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A Uniform Dress Code

A Policy Research Project
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to show the need for a uniform dress code. It will not only show the need for consistency in the appearance of the uniformed officers, but also the need for the consistency in the appearance of the plain clothes officers as well.

Through the use of publications, journals and various existing department dress code policies, it will be shown how a uniform dress code policy can effect a department's image and status. It will show the history of the use of distinctive uniforms as well as other forms of uniform dress. The research will also show legislative guidelines that have been set concerning public servants with regards to the wearing of distinctive uniforms and other identifiers.

The main purpose of this paper is not to just show the need for a uniform dress code, but some of the reasons for having a uniform dress code.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context	2
Review of Literature or Practice	4
Discussion of Relevant Issues	8
Conclusion/Recommendations	10
Bibliography	11

INTRODUCTION

In today's law enforcement environment, officers are faced with numerous problems and situations. They want someone to train them how to do their job but they do not want someone to tell them how to dress for their job. For this reason it could be assumed that most officers are not concerned with the way they look to the public, but only how they deal with the public. If this assumption is valid, then this could be a problem when it comes to the image a department wants to present to the public. The effort to create a positive image starts with the newest officer at the bottom of the ladder, all the way to the chief's office.

Therefore, the relevancy of this research project is to show a need for a uniform dress code. The policy should show the need for consistency in the appearance of uniformed officers as well as the plain clothes officers. For uniformed officers the dress code policy should outline the how and why of the wearing of the uniform, what can and can not be worn on the uniform, and, how the allowed articles will be worn. For plain clothes officers the uniform dress code policy should outline how and what is acceptable for non-uniform wear. This part of the policy should also address how allowed articles are to be worn. This section should also address how the plain clothes officer's badge and duty weapon are to be worn when not covered by an article of clothing. This policy should also address the grooming styles that are applicable to each section of the department, describing in detail if necessary, to explain how each is to be administered.

This research project is intended for administrative personnel who may be developing dress code policies and procedures. It is hoped this information can be used by all departments regardless of size for either creating a much needed policy or updating an existing policy.

Through the use of publications, journals and various existing departmental dress code policies, it will be shown how a uniform dress code policy can and will affect a department's public image and status. It will also show legislative guidelines that have been set for public servants regarding the wearing of distinctive uniforms and other identifiers.

Finally, by showing the history of distinctive uniform dress codes, the use of various existing departmental policies, and information located in journals and books, it is hoped the need for consistency in the wearing of a distinctive uniform as well as other forms of uniform dress will be seen.

HISTORICAL, LEGAL and THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The word uniform is defined as distinctive dress worn by persons in the same service or organization. The word uniform comes from the Latin words, UNUS, meaning "one", and FORMA meaning "form". Although law enforcement agencies also use standard uniforms, the most widespread use of uniforms is in the armed forces of the world. The origin of uniforms worn by military forces is sometime disputed, but they are most credited by historians to King Henry of England. Still others credit Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden or Louis XIV of France (New Standard Encyclopedia U - 15, U 16).

Since most of the early fighting was done hand to hand, most military uniforms were bright colors. This was done so it could be distinguished between friend and foe. However, with the changes in battle tactics in the early nineteenth century, the bright color uniforms, which made easy targets, were changed to colors that would blend with the landscapes. During the early part of this century military uniforms have been changed to fit the landscape or type of battle field. For example, in the Russo-Finnish war, 1939-1940, the Finnish troops wore white uniforms in snow covered areas which provided excellent

camouflage. Khaki was introduced by the French during World War I for trench warfare. Through this form of trial and error, uniforms have evolved into the military uniforms we know today. (New Standard Encyclopedia)

As is the case today, some military uniforms of the past were worn only for special purposes while a standard uniform was worn for the "day to day" activity. Then, as now, these special uniforms had special insignia and markings to distinguish the special purpose of the unit and the uniform. ,

Through the entire history of uniforms, some form of rank insignia has been used to show a person's status in the organization. The markings are also used to indicate the person's job title, time of service, or any special awards or training with that organization (New Standard Encyclopedia U-15, U-16). This past history of military uniforms is what the modern law enforcement uniform is based on. The usage of insignia of rank, title of rank, and military style of dress is taken from these earlier ideals and concepts.

However, as with the military uniform, without proper backing and support the purpose and power of the person wearing the uniform would be worthless. For this reason governmental bodies have given mandates for the wearing of distinctive uniforms by law enforcement officers.

The State of Texas, by law, states that it is assumed a person is a law enforcement officer if the officer is wearing a distinctive uniform indicating the power of office (Texas PenalCode, Chapter 22, Section 22.01, Subsection d).

When looking at law enforcement officers today, the casual observer only sees a person wearing a familiar uniform. They recognize the authority behind the uniform but most often they do not see the person wearing the uniform. They fail to realize that the person wearing the uniform is a human being just as they are. They often do not stop to think that the officer has the same type of problems, feelings, likes, and dislikes that they do.

When it comes to the world of law enforcement management, too often the people in these positions forget this also. In designing uniform dress code policies, most often the comfort and needs of the people affected is overlooked or ignored. Some department policies are designed to focus on nothing but "image" and nothing else. Although image is important, it should not be the only thing considered when preparing or updating a dress code policy (Pilant).

There are several questions to be considered when writing a uniform dress code policy. The first question, and possibly the most important, is, what type of image do you want to present to your community? Do you want to "look like an unmade bed?" or do you want to "look authoritative?"(Pilant 37).

Officers and departments that show the first type of image will find it difficult for the public to give them the authority and respect they deserve. The general public will have the attitude of: "they don't care, why should we? However, officers or departments that use a too authoritative image will appear they are trying to be above everything and everyone, and demand authority and respect because of the "uniform".

One way to avoid both these problems is to look at the community you are charged to protect and serve. Does your community desire uniforms that demand respect, or does the community want uniforms that blend with the surroundings? A department in Aspen Colorado wanted their officers to blend with the community, so blue jeans became the standard uniform (**Pilant** 37). Although this worked in Aspen, it might not be proper in other communities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE OR PRACTICE

Throughout recent history police departments and sheriff departments have had some type of uniform policy. The uniform policy may have only consisted of a badge and gun worn over normal clothing, but it was a start toward the policies we have today.

Although some departments in the country still have these basic dress codes, they are standard through out the entire department. The department has guidelines on how items are worn and what items are allowed and not allowed. This style of dress is most common in sheriff departments and constable offices in the southwestern United States. However these departments are slowly changing their policies from the western style of dress to that of wearing a distinctive uniform.

Uniforms for police officers have been changing over the past five years, due in large measure to the development of new fibers and fabrics, and comfort-oriented designs.

The trend in style and design is toward ease of use, performance, and comfort. Visibility, is becoming a standard feature of daywear, nightwear, and rainwear. Jackets, coats and uniforms in general are becoming more flexible, lightweight, and less bulky. More pants are being designed in a military style, with extra pockets built into them. Ease of care is also becoming an increasingly important consideration in uniform design. A lot more departments are updating their looks and becoming more fashion conscious. Uniforms are also being designed to protect officers from bloodborne pathogens such as hepatitis and the HIV virus. One designer predicts that the police look of the future will be a layering system that will include turtlenecks, work shirts, pants, liners in the pants, sweaters, and shell garments worn as outer wear. (Strandberg, K. W.) These changes will most certainly change the way the public views law enforcement officers but they will not be as noticeable as the changes that have been made in the uniform styles for female officers.

When women first got into law enforcement they were given blouses and skirts as their uniforms.. The thinking was that female officers couldn't do anything but type and file, so they did not need any other type of uniform. When females finally did get out of the "office" and on to the streets, a problem that had never before appeared had to be addressed. The female officers had to be content with uniforms that were designed for

their male counterparts. These uniforms had to be refitted for the female which was usually done at their own expense (Hirschman, 1. E.).

While male officers have always had a vast choice of sizes and styles of uniforms, it was not until the late 1980's that clothing manufactures started designing uniforms for women. At the request of numerous female officers, the manufactures starting designing uniforms that took into consideration the differences in their hips, shoulders, and arm lengths. Even with the changes that have been made, women officers sometime still have to choose their uniforms from sizes that have been designed from a "number". Equipment that is worn is also being tailored for women's physiques. This includes duty belts and shoulder holsters. One other aspect that now has to be considered for female officers is outfitting them with maternity uniforms. In the past female officers had to furnish their own. However, manufactures are now offering uniforms that have been designed for this purpose. Options include smocks, navy blue civilian maternity shirts with matching maternity pants, and the basic navy blue jumper. (Hirschman, J. E.). The problem of fitting uniforms to female officers still has a long way to go, but it is much better that it used to be.

Today most police departments wear matching and consistent uniforms. The style and wearing procedures are usually outlined by written policies and procedures. However, these policies and procedures sometime leave a lot to be desired.

Some departments, in their effort to assist the department personnel in the wearing of the department uniform, create a monster when the uniform policy is written. This policy usually consist of several pages of "how to" and "because" and tends to confuse department personnel in the proper wearing of the departments' uniforms when the entire purpose of the policy is to assist in the proper wearing of the uniform.

A prime example of how a policy can become confusing can be seen by looking at the current policy in affect at the Victoria, Texas, Police Department. This policy consists of one half of a page explaining why the department has and will wear uniforms, and an

additional fourteen pages explaining how to wear the uniforms (Victoria, Texas, Police Department). As was with the officer from Victoria, departments with these kinds of policies are constantly hearing complaints or questions from personnel about the uniform dress code policy. For some unknown reason, some department administrators do not understand why there is so much confusion when the guidelines are spelled out in a written policy.

Departments that have a vague or non-written policy usually find themselves in the same situation. The vague or un-written policy creates the same kind of questions and confusions. The vague policy gives only basic information and tends to let everyone interpret what the policy means. The un-written policy does not offer any guidelines and lets everyone "do as they please". Both of these policies usually leads to the inconsistent wearing of the department uniform and often leads to low morale within the department. This type of policy tends to give the public a low opinion of the department and a low opinion of how the department is administered. When this is the case, this could lead to further problems within the department. This type of policy, or lack of, could also lead to problems with the public the department is empowered to protect.

Although anyone of these policies can and will cause problems within a department, the wishes and needs of the personnel the policy is designed to administer should not be ignored. When a policy is written for the first time, or it is revised for the twentyfourth time, these needs, desires, wants, wishes and comforts should be considered when the policy is written or rewritten.

Since there is no such thing as a perfect policy or procedure, the uniform dress code policy and procedures will always be a topic of discussion among department personnel. It will always be a source of aggravation, conflict, argument and debate. And, no matter how well written the policy, not everyone will be satisfied with the outcome.

DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT ISSUES

Throughout the history of uniforms, there has always been someone who thinks that their ideas are the best and only theirs should be used. This caused problems and conflicts at the start and unfortunately is still causing concerns today. For some reason, when the person in charge of creating the uniform dress code policy starts "inventing", not all of the relevant issues are considered before the policy is completed and given to the affected personnel. Although it will not solve all the problems a new or revised policy will create, following a few simple steps could lessen the blow to the affected personnel when the completed policy or procedure is placed into use.

Whenever a policy or procedure is written for the first time, or is revised for the twentyfifth time, the writer of the policy should seek input from the personnel that will be affected by the new policy. Getting this information is vital if the person writing the policy wants the majority of affected people to accept it, regardless of the reason the policy is being rewritten or revised. After all, it would be senseless to write a new policy if the old one is feasible and is accepted by the majority of the department personnel.

Questions that should be asked by the person doing the research for the new policy are, "Should the old policy be changed? Should all of it be changed or just parts of it?" These questions can be easily answered by simply asking the people the policy pertains to. These people know what they like and dislike about the current policy or procedure and they will have ideas, both good and bad, on what to change when the policy is rewritten.

If the writer of the new or revised policy or procedure has followed these simple steps, they should not have any problems in writing the new policy. They should be able to write a policy that will be accepted by the majority of the people the policy touches.

However, the policy writer should keep in mind that no matter how much research is done, no matter how many people are talked to, not everyone will be happy with the outcome. The policy writer should keep in mind some parts of the policy will be accepted

by everyone, some parts will not be accepted by everyone, and some parts of the policy will not be accepted by anyone.

The writer should be objective and open minded and write a policy that is both fair to the affected personnel and feasible for the department. All personal feelings and comforts of the affected personnel should be considered as well as what the cost to the department will be if a new policy is implemented. It would be unwise to create a policy or procedure based solely on the cost to the department. However, it would be just as dangerous to base it solely on the comforts and desires of the effected personnel. A good policy will be based on both these factors. A good policy will be acceptable to, and feasible for, the affected personnel and the department.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research project is to show the need for a uniform dress code policy for all members of the department. A policy that is fair and feasible for the affected personnel and the department, and a policy that spells out in detail the "How" and "What" of the procedures, but in a manner that is understandable by all. This policy should be written so that it will be accepted by all personnel and will be cost effective for the department.

Whether the policy is written From the ground up, revised From an existing policy, or copied verbatim From another department's policy, all issues, wants, needs, and costs should be calculated before the finished product is submitted for acceptance. If all these factors are not considered when the policy or procedure is written, then the policy is doomed to failure. And, if the new policy or procedure fails, then all the time and effort put into creating the policy has been wasted.

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