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**Returning the Veteran to Police Service:  
Establishing a TCOLE-Mandated Reintegration Program  
in the State of Texas**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
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## **ABSTRACT**

As veterans return from deployments across the globe they face many challenges ranging from significant amounts of time separated from family and friends, to dealing with the nature of modern day, asymmetrical warfare during their deployment. This means our veterans who are members of law enforcement encounter unique circumstances as they transition from a warrior mindset back to a guardian mindset. Having an effective process in place to facilitate this transition is an important and fundamental responsibility the law enforcement agency and the communities share ensuring the returning veteran is once again grounded in the notion they are primarily charged with a mission to protect and serve. To accomplish this task it is imperative that law enforcement agencies are equipped with the tools needed to build a cohesive line of communication between the returning veteran and the law enforcement agency. No longer can an ad hoc system of reintegrating veterans back into their previous roles exist. The uneasiness and uncertainty can be curtailed by boldly pursuing the creation of a veteran reintegration program to be established at every law enforcement agency in the State of Texas.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction . . . . .	1
Position . . . . .	3
Counter Arguments . . . . .	8
Recommendation . . . . .	11
References . . . . .	14

## INTRODUCTION

Since that tragic Tuesday at 8:46 (EST) when the first hijacked plane slammed into the World Trade Center, it is a date now etched into our minds as 9/11 and can never be erased. In a very short period of time, the United States mobilized military forces and what would soon be known as Operation Iraq Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom galvanized in an effort to root out terrorism. According to Curran, Holt, and Afanador (2017), over two million members of the Armed Services have served in support of the campaigns against terrorism. Of these, many of them were members of the National Guard and Reserves who were also members of law enforcement who stepped away from their careers, deployed, and had to deal with the demand of assimilating back home and in their careers upon deactivation (Curran et al., 2017). The International Association of Chiefs of Police (2010) estimates that 18,000 National Guard and Reserve personnel have served on active duty. A distinct outcome of this fact is that military service and law enforcement are intertwined. The numerous activations, deployments, and the demanding process of reintegrating back into a law enforcement role can be challenging (Curran et al., 2017).

Clearly this challenge is not only a contemporary one, but historically has been a unique aspect of our society. After World War II, questions were posed about how returning veterans would reintegrate into society. These veterans were observed to see how quickly they moved back into being a civilian, transitioning from a military mind set without lingering effects, and in many cases the transition occurred without notice (Becker, 1946). Nonetheless, the shadow of past experiences shrouded with memories of tragic events, loneliness, living in a harsh deployed environment, and dealing with the

traumatic experiences associated with modern warfare can result in physical and emotional scars. When applied to the realm of a military member's transition back to police services, there exists unique challenges and cultural adjustments that can be less than forthright (Johnson, 2013).

The topic of reintegration of the military member back into the law enforcement role needs to be examined. The mass deployments to areas such as Afghanistan and Iraq are dwindling down to much smaller numbers, but the military will continue to call upon our National Guardsman and Reservist to fill billets as conflicts emerge in the future. A short sighted approach would be to focus on the downward trajectory of activations, not understanding that a major conflict could erupt again resulting in an upward trajectory of activations occurring once again. The United States would again see a substantial increase in the number of troops deploying and a significant number of these would be police officers. Activations will continue in other parts of the world from now on as the Guard and Reserves components are seen as integral parts of the Total Force. The use of the Guard and Reserve components has been cemented even further because of the relationships built when partnering with the active duty components (Wormuth, 1999).

It can be reasonably asserted the use of National Guardsman and Reservist is now established as routine; the new norm to sustain and fight in many locations across the globe. With that comes the new norm of our law enforcement professionals leaving their police departments and ultimately returning back to serve their communities. This cycle of deployments and returning to the previous roles means police officers face a number of uncertainties. According to Currie, Day, and Kelloway (2011) reintegration is

defined as “the process of transitioning back into personal and organization roles after deployment” (p. 38). Police officers returning from active duty are faced with the sometimes daunting task of re-assimilating back to the role of peace officers after serving as a soldier, sailor, airman, or marine. As these veterans return there is a lack of reintegration programs in place despite recommendations that these programs are in place and follow legal guidelines associated with employment laws (Curran et al., 2017).

Police departments across the State of Texas have been shortsighted and not progressive when addressing the topic of reintegrating police officers back into their civilian roles. Texas National Guardsman and Reservists have raised their hand and swore allegiance to the United States and faithfully deployed throughout the world. However, when they return, it is incumbent upon the police departments to ensure these veterans are mentally and physically ready to serve their communities once again. The implementation of standardized reintegration programs should be implemented statewide, funded by our legislature, and managed by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE).

## **POSITION**

Implementing a statewide reintegration program for veterans returning to police agencies would ensure a consistent and comprehensive program is established. This would provide more certainty that our veteran police officers are allowed the opportunity to assimilate back into their civilian roles with the appropriate level of training and mentorship. When veterans are released from active duty military service they may face challenges adjusting to civilian life and this is commonly recognized (Johnson, 2013). While many similarities can be found to exist between military service and police

service, there are also significant differences. Use of force policies, balancing mundane moments with moments of stress, and rules of engagement are unique in law enforcement (Johnson, 2013).

The circumstances illustrated above provide the framework for why reintegration programs should be established in Texas. Curran et al. (2017) stated that over two million military personnel have served in the Area of Responsibility (AOR) since the outbreak of warfare following 9/11. Serving in the AOR means challenges and hardships, exposure to high-tempo operations, combat and non-combat related injuries and death, and separation from families for extended periods of time. Many of these military members were law enforcement personnel who set their careers to the side, then came home to the demands of adjusting to returning to a civilian life (Curran et al., 2017).

When military members return from deployments, a mental health screening is conducted utilizing Post Deployment Assessment (PHDA) questionnaires (Curran et al., 2017, p. 163). Military members are then required to complete a Post Deployment Health Reassessment 90-180 days after the deployment. Milliken, Auchterlonie, and Hoge (2007) indicated this time span could be the reason why some mental health issues are missed. More significantly, the study noted mental health treatment referrals of guard and reserve members outpaced their peer active duty members. Milliken et al. (2007) further stressed that guard and reserve members had higher mental health care referral rates, were less likely to seek treatment, possibly due to lack of access to services, and guard and reserve members' separated from their units and quickly transitioned to civilian status.

This is impactful when applied directly to the uniqueness of guard and reserve members transitioning back to their roles as police officers. One can easily recognize the need for reintegration programs for returning police officers. Questions are left unanswered as these service members suddenly transform back to a “protect and service” status, exposed and left to shuffle from warrior to a guardian mindset. Another layer of care and oversight must be added and police reintegration programs can be invaluable. Police agencies should have reintegration programs that are created to deal with this transition, and they should be instituted and abide by labor laws and legal guidelines (Curran et al., 2017).

In the realm of the policing profession, it has been well-established as dangerous, punctuated with scenes of death, human misery, and this may lead to higher rates of alcoholism, depression and illnesses prompted by stress. Police departments are addressing the need to intervene and provide mental health and stress reduction programs, and creating peer support groups is occurring too (Price, 2017). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) maintains that police officers have injury and illness rates that far surpass many other professions. Therefore, it can reasonably conclude that not only is the inherent nature of policing dangerous, it is likely to result in officers being more susceptible to mental health issues. Establishing this point accentuates the need for implementing a systematic approach to reintegrating military members returning to police communities across the State of Texas. The IACP (2009) made it clear that mental health of police officers falls within the sphere of officer safety. However, there remains a reticence on the part of officers to report mental illness



because it could impact the manner in which they are perceived by the department. (Price, 2017).

Multiple deployments and the nature of the warfare in locations such as Iraq and Afghanistan can exacerbate the problems of veterans dealing with PTSD due to the asymmetrical type of warfare punctuated with improvised exploding devices (IED's) and guerilla tactics according to Hafemeister and Stockey (2010). Traumatic events that occurred during deployments, coupled with disparate events that occur post deployment increase the likelihood of PTSD (Olusanya, 2012). Subsequently, police officers returning from active duty face the reality that PTSD can impact them. Compound this with the fact that officers are faced with numerous stressors both on duty and off duty.

There exists a significant need to counter this likelihood with a systematic approach of establishing reintegration programs for police officers. A topic that should also be considered is the growing number of female officers who have served on active duty. Female police officers are growing in numbers and now represent 9% of the police work force, and wellness programs are seen as the best manner in which to meet the transition dilemma (Johnson, 2013). Transition programs incorporate wellness programs into the process and our female police officers should not be overlooked.

There remains a strong link between the military and law enforcement. This will continue unabated as police departments actively recruit prior military service members. This has been occurring for over a century for a number of reasons ranging from there are those that desire to serve their country by joining the military, to there are those that want to continue a legacy of service by focusing on serving their communities.

Another reason is there are common themes and similar organizational structures the military and police departments share. This serves as a catalyst as young men and woman serve in the military and feel a strong desire to continue with a well-found need to serve their communities. Military members are heavily recruited at job fairs and there are programs specifically created to attract our military members to cross over into police services, including federal programs such as Troops to COPS that was part of the 1993 Defense Authorization Act where departments received up to \$25,000 per veteran that was recruited and hired (Ivie & Garland, 2011).

Often the mere essence of a police department permeates a military structure. The rank structure in many cases is the same with sergeants, lieutenants, captains, colonels, etc. with titles attributed to police ranks identical to those attributed to military ranks. Auten (1981) stated that the formality of uniforms, briefings, inspections, and basic police academies structured like a basic military training regimen exist. This is relevant because the affiliation between the military and law enforcement results in a substantial number of military members continuing their military service as a guardsman or reservist, a duality that intersects with impact when the police officer is called to active duty. Research suggests those with military experience have more resiliency when it comes to dealing with events that precipitate anxiety, along with characteristics of discipline and congruity serve as a shield against stress (Ivie & Garland, 2011).

Nonetheless, there remains a concern about our returning veterans who have deployed and served in stressful environments, and then return to similar circumstances in police services, are at risk of being overwhelmed with the prospect of dealing with stress. Brailey, Vasterling, Proctor, Constans, and Freidman (2007); and, Kilgore,

Cotting, Thomas, Cox, McGurk, and Vo (2008) concluded that exposure to combat can result in higher levels of mental health concerns, PTSD, and depression. Subsequently, Kilgore et al. (2008) added that this can also lead to riskier behavior occurring when the deployed veteran returns. Certainly this is impactful to law enforcement and further supports the premise that state mandated transitional programs for veterans should be implemented.

## **COUNTER ARGUMENTS**

While the best intentions of institutions are many times aimed at assisting those who have served and may need assistance transitioning, there is a concern this can cause unintended consequences. Specifically, a negative stigma may arise and the returning service may have reservations about once again being thrust into the forefront of getting back to normal. Research conducted within the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) revealed some of the returning veterans expressed specific concerns about being stigmatized or viewed as broken simply because of their service (IACP, 2009). Furthermore, returning officers are sometimes hesitant to trust their agencies regarding confidentially issues, and veterans often have formed a strong bond with their guard and reserve units that is stronger than their bond with the police agency (IACP, 2009).

However, the concerns related to anxieties about stigmas have to be surmounted. Certainly these concerns should be taken into account and agencies should have transition programs that consider concerns about stigmas and confidentially concerns, but the indispensable point is that military veterans need a well-structured reintegration program so that law enforcement agencies can be certain

potential invisible wounds are addressed and do not manifest as time progresses (Hink, 2010).

Numerous agencies across the United States have implemented veteran transition programs. The size of the agencies ranges from large to small and what is important is these agencies have taken a proactive approach to taking care of the returning veteran's needs and alleviating some of the problems associated with reintegration. For example, the Los Angeles Police Department created a Military Liaison Program in 2003, and smaller agencies such as the Santa Monica Police Department have had a program in place since 2001 (Hink, 2010). The programs may vary in content, but the focus is on taking care of the veteran before, during, and after the deployment, ensuring they understand benefits, administer physical and mental health assessments, and the main focus is making sure the veteran knows they are still a part of the police family (Hink, 2010). Mentoring the returning veteran is probably one of the more impactful aspects of a reintegration program. One can assert veterans may be concerned about stigmas being attached to them, but one of the best ways to overcome this fear is through mentorship. Having a confidant that the reservist can address personal issues with is essential, and preferably a mentor who the veteran is already familiar with can be helpful (Lendman, 2004).

Another opposition to veteran reintegration programs surrounds the theory of additional stressors being placed upon returning veterans. Some veterans are at a higher risk of mental health concerns and some feel simply establishing more robust reintegration programs could have a paradoxical outcome. This may seem counter intuitive but research suggests this could be a concern (Haller, Angkaw, Hendricks, &

Norman, 2016). Higher rates of suicide have been determined to exist for veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation New Dawn (OND), and along with this this comes the premise that suicidal ideation (SI) is more likely and is linked to PTSD (Haller, Angkaw, Hendricks, & Norman, 2016). One could then conclude that further stressors would only serve to accentuate the concern, particularly if a police agency were to assert its authority and harshly administer a reintegration program, thus resulting in veterans facing further adversity. Crocker, Powell-Cope, Brown, and Besterman-Dahan (2014) indicated that despite all five branches of the military service requiring military members to participate in reintegration programs prior to release from active duty, the efficacy of these programs seems inadequate. Finally, stress associated with reintegration programs coupled with PTSD and other associated mental health concerns may increase suicide risks for veterans (Haller et al., 2016).

Notwithstanding the argument presented above, there are compelling points to withstand the assertion. There is undoubtedly risks associated with implementing standardized reintegration programs for every law enforcement agency throughout the State of Texas. Dunlap (1999) asserts that transitioning military members from an emphasis on combat skills to public service skills is critical. Police officers are resilient and research supports the theory that officers with prior military service do not have perceived stress levels that are higher than that of their peers lacking military experience (Patterson, 2002). Additionally, Violanti (1992) concluded that life experiences and personality types, coupled with education levels explains why officers respond to stress differently. The assertion here is many factors impact how officers

returning from military service will respond to stress and reintegration to police services. Careful consideration should be given to the presumption that all returning veterans have amplified mental health concerns such as PTSD, depression, etc. Other factors to consider when veterans reintegrate into the agency are significant. Swanson (1977) concluded that officers with higher education levels tend to possess higher levels of stress related to organization factors. Assignments are a factor too as returning veterans assigned to smaller, specialized units may encounter less stress as opposed to officers returning to large, bureaucratic type patrol divisions (Patterson, 2002).

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Every law enforcement agency should have a State of Texas mandated veteran transition program, and it should be administered through TCOLE. These mandated programs should be focused on the health and well-being of the veteran who is faced with a daunting task of moving from a primary role of warrior to a primary role of guardian. Moreover, police agencies must balance the need to transition returning veterans while respecting their rights outlined in federal statutes such as the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act, 2008, Americans with Disabilities Act, 2002, and the Uniformed Services Employment Rights Act (1994). Police agencies are forbidden from mandating fitness for duty evaluations (Curran et al., 2017). These concerns can be mitigated by agencies carefully and lawfully following a structured state mandated reintegration program. The programs need not be extensive and should generally consist of rules of engagement, working in a community setting, and how to deal with stress (Shernock, 2017). Another aspect to consider is the nature of activations and deployment are they include positive attributes. Klein Associates (2009) and Webster

(2008) discuss the benefits of deployments ranging from enhanced weapons training to better responses to critical incidents.

An equitable mixture of mentorship and proper training should be emphasized when crafting a reintegration program. Millions of military members have been deployed and served their country, and many of them are law enforcement professionals. Despite the downward trend in military activations and deployments, it would be short sighted to think a surge could not occur again. Over 20% of those seeking employment with a police agency possess military experience (Curran et al., 2017) and there is nothing to suggest that this legacy of law enforcement agencies attracting military talent will abate. The potential impact of invisible wounds exist among veterans returning to police agencies, and studies suggest that approximately 35% of deployed military members may suffer from mental health issues (Hink, 2010). Subsequently, the suggested numbers cannot be ignored and having a state mandated reintegration program is critical.

There are detractors who purport that more integration programs can cause further stress. Research has concluded that reintegration stress accompanying PTSD symptoms can elevate the risk of suicide (Haller et al., 2016). Yet law enforcement agencies can take solace in the fact that research also supports the premise that police officers are resilient. Violanti (1983) suggested that officers with more experience adapt to the work environment and deal with stress favorably, and that is because they “perceptually adapt” (p.113). This further supports the position that officers are resilient and perceived stress associated with integrations programs can be overcome. Additionally, the content of the reintegration programs can be impactful and determine

the success or failure of the programs. The programs should be transparent and designed to successfully return veterans to the role as police officers and decrease the liability of agencies (Hink, 2010).

Finally, developing reintegration programs for veterans across the state of Texas can be accomplished if our law enforcement leaders and legislatures understand the value of these programs. Part of the process should be to educate our leaders and unite them in a meaningful effort to promote the idea of funding these programs. Furthermore, by allowing TCOLE to administer the program will result in a professional, curriculum based process geared towards balancing the needs of the veteran returning to police services and the needs of the communities they serve. The legacy of veterans serving their country and then serving our communities is exceptional and beneficial. Protecting and serving veterans will allow them to protect and serve all the citizens of the state of Texas in a safe and proud manner.



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