency.

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<sup>6</sup> Stogner, J., Miller, B. L., & McLean, K. (2020). Police Stress, Mental Health, and Resiliency during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *American journal of criminal justice : AJCJ*, 1–13. Advance online publication.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09548-y>

<sup>7</sup> Hartley TA, Burchfiel CM, Fekedulegn D, Andrew ME, Violanti JM. Health disparities in police officers: Comparisons to the U.S. general population. *Int J Emerg Mental Health*. 2011;13:211–220

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## *Conclusion*

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The information provided in this report intends to bring attention to major factors affecting law enforcement resiliency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Every local community is different. A one-size fits all approach to policing in North Carolina will not address unique concerns at the local level. Police chiefs, sheriffs, and correctional institution leaders in North Carolina encourage agencies to adopt the recommendations of this report that best fit the organization.

As police reform legislation across the nation sought to radically reimagine policing in America, many voters in major cities including Buffalo, Minneapolis, and Seattle, voted to oppose sweeping or radical changes, preferring more moderate changes as needed in local communities<sup>8</sup>. As documented in the NCACP and NCSA law enforcement reforms reports, police chiefs and sheriffs initiated and implemented numerous reforms without legislative mandates years prior to the May 25, 2020, death of George Floyd that promoted additional police reforms. While the conversation about police reforms is welcomed, elected officials, law enforcement leaders, and governing bodies must do more to publicly support law enforcement. Significant progress by North Carolina law enforcement leaders helps to diminish potential radical changes proposed in other areas of the Nation. The dedicated work of those leaders and the regulatory authority of the Criminal Justice Standards Commission and the Sheriffs' Standards Commission provide foundational work to promote a resilient law enforcement community in North Carolina. While enhancements to existing work continue, law enforcement leaders are encouraged to utilize the resources from this report to influence change in their local agency.

### Law Enforcement Code of Ethics

“As a law enforcement officer, my fundamental duty is to serve the community; to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence or disorder; and to respect the constitutional rights of all to liberty, equality, and justice.” 12 NCAC 09A.0103 (17).

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Nickeas and Emma Tucker, CNN, November 7, 2021, Voters and public officials choose police reform in moderation after George Floyd's murder, Online at: [Voters and public officials choose police reform in moderation after George Floyd's murder - CNN](#)