



Issue Brief: California Law Enforcement Survey

November 2021

Executive Summary

In the fall of 2020, the Little Hoover Commission launched a study to examine the role of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) in shaping law enforcement training standards for California's peace officers. As part of this work, the Commission anonymously surveyed active-duty peace officers in May 2021 to learn more about the training they receive through POST. Over 300 officers responded to the survey, and their answers, detailed in this Issue Brief, provide critical insight into the strengths and shortcomings of police training in California.

Officers' survey responses affirmed the value of the training they receive, but also pointed to problems.

- Overall, training in California is perceived to be superior to training in other states. Over 80 percent of officers said the training they receive is better than the training provided to their peers in different parts of the country.
- Officers overwhelmingly agreed that all forms of training – basic, field, in-service – are relevant to the work they do, yet officers are split on whether this formal training is more important than the informal on-the-job advice they receive from colleagues.
- Over 80 percent said stress-based academies provide essential training for law enforcement, and 76 percent agreed that California should continue using them. Sixty-four percent of officers said non-stress academies are not as effective as stress-based ones for preparing officers for the reality of policing.

Still, throughout the survey officers also identified pressing challenges that could be addressed to improve the training they receive.

- Over half of officers said certain subjects are not adequately covered by existing training curriculum. Mental health, de-escalation, legal processes and procedures, use of force, and officer wellness were identified as topics for which training is lacking.
- Various barriers prevent officers from pursuing additional training. Finding staff to backfill positions while officers receive training is frequently a barrier for 52 percent of respondents, while financing is a roadblock for almost half.
- Nearly 70 percent of officers said there needs to be greater consistency in training across California's 692 law enforcement departments and 41 basic training academies.
- Oversight of training outcomes and their effectiveness is missing. More than 80 percent of officers agreed that POST should monitor training outcomes and adjust its standards and curricula accordingly, while almost 70 percent said POST should incorporate research on training effectiveness into its training standards.

We hope this Brief will serve as a resource for state policymakers as they evaluate ways to improve police training to benefit peace officers and all Californians.