



[Event:](#) Little Hoover Commission—Public Hearing on Law Enforcement Training (Part 2)

[Date/Time:](#) Thursday, February 25, 2021 | 10:00am

[Event Overview:](#)

The Little Hoover Commission is examining the development of training standards for California’s law enforcement community.

Lawmakers established the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) in 1959 to set minimum selection and training standards for California law enforcement agencies. Agency participation in the POST program is voluntary, though 92 percent of California’s nearly 700 law enforcement agencies participate. The POST Commission also offers a number of tools and services for participating agencies and issues professional certificates to recognize peace officer achievement and proficiency.

[Event Objectives:](#)

Each year, lawmakers introduce new legislation to amend training requirements for peace officers and clarify training priorities for the POST Commission. Given lawmakers ongoing interest in ensuring California peace officers receive adequate and appropriate training, with this study the Commission will:

- Review and analyze existing training requirements for California peace officers.
- Consider how current training requirements align with the responsibilities of peace officers in the field.
- Review the process for amending peace officer training requirements.

[Event Participants:](#)

- Damon Kurtz, Vice President, Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC)
- TBD

[Brian Marvel Written Testimony/Talking Points:](#)

1. How does existing training content align with officers’ experiences in the field? Are there any mandated courses or curricula that do not align with the realities of the profession?

- Community policing today is more complex than ever before. The basic functions and duties of an officer have changed immensely over the years, and yet, the amount of education we expect of our officers to prepare them for the adversities they will face on the job have not changed enough.
- As law enforcement and public safety moves into a more modern world, we need to take a deep dive into the kind of training requirements current and prospective officers must receive before being certified to practice in our local communities.
- It has also become clear that the 685-hour police academy does not cover the mandated training required by the Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (POST) and all the new legislative requirements.
- Today’s line officers and leaders must meet a wide variety of challenges including, evolving technologies, changing laws, new cultural norms, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and a growing mental health crisis.
- To truly improve public safety outcomes and restore trust in law enforcement, we need to create an environment that recruits, trains, educates and retains the best public safety professionals for the job as it is today.

2. Are there additional training subjects that are not adequately covered by existing curriculum but could help officers better prepare for the realities of the job? (For example, some have said additional mental health training would help support officers deal with traumas they encounter. Others suggest a greater focus on soft skills like emotional intelligence or interpersonal communication would be helpful.)

- In a word, yes. That is why PORAC and the California Police Chiefs Association (CPCA) sponsored the LEARN – or Law Enforcement Academic and Recruitment Next Act – with Senator Anthony Portantino that was announced only two weeks ago. The bill provides a framework and establishes funding for recruiting & educating California’s next generation of officers.
- PORAC doesn’t just want to improve our profession; we have made it our mission to have the best trained and most highly educated peace officers in the country by the end of this decade, and the LEARN Act represents only one of many steps that will need to be taken to get there.
- By providing both prospective and current officers with more opportunities to earn a college degree and the curriculum needed to prepare them for the rigors and adversities they will face on the job, we can help to create a cultural shift that will prepare and empower our officers to approach each interaction with the necessary tools and skills, especially when confronting resistance.

3. Is existing training effective in achieving desired learning outcomes/behavior changes in the field? How can this be improved?

- While training and education requirements for California’s officers are already amongst the highest in the nation, we want to continue to lead and raise the bar.
- Jeffrey Fagan, a criminologist at Columbia University probably said it best, “We want people who have the capacity for emotional regulation — so they don’t get angry, they don’t see authority challenges as personal challenges, they don’t fall on use of force as the first response to a challenge to their authority. We want people who are good at planning and thinking ahead. We want people who have a capacity to learn from their mistakes.”
- I do think the existing training is effective, but that doesn’t mean it cannot or should not be improved upon.
- We need a multi-discipline approach to capture all the various skill-set requirements necessary of the modern police officer, and that is going to mean more time in the classroom.
- That is why we proposed the LEARN Act, which calls for developing an expanded curriculum specifically designed to prepare officers to meet the expectations of a modern police force, including classes on mental health, social services, psychology, communication and more – and makes this coursework a requirement for officers looking to move up in the ranks and to receive their intermediate and advanced POST certificates.

4. Do officers have sufficient access or opportunity to take higher level courses appropriate to their rank and experience? What are some of the challenges for officers/agencies who wish to seek/encourage continuing education? In what ways could California expand access to additional learning opportunities for officers throughout their careers?

- We have an opportunity, and frankly, a responsibility to create more opportunities for officers to continue their education.
- Years of research and multiple studies seem to confirm the connection between education levels and police behavior – these studies show that:

- “Officers with only high school educations were the subjects of 75 percent of all disciplinary actions.”
- On average, officers with undergraduate degrees performed on par with officers who had 10 years of additional experience.
- A college degree significantly reduces the likelihood that officers will use force as their first option to gain compliance and educated officers tend to demonstrate greater levels of creativity and problem-solving skills.
- Too often our young prospective officers go right into a career in law enforcement straight from high school because they lack the financial resources to pursue a higher degree, and while we believe that should remain an option, PORAC working to develop a new Cadet Corps modeled after a very similar program that has seen success in New York.
- The program would provide cadets with the chance to receive on-the-job experience with a department while providing the financial resources they need to pursue a higher-education degree, all before they become certified to practice law enforcement in the state.
- The credits they earn through their coursework would apply both to their license to practice law enforcement through the police academy – many of which are already administered by community colleges throughout the state – as well as to their chosen degree.
- Just as teachers can have their education debt forgiven after a certain period of years teaching at a public school, cadets would be afforded this same opportunity through the Cadet Corps program. Once hired, Cadet Corps members would have access to a loan forgiveness program, whereby in exchange for working as an officer for a particular department or agency for a specified number of years, their education debt would likewise be forgiven.
- The ultimate goal of this program is two-fold: We want to provide minority and economically dis-advantaged youth the chance to pursue both a career in law enforcement as well as a higher-education degree, helping to both recruit and train the best men and women to serve their communities. But we also want to work with California’s community colleges to establish a degree program that is specific to the practice of law enforcement and public safety in California.

5. Is there a need for greater standardization in the way training is offered across academies and instructors? Why or why not?

- Yes, I believe so. That why PORAC, in partnership with the California Police Chiefs Association and California Association of Highway Patrolman, sponsored SB 230 in 2019 – making California the first state in the nation to mandate that every law enforcement officer state must receive training specifically designed to minimize the use of force.
- More specifically de-escalation, rendering medical aid and proportional use of force.
- But it takes time, as we’ve discussed, for new legislative requirements to make their way into POST curriculum.
- And these more practical training requirements must be supplemented with more academic coursework that will help California’s peace officers better understand not only how to implement the tactics that will allow them to perform their duties safely and effectively, but when, where and why those tactics will or will not be successful depending on the situation.
- Greater standardization in way officers are trained will absolutely help to ensure that we are on track to meet our goal of having the most highly trained and educated police force in the nation, but I also think it is important to recognize that California’s law enforcement community is not a monolith.

- Each California community and the elected leaders that represent those communities have very different ideas about how they would like to see their communities policed.
- That is why as we seek to standardize the trainings officers receive statewide, we should also be seeking input from local departments, agencies and associations about what does and does not work for them based on their own lived experiences with the people they are sworn to serve.
- In addition, the requirements we have of our instructors are incredibly out of date. We need to make sure that instructors aren't simply continuing to teach the same content and material they were certified to teach 10 or 20 years ago but are required to themselves re-certify with regularity their course of instruction to ensure we are providing officers with the latest and greatest.

6. If you could build a training and educational program for California law enforcement from the ground up, what elements would you redesign?

- Well first I would like to acknowledge that I think we are doing a lot of this work already.
- One of the reasons we sponsored the LEARN Act was to do exactly this, redesign the training and educational program for officers in California.
- But it will take time, it will take money, and most importantly, it will take a commitment from our elected officials to provide the resources we need to implement.
- With all of that said, I would eventually like to see the academy expanded to a full two years to include more academic instruction. Ultimately, I would like to establish a degree program that is specific to the practice of law enforcement that goes hand-in-hand with the academy training by attributing POST credits to this coursework as well.
- I think we need to increase training and instruction with mental health and social work professionals to better prepare officers when interacting with at-risk members of our communities.
- We need to increase implicit and explicit bias training for both prospective and current officers, revise training programs to put a greater emphasis on de-escalation tactics, and how and when use of force options are allowable to gain compliance.
- But redesigning training and education alone will not go far enough. We also need redefine our hiring practices to increase diversity and ensure we are recruiting the right people, people that will approach the job with empathy, deference and respect.