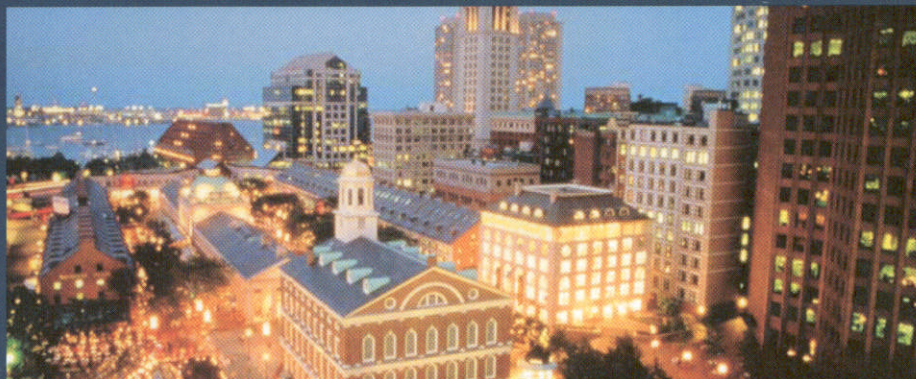
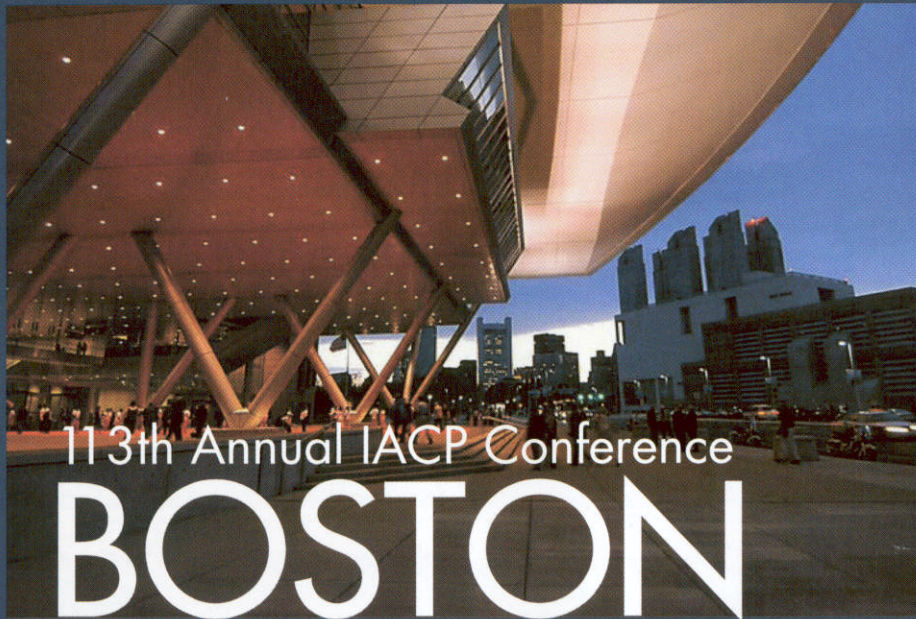


The Police Chief

THE PROFESSIONAL VOICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

OCTOBER 2006



Inside:

Police Pursuit and High-Speed Driving Lawsuits

Police Officer Recruitment: A Public-Sector Crisis

Impact of the Military Reserve Activation on Police Staffing

Employee Disciplinary Matrix



POLICE OFFICER RECRUITMENT A PUBLIC-SECTOR CRISIS

*By William J. Woska, J.D., Professor,
Golden Gate University, Carmel, California*

Career Fair at the 2006 National Law Enforcement Exploring Conference,
Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona, July 10-12, 2006

Law enforcement agencies throughout the United States are having difficulty filling peace officer positions. From the 1960s into the 1990s, many young men and women with a high-school diploma, in addition to individuals with a college education, were attracted to a law

enforcement career. A police officer position provided a good salary, excellent vacation, sick leave, medical and retirement benefits, and promotional opportunities. In those years, public agencies often had hundreds and sometimes thousands of applicants applying for a job.

Since the 1990s, interest in becoming a police officer has declined noticeably. This reduction may be attributed to many factors:

- The increasing number of students seeking higher education and pursuing professional positions
- The evolving opportunities provided in high technology and the private sector
- Negative publicity over high-profile incidents of racial profiling and excessive use of force
- The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

that have siphoned off public-service-minded people to the military

Each year, an increasing number of baby boomers complete their law enforcement careers and leave the force. The next generation's labor pool is smaller, further reducing the number of prospective applicants. The events of September 11, 2001, have increased the stress of police work. Also, media accounts that describe the substantial challenges faced by police officers may discourage many from a law enforcement career.

A major difference between the baby boomer generation and the expectations of today's work force is the change from a life that revolved around a job to a life that includes family and activities (the work-life balance). Careers in law enforcement require people to spend much of their time in an environment primarily consisting of the bad elements of society, including criminals, abusive relationships, and individuals involved in drugs or other contraband. This environment is not conducive to balancing work and family requirements.

Many police departments now find it nearly impossible to fill all police officer positions. In California, for example, police officers can retire at age 50. Peace officers often receive a retirement benefit of 3 percent for each year of employment. Thus, an individual beginning employment as a police officer at age 21 would have a retirement benefit of 87 percent (29 years multiplied by 3) at age 50. As a result, California police departments have high turnover as increasing numbers of peace officers elect early retirement and an opportunity to return to school, play golf, travel, or begin new careers.

Becoming a Police Officer

Although some departments require police officer applicants to have up to 60 units or more of college credits, most state and local government agencies require the following:

- A high school diploma or the equivalent of a high school education
- 21 years of age at time of appointment
- A written examination, an oral interview, and a job-related performance examination consisting of strength and stamina exercises
- A psychological evaluation, background investigation, and a physical (medical) examination
- A polygraph examination
- U.S. citizenship

Most height and weight restrictions have been removed because of legal challenges based on the grounds of gender and race.

Federal law enforcement agencies—including the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Central Intelligence Agency; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; and the U.S. Secret Service—often have more stringent employment standards including graduation from a four-year college or university.

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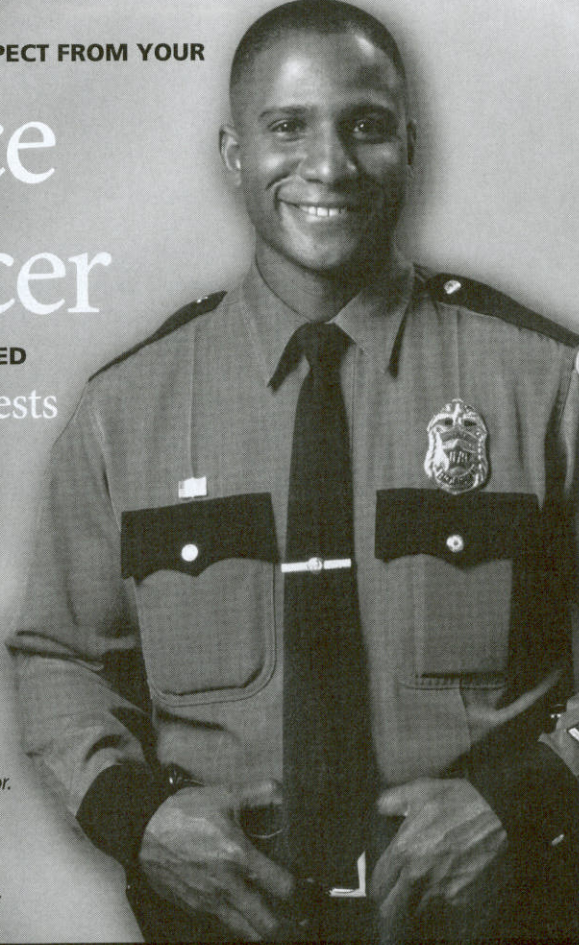
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Vacancies

By estimation, more than 80 percent of the nation's 17,000 law enforcement agencies, large and small, have police officer positions that they cannot fill. Jim Hyde, police chief in Davis, California, reports approximately 9,000 police officer vacancies in California as of June 2006.¹ However, only 2,500 officers graduated from California police academies in 2005. Nationwide projections estimate that between 2002 and 2012 the United States will need 37,700 new

police officers, in addition to the 30,300 positions needed to replace retirees and other persons leaving employment.² A survey conducted under the auspices of the California Chiefs of Police Association consistently ranked recruitment and selection among the top two issues facing law enforcement in the next five years, regardless of agency size.³


Another example of the fallout in filling positions is President Bush's recent request that Congress authorize an additional 6,000 Border Patrol agents. On aver-

age, the Department of Homeland Security would need approximately 240,000 applicants to fill the positions, since only one person is appointed for every 40 individuals who apply for the position.⁴

This severe shortage of workers was caused by the fact that a workforce of 80 million baby boomers (persons born between 1946 and 1964) is being replaced by a workforce of 30 million—a shortfall of 50 million individuals.⁵ Nationally, by 2010 there will be a labor shortage of 10 million workers as the demand for employees exceeds the supply.⁶



The listings of vacant peace officer positions in Table 1 delineates the recruitment dilemma encountered by many agencies throughout the country.

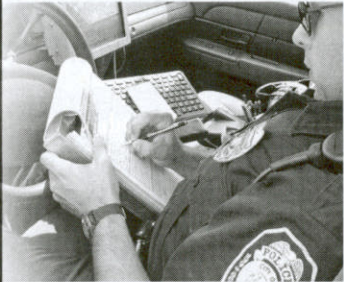
Because the screening process is stringent, over 90 percent of the applicants are rejected during the selection process. Wayne



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Helen C.
San Francisco, Ca. Citizen

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Table 1

Agency

Los Angeles, California
Prince George's County, Maryland
Dallas, Texas
St. Petersburg, Florida	.....
Clayton County, Georgia	.....
San Diego, California	.....
Phoenix, Arizona	.....
Oakland, California	.....
New York City, New York	.....
Plano, Texas	.....
Honolulu, Hawaii	.....
San Jose, California	.....
Houston, Texas	.....

Tucker, the police chief in Oakland, California, reports that "as few as 5 percent of the applicants pass the background check and psychological and physical exams required to be an officer."²⁰ Even after appointment, it is not unusual to lose 25 percent or more of the persons appointed during the rigorous training at the police academy.

Recruitment Efforts and Incentives

Federal, state, and local government agencies compete against one another to fill law enforcement positions. Since fewer than 5 percent of the applicants qualify for appointments, employers are reaching out and using different types of

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incentives to attract individuals.

The City of San Jose, California, recently sent a recruiting unit to Honolulu, Hawaii, to obtain police officer applicants.²¹ In turn, the Honolulu Police Department—the 12th largest in the country with 2000 sworn positions—has sent recruiters to San Diego, California, and Portland, Oregon, seeking persons interested in careers in law enforcement. The Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department—with almost 3000 sworn positions—budgeted \$300,000 to expand its pool of applicants by recruiting in the Los Angeles metropolitan area for 500 vacant positions.²²

Agencies are trying various incentives to attract applicants. Texas law enforcement agencies need law enforcement officers so badly that Dallas, Austin, and Houston are in the midst of a bidding war to hire vet-

- King County, Washington—40 hours of vacation time for any deputy who recruits an individual who becomes an officer²⁸
- Los Angeles, California—a retirement payment of \$250,000 in addition to a pension after 20 years of employment²⁹
- Lexington, Kentucky—up to \$7,400 for a down payment on a home in an area designated for redevelopment³⁰

Qualification Standards

Historically, people who applied for sworn law enforcement positions could not have misdemeanor or felony convictions, a record of prior drug use, or a criminal conviction. Now, chiefs have to consider the circumstances and the context. An individual convicted for using marijuana several years earlier, with an otherwise clean police record, may be considered an attractive applicant by many police agencies, when he or she succeeds in other parts of the selection

Vacant Positions	Source
720	7
60	8
600	9
27	10
50	11
152	12
500	13
93	14
800	15
23	16
200	17
50	18
700	19

eran officers, with Houston recently upping its bonus to \$7,000.²³ Dallas, countering the Houston bonus, increased its bonus to \$10,000.²⁴ The San Diego, California, County Sheriff's Department has offered a \$500 bounty to county employees who find applicants who become deputies. It also provides a signing bonus of \$5000 to lateral hires—law enforcement officers transferring from another agency.²⁵ The Oregon Army National Guard is offering bonuses of up to \$20,000 for military police positions.²⁶

Other incentives include the following:

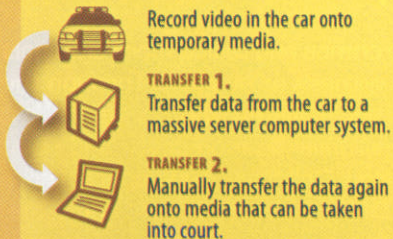
- Phoenix, Arizona—assistance with a down payment when purchasing a home²⁷



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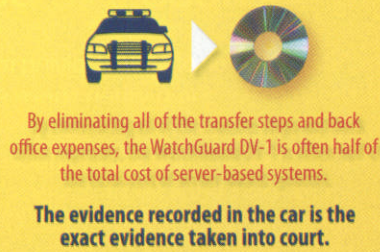
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process. Hubert Williams, president of the Police Foundation, a law enforcement advocacy group, states that "... a few years ago, an arrest record was a deal breaker. Now departments are asking whether someone is salvageable."³¹

Police departments nationwide have had to adjust their hiring policies because of widespread drug use in society as a whole. Even the FBI has had to adjust its standards. Until 1994, the FBI had a zero-tolerance policy disqualifying anyone who had used marijuana or other drugs, even in one-time experiments.

The FBI's revised policy still disqualifies people

- who have sold illegal drugs,
- who have used drugs in the past three years,
- who have used marijuana more than 15 times, or
- who have used harder drugs, including cocaine, more than a total of five times or any time within the past 10 years.³²

Because of recruitment difficulties, the FBI is considering changing its policy further, judging applicants based on their "whole person" rather than limiting

drug-related experiences to an arbitrary number. It would consider the circumstances of an applicant's previous drug use, such as the person's age, and the likelihood of further use. The relaxed standard is already in use at most other U.S. intelligence agencies.³³

The Austin, Texas, Police Department has established a prior-use drug policy that revolves around the experimental versus the habitual user. Rather than disqualifying an individual for prior drug use, the police department tries to distinguish between the individual who has used marijuana or other drugs on several occasions as opposed to a person who has regularly used drugs over an extended period of time.³⁴

Recruiting Competition

A survey of more than 850 peace officer basic training academy recruits collected from 14 California peace officer academies revealed that the two issues applicants had the most difficulty with were the following:

- Time—the selection process took too long to complete
- Communication—lack of contact through the process³⁵

Since many agencies test continuously for law enforcement positions and many applicants submit applications to multiple agencies, the agency that takes the most care of an individual through the selection process will often be the one that the individual chooses—and that agency will further succeed in keeping vacancies to a minimum.

Additionally, and consistent with the recruit survey, even though the selection process sometimes extends over many weeks or months, agencies that remain in contact with applicants during the process reassure the applicants that the agencies are interested in employing them.

Federal, state, and local government agencies must not leave law enforcement recruiting to chance, especially those agencies that regularly experience difficulty in filling positions. They must "be on top of their game"—the agency must know the practices, procedures, incentives, and rewards that other employers are using to attract applicants, and use them in turn.

In addition, the agency's internal selection procedures must move applicants through the several tests and other requirements without undue delay—even if those procedures need to be revised in order to do so.

If agencies need to recruit from this new generation work force, they will



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need to use those techniques that attract them. It will require adaptation, but it can be done. ♦

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²² Kevin Johnson, "Police Recruits In Heavy Demand," *USA Today* (10 November 2005).

²³ John Pomfret, "Police Finding It Hard to Fill Jobs," *Washington Post* (27 March 2006): AO1.

²⁴ Susan Kreimer, "Officers See Best, Worst of People," *Dallas Morning News* (26 June 2006).

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