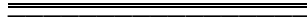
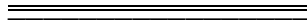


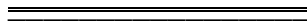
**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Law Enforcement Agencies Should Focus on Retention of Officers**



**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Throughout the country, there is a consistent dilemma that many small to medium sized law enforcement agencies are facing. That dilemma is the revolving door of officer turnover. Over the last decade, agencies have found ways to actively recruit new officers by thinking outside of the box in their techniques and tactics. Some of these recruiting campaigns over social media and the internet have reached to seasoned, experienced police officers in the smaller agencies. Law enforcement agencies should make strives to retain their experienced officers to prevent turnover costs and loss of agency investment in their personnel. Another way agencies can prevent turnover is by introducing incentive based programs that provide incentive pay for employees that hold higher education certifications, law enforcement certifications, and master certain job related skills. Retention is important to the future of law enforcement. In retaining experienced officers, agencies will be able to reduce the amount of costs associated with turnover. The costs of turnover should be redirected into incentive-based pay to retain experienced, qualified officers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the country, there is a consistent dilemma that many small to medium sized law enforcement agencies are facing. That dilemma is retention of experienced law enforcement officers and the revolving door of officers leaving their departments. Over the last decade, agencies have found ways to actively recruit new officers by thinking outside of the box in their techniques and tactics. Some of these recruiting campaigns are easily accessible over social media and the internet. Recruitment tactics have targeted the experienced police officers in the small to medium sized agencies. Several states have found that at least 25 percent of officers leave their department within the first 18-36 months on the job (Orrick, n.d.). There are several reasons why law enforcement agencies are experiencing turnover, specifically with veteran officers. These reasons include; better economic opportunities elsewhere, current agency salaries are not competitive and employees seeking advancement in growth and promotion opportunities. Turnover rates weigh heavily on the restricted yearly budgets. Law enforcement agencies should strive to place an emphasis on retaining experienced officers to prevent turnover costs and loss of agency investment in their personnel.

In today's society (2020), there is a negative light on the noble profession of law enforcement and policing. Potential recruits are second guessing this career path due to the negativity in the media and on social media platforms. From 2014 to the summer of 2020 there were several high-profile news reports spotlighting riots, use of force cases and the emerging Defund the Police movement. By focusing on officer retention

efforts and investing in experienced officers, agencies can redirect recruitment funds into incentive-based programs.

Law enforcement agencies can prevent turnover by introducing incentive-based programs that provide incentive pay for employees that hold higher education certifications, law enforcement certifications, and officers who master certain job-related skills. The Pflugerville Police Department has an incentive pay program that provides incentives for monthly certification pay, educational pay and other incentive skill pay (Pflugerville, Texas Police Department, n.d.). These incentives include night differential pay for officers working night shift. Night differential pay at Pflugerville Police Department is an additional \$2.00 an hour in incentive pay (Pflugerville, Texas Police Department, n.d.). In addition, they have specialty skill pay for K-9 Officers which is a high demanding position, where officers and K-9 continually train daily (Pflugerville, Texas Police Department, n.d.). There are several other demanding special fields that have incentives, such as advanced investigator, traffic investigations and crisis intervention team (Pflugerville, Texas Police Department, n.d.). Incentive programs provide more income for officers, create better work opportunities, and provide a sense that the agency is valuing their service. Retention is one of the most important aspects to the future of law enforcement. Retaining experienced officers and implementing incentive-based programs will reduce the amount of costs associated with turnover.

## **POSITION**

Law enforcement agencies have a vast responsibility to the community they serve and the employees they invest in to carry out the department's mission and goals. The number one responsibility is to the public that has entrusted law enforcement

officers to serve them. All agencies are limited to the budgets that are allowed by city and county officials. A constant and recurring budgetary concern is officer recruitment and retention. The monetary expenses begin well before an applicant submits their application and receives a job offer. Part of the monetary expenses in the budget begin with recruiters taking the time to actively recruit for applicants. Advertising methods are costly and include placing an ad in local newspapers, recording video advertisements for TV commercials, compiling graphics and outlines for handout brochures, and by officers attending job fairs at schools.

In the past decade starting in 2009, advances in recruitment have been seen all over social media platforms. Departments have had successes in recruiting on social media platforms such as Facebook. Departments are able to quickly and effectively advertise their department strengths such as starting pay and incentive pay. Competition is high and salary rates are very competitive. In addition to the costs associated with advertisement, there are costs of employing the recruiter conducting the background investigations. Once an applicant submits their application, the background process begins. The recruitment process can take up to three to six months to complete. The training officers conducting the background investigations spend countless hours conducting a thorough background to submit only the most qualified applicants. The officer(s) conducting the background and application process invest their time in organizing the review boards, conducting the physical agility tests, and submitting the background to administration for review.

According to the Victoria Police Department 2020 budget the average costs to recruit a quality applicant, hire, send to a local police academy, provide duty gear, and

fully train from the initial application submission to fully functioning officer can exceed \$80,000.00 (City of Victoria, Texas, 2020). For small to medium size departments, this is a significant expense to their budgets. The hiring and training process can take anywhere from twelve to eighteen months to complete. Law enforcement agencies should expect three to five years of service before they can expect a return on the agency's investment in an officer (Meade, 2017). A North Carolina study found that police agencies in that state had an average turnover rate of 14 percent for patrol officers, with average tenure for a new officer being 33 months (Orrick, 2005). Police officers typically leave their jobs for several different reasons. Officers are leaving agencies due to economic issues, competitive job salaries at other agencies, poor leadership, and growth opportunities. Therefore, officers leave their departments for other agencies where there are "greener pastures". Depending on the size of the agency, turnover can be a major concern to their budget. Some agencies view turnover as a revolving door. With the knowledge that most officers leave in three to five years, agencies hold the philosophy that they should focus their concerns on recruitment over retention. Keep in mind that it will cost the Victoria Police Department approximately \$80,000.00 to recruit, train and equip a new recruit (City of Victoria, Texas, 2020). This is a costly practice that can be avoided by focusing on retaining experienced officers with competitive salaries and incentive-based programs.

Officer retention can cut recurring budget costs and reduce the revolving door theory. By retaining officers, agencies will capitalize on the investment of time and expenses they put into each of their officers. Retaining qualified personnel that bring knowledge and skills is an area of concern for human resources. Poor retention and

turnover are demanding costs that are typically not accounted for. According to a 2017 study, when a worker departs, the employer spends an average of 33 percent of that worker's salary on finding and hiring a replacement (Harris, n.d.). Retaining officers will reduce the budgetary expenses; therefore, the costs that would be used to recruit a new officer could be used elsewhere in the department, such as an incentive-based program.

Incentive-based programs are designed to provide supplemental income to law enforcement officers. The incentive programs can differ from department to department, based on the needs of each agency. Incentive-based pay programs can help in recruiting and retaining officers. Incentive programs can be developed to assist new hires by providing temporary housing for the new recruits. Some agencies have an incentive program that allows officers to attend colleges. In addition to certification pay, some incentives can have low budgetary expenses as it relates to pay. These incentive practices can boost morale and encourage a healthy work environment. By establishing an incentive program and investing in officer career development, agencies can encourage employees to seek higher retention rates, which, in turn, saves agency budgets.

The millennial generation is often looking for ways to increase their salary at a fast pace. Recruitment by outside agencies on social media grabs the attention of officers that are between three to five years in law enforcement, who may reevaluate their careers and compensation. Some tactics that departments use to attract experienced officers from other agencies are offering incentives for signing bonuses of \$2,000, if the officer(s) leave their current police department, and a \$1,000 incentive



bonus to the officer responsible for the recruitment (Municipal Association of South Carolina, 2017)

As mentioned earlier, departments can place an emphasis on retaining officers to reduce the cost of turnover in the agency. In turn, the expenses can be budgeted in incentive-based pay programs. Incentive-based pay programs can help in recruiting and retaining officers.

## **COUNTER ARGUMENTS**

There are a number of issues that affect public safety from quality recruitment, retention of experienced officers, and budgetary restraints. As with most agencies in this country, there have been economic difficulties and departments are underfunded, causing increased difficulties to retain experienced personnel (Thompson, 2017). City and county managers often have to make drastic decisions with budget constraints, which often means cutting costs such as incentive pay as well as placing a halt on the recruitment of new officers. This is evident in the “Defunding the Police” movement. This movement gained popularity in May 2020 and is based on reducing the police budget and redirecting the expenses to other programs, such as housing and mental illness programs. Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) reported last year that 63% of departments nationwide saw a decrease in applications over the past five years (Murdock, 2020). More than half of those departments described the decrease as significant (Murdock, 2020). If this trend continues it will deter people from entering the law enforcement field.

As mentioned previously, in efforts to retain experienced officers, agencies have been providing incentive pay programs. These incentives can be costly and may not be

available for every agency to fund. However, securing federal, state, corporate, and private grants can improve officer retention efforts to assist in covering agencies funding dilemmas. (How Grants can Retain Officers, 2019).

The Department of Justice provides an assortment of competitive grant funding opportunities, including body cameras, armored vehicles, and most importantly aiding agencies with personnel to relieve budget constraints (Olson & Wasilewski, 2017). These options help in relieving the stresses of budget spending and provides better incentives for officer retention (Olson & Wasilewski, 2017).

In some small to medium size law enforcement agencies, there is little room for professional growth and career development. In these agencies, the ranks are filled with tenured, experienced employees, which leaves little to no opportunities for advancement in their careers. Gallup found that 60% of millennials say they are open to a different job opportunity -- 15 percentage points higher than the percentage of non-millennial workers who say the same (Adkins, n.d.). Millennials are also the most willing to act on better opportunities. 36% report that they will look for a job with a different organization in the next 12 months if the job market improves, compared with 21% of non-millennials who say the same (Adkins, n.d.).

A study (Koper et al., 2001) showed that a minority of officers leaving small agencies left for retirement and that "Approximately 20% of department officers were retirees. The majority (59%) of departing officers left due to other circumstances which might have included transfers to other law enforcement agencies." (Koper et al., 2001, p. 46).

Some of these agencies believe that there are positive results from law enforcement turnover. These agencies believe that the turnover will keep the department leadership from becoming stagnant and unfocused on the mission of the agency. By constantly recruiting new officers, this will create a culture of employee proactivity and officer engagement. Another positive outcome for employee turnover is replacing ineffective and unethical staff.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Law enforcement agencies throughout the country are facing high turnover rates. Although a majority of departments have outstanding recruitment programs, the competition in recruiting experienced officers is fierce. Agencies with a limited budget focus on recruiting experienced officers from other agencies. These tactics help prevent the costly expenses of the hiring process to the agencies targeting officers currently in the law enforcement profession. The hiring process can cost in excess of \$80,000.00 per officer, according to the Victoria Police Department (City of Victoria, Texas, 2020).

Statistics show that officers typically experience turnover around the three-to-five-year mark. With that in mind, agencies will not see a return on their investment in their officers until the three-to-five-year range of employment. Agencies are experiencing turnover due to economic issues, job salaries, lack of benefits, and other incentives; thus, creating the “revolving door,” losing the knowledge and quality in service of experienced officers. Law enforcement agencies have performed extremely well in the area of recruitment; however, agencies should focus on officer retention rather than recruitment.

Incentive-based programs are additional ways to reduce the expenses of recruiting officers. Incentive programs have proven to be beneficial in officer retention. These programs are designed to provide additional compensation for certain certifications and certain skill sets. In Texas, there is a demand for Spanish speaking officers. This is a specialty skill that a majority of officers do not possess. Providing bilingual incentive pay is another benefit for officers and creates greater potential for officer retention. Health and wellbeing are also an increasing concern to officers. More and more agencies are providing incentive pay or reimbursement for officers who are interested in physical fitness.

Many agencies across the country have had increased economic difficulties, which cause increased complications in retaining experienced officers. This has forced agencies to make drastic cuts to recruiting new officers to fill the ranks. Accompanied with the anti-police movement, this is forcing potential applicants away from law enforcement. Therefore, agencies should increase their focus on retaining their officers with alternatives such as incentive-based programs to retain experienced personnel.

Many small to medium sized agencies are having opposite effects of retention. These agencies are not affected by turnover. This has caused little opportunities for growth and development throughout the ranks. The concerns with these agencies are that most of these officers are staying in their position until retirement. On the other hand, a majority of officers are leaving their department for agencies that provide better growth and career development opportunities.

Turnover is not always viewed negatively by some law enforcement agencies. Police chiefs with this philosophy view turnover as a positive, stating that turnover will

keep their officers from becoming stagnant and inattentive to the mission of the agency. Constant movement within the ranks will provide a positive culture of employee proactivity and engagement. Law enforcement agencies need to stop the revolving door and costly expenses of recruiting and focus their efforts on the cost-effective practices of officer retention as well as practical incentive pay programs.

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