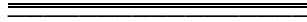
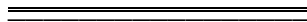


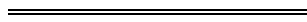
**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Mandatory Fitness Training
Hours for Officers**



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



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ABSTRACT

When an emergency occurs, and citizens call 9-1-1, they expect law enforcement officers to respond and deal with whatever situation they come upon. In order to effectively respond they must be in top physical condition. Currently officers only have physical fitness training in an academy, or they must meet a fitness standard prior to getting hired. Beyond this minute amount of fitness training there is no long-term plan in most law enforcement agencies for any additional programs. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) should set minimum physical fitness training hours to impress upon officers the importance of physical fitness as it relates to long-term health and wellness. Fitness is a crucial part of officer health and wellness. When officers participate in a physical fitness programs the results can include increased strength, increased flexibility, increased cardiovascular health and an increase in general health (Kasper, 2013). In addition, it is irresponsible to wait or respond to an officer losing a fight with a subject due to his or her fitness level (Nice, 2017).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Position	2
Counter Arguments	8
Recommendation	11
References	13

INTRODUCTION

Many police departments have vision and mission statements that are used as guides for their law enforcement officers as they perform the rigorous demands this profession requires of them. Policing is a profession that expects its people to endure extremely stressful situations, to include, hand to hand self-defense, highly volatile situations, pursuing offenders in cars and on foot, and a strong intellectual knowledge of federal, state and local laws, only to name a few. These demands come at a price to the human body. Some of the best ways to combat the high demands of the job, is to work towards physical health and wellness.

Communities expect their law enforcement officers to perform at the highest level of competence and professionalism, which includes physical fitness. Physical fitness is a key component to being able to competently and confidently perform the duties of a police officer. Most people understand how important health and fitness is for police officers in relation to job performance, safety and longevity (DeNysschen et al., 2018). While our communities expect officers to be fit (Bissett, Bissett & Snell, 2012), there is very little being done within most police organizations to emphasize physical fitness for long term health and wellness. Most law enforcement organizations provide pensions for officers normally around 20 years; however, studies have shown law enforcement officers die within two to five years after retirement (Quinones, 2009). According to the Social Security Administration, males who retire at age 65 live approximately 15.3 additional years on average while females live an additional 19.6 years (Social Security Administration, 2021). Clearly law enforcement has some work to do.

These statistics should be alarming to both law enforcement organizations and the communities they serve. If the concepts of the Peelian Principles of Policing by Sir Robert Peel are true, then police are the community, and the community are the police (University of Washington, 2021). Communities and police organizations have a vested interest in the long-term health of law enforcement officers. Nice (2017) claims that “Employees are the most valuable resource; therefore, protecting their health is pivotal for an agency to function” (p. 22). Leaders in the law enforcement community should be doing everything they can to promote officer’s health and wellness. Physical fitness plays a crucial role in that equation and leaders are in a unique position to mandate an education program. Not only will it benefit the agency in the long term, but it will benefit the officers as well. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) should set minimum physical fitness training hours to impress upon officers the importance of physical fitness as it relates to long-term health and wellness.

POSITION

Many people think they are familiar with the required job tasks of a law enforcement officer, however “Law enforcement work is inherently unpredictable and potentially violent” (Smith & Spottswood, 2014, p. 76). Due to the unpredictability of law enforcement, it is important for the agency to establish the essential job functions. While a job function or task may be essential it does not mean the task or function will be completed everyday (i.e., ability to shoot a gun vs sitting or standing) (Smith & Spottswood, 2014, p. 76). Law enforcement officers are expected to work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for 365 days, for however many years until retirement (at least 20 years). During those times, they could be doing anything physical from

sitting to running to writing to fighting, all in one 8-,10-,12-hour shift. According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (2014), “For apprehensions or other physical tasks lasting more than two minutes, officers use 75-90 percent of their maximum capability, a requirement many law enforcement personnel are not fit enough to handle” (p. 3). Outside of physical tasks, law enforcement officers are expected to be counselors (mental health, family, marriage, etc.), caregivers, investigators, experts in the law, and a parent, just to name a few. When law enforcement agencies hire new officers, these are the tasks and/or skills they are looking for in the applicants and what they will be trained for. Executive law enforcement officers know there is a difference between those who work at a job and those who are passionate enough to be in shape, mentally and physically, to do the job.

Communities entrust the law enforcement organizations in their area to establish stringent hiring standards to select the most qualified and capable individuals to perform at the highest level of human performance, including lifesaving measures when needed. Many law enforcement agencies begin the standard of physical fitness in the pre-hire stage of law enforcement employment. Not only is pre-employment fitness testing allowed, it is also recommended and provides agencies with the first look at an applicant’s ability to perform the job tasks required by the agency and expected by the community (Smith & Spottswood, 2014, p. 77). Physical agility tests are used nationwide to determine if an applicant has the minimum strength and endurance required for the job (Bissett et al., 2012). Police agencies can use different standards of fitness testing for the pre-employment process, however best practice recommendations mandate it consists of job-related tasks (Smith & Spottswood, 2014,

p. 76). Research has demonstrated the need for high levels of aerobic fitness, muscular endurance, muscular strength, muscular power and flexibility in order to perform their duties safely and effectively (International Association of Fire Fighters, 2021). A recent study found applicants who are overweight and yet are somehow able to pass or complete the pre-employment fitness testing are more inclined to develop health problems, to include heart disease and diabetes, over the course of their career (Hostetter, 2007).

After the hiring process, agencies continue to demand police cadets maintain high fitness expectations during police training academies. It is during this time; police cadets are first exposed to organized physical fitness programs. In fact, it might be the first time an individual has ever had any organized fitness training. At the academy level nationwide, a priority is placed on instilling the need for individual physical fitness (DeNysschen et al., 2018). While in the police academy, physical fitness is stressed to meet the physical and mental demands of the job but there are rarely expectations to maintain any level of fitness to continue employment with an agency (Hancock, 2017). After graduation from the police academy, police cadets will start their career with extensive on the job training. This training can become so rigorous and demanding that there is little to no time to maintain the same level of fitness expected at the academy. Once an officer leaves the academy and starts work at their agency their focus on health and fitness stops almost immediately (Hostetter, 2007). If you look at social media, it seems the profession is lowering the bar as it pertains to physical fitness (Fass, 2013).

As officer's interest in physical fitness dims and because of assigned shift work, law enforcement officers will normally eat one fast food meal per day (Hostetter, 2007). This is compounded over years of service. Studies have shown there is a direct correlation between how long an officer has been in law enforcement and a decline in fitness (Panos, 2010). A recent study showed few officers indicated high levels of any fitness activity, and only 53% stated they participated in some type of fitness regimen at all (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Leaders of departments must do better. After being hired, officers should be educated on the health benefits of physical fitness. They must be made aware of what can happen to their bodies if they choose not to stay fit. Leaders must make every effort to provide their officers with options to stay fit whether it is an on-site gym, gym memberships or other "outside the box" options. An effort must be made to increase participation in fitness programs by those who have not taken advantage of the option (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990).

If companies can keep their employees healthy, they can reduce healthcare costs and have a happier and more productive workplace (Kocakulah & Powers, 2015). Sadly, this is not the case right now. Two thirds of Americans are considered overweight and one third are considered morbidly obese (Hostetter, 2007). Law enforcement is a high-stress occupation coupled with long hours of sedentary behavior with some short and intense bursts of maximum physical output (IACP, 2014). Due to the demands of the law enforcement profession, for officers to be successful, they need to be able to transition from the hours of sedentary work to high physical demands rapidly. Kasper (2013) noted "It has been said that sitting is the new smoking-inactivity negatively impacts health" (p. 26). Officers can increase their job performance by increasing their

cardiovascular endurance, muscle strength, and anaerobic power and reduce their long-term health risks by participating in a fitness program (IACP, 2014). When law enforcement officers are compared to the general population, they have a greater morbidity and mortality rate; so much so, officer's risks of experiencing a heart attack increases by double with each 10 years in the profession (IACP, 2014).

Law enforcement leaders should not wait until a devastating injury occurs to an officer on-duty whether it be an accident, a fall or a fight. All leaders should proactively encourage their officers and challenge them to be in the best shape they can be in. When law enforcement officers make physical fitness a priority, agencies reap many rewards to include reduced costs associated with injuries and disability claims (IACP, 2014). Furthermore, when agencies have fitness and wellness programs made available to their employees', loyalty and morale increases significantly as does efficiency and productivity (IACP, 2014). Considering the current atmosphere regarding the law enforcement profession, doing more with less is a priority. Police agencies absolutely need their officers to be healthy and fit in order to be effective.

Everyone agrees healthcare costs will continue to increase. From 2015 to 2021, healthcare spending increased 6.2 percent with the same percentage increase happening with doctors and clinics involved with the aging population (Burke, 2015). Law enforcement agencies can help themselves by providing officers with education on the health, wellness and fitness they need in order to make informed decisions on their welfare. Of course, officers will only get out of a program what they put into it, however studies have shown the benefits to be many, including less injuries, less stress, better

sleep and most importantly a healthier heart (DeLucca, 2017). As it stands today, the approximate cost of an on-duty heart attack is upwards of \$500,000 (Strandberg, 2014).

To reiterate, officers who involved themselves in an active physical fitness program were less likely of having an injury that would need to be reported to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration as compared to those who were not involved in a program (IACP, 2009). The value of partaking in a physical fitness program cannot be underestimated or undervalued. In addition, leaders of organizations need to continue promoting injury prevention and workplace safety. Some organizations already have gyms on-site. If this is the case, leaders should push for their personnel to utilize equipment and resources already in place (Hancock, 2017). Studies have shown physically fit law enforcement officers utilize less sick time, less benefit time and are normally less stressed (Hancock, 2017).

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, there has been a movement toward demanding law enforcement administrators offer benefits to officers in the areas of education, time away from work and/or incentives for officers who are a part of healthy fitness programs. This movement has been largely influenced due to the intense mental health pressure law enforcement officers face regularly (Rivera, 2001). There is a large strain on law enforcement agencies to fill the needs of their communities. Many times, these strains are developed because there is a void in a service provided to the public. These large demands can create increased stress on officers. Law enforcement officers who are continuously exposed to high levels of stress and trauma can become out of touch with family and friends, depressed and melancholy (IACP, 2014). Law enforcement administrators can make their employees more productive at managing

this stress by providing ways to ensure their employees are healthy (Kocakulah & Powers, 2015). Many law enforcement officers understand to perform at their highest level and fight against depression, personal safety and wellness. They must also maintain their own health (physical, emotional, and mental) (McWilliams, 2015).

There is an expectation in communities that first responding officers show up to an emergency scene with the physical ability, to include strength and stamina, and the mental capability to handle highly intense and rapidly evolving situations (Hostetter, 2007). A hard truth law enforcement officers must face is their appearance can make a difference on their success, up to and including their survival. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) routinely publishes a study of Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) in the Line of Duty. In those studies, the FBI interviewed suspects who have killed or seriously injured officers during a law enforcement interaction. What was learned during those interviews was the determining factor whether to assault the officers was if they believed they could “win” the fight (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021). A large part of those decisions was made based on the officer’s appearance of being “fat”, “sloppy”, unfit and/or unprofessional (FBI, 2021).

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

While it is presumed all law enforcement employees had to complete some type of pre-screening fitness testing to be hired, the fact is that after being hired there is no longer a physical standard that must be met. There is no motivation or incentive for already employed officers (incumbents) to continue staying fit. Many incumbent employees believe physical fitness is important in concept but there is little agreement as to how important it is in policing (Bissett et al., 2012). In fact, 11% of agencies did

not have any physical fitness testing to get hired at all (Lonsway, 2003). Those who were hired without a physical fitness standard have little reason to think it is important now. When implementing a wellness and/or fitness program there are going to be law enforcement officers who are reluctant or even admit to wanting to participate. However, fitness and wellness programs can be successfully implemented by making the officer's health a top priority and educating the officers on the importance of fitness and how it relates to health. This priority needs to be a part of the culture not just from a few but starting with the law enforcement administrators (Strandberg, 2014).

One of the most significant tools law enforcement administrators have at their disposal is leading by example and healthy peer pressure (Hostetter, 2007). Agency administrators will need to create a workplace mindset encompassing positive healthy lifestyles that will optimize their health (Nice, 2017). If an education program is mandated, officers will gain the knowledge needed to make important decisions on their health. Another option to gain involvement from incumbent officers is to incentivize participation. One agency provided eight hours of comp time for those who participated and reached a certain level of fitness (Hoelzer, 2010).

Many organizations have no programs in place to assist officers if they endeavor to partake in a physical fitness program. Not every law enforcement agency has an on-site gym, let alone a space they could potentially turn into a gym. According to Sage (2021), a business leader in cloud business management, the cost to build a small gym or medium sized gym can range from \$65,000 on up to \$115,000. Most agencies, especially the smaller ones, do not have this amount of money available in their budget. However, when compared to the on-duty heart attack costs being \$500,000 this would

appear to require further consideration. There are other ways this can be mitigated. Most fire departments have workout areas within the fire stations. The chief administrators could create policies and/or procedures for officers to utilize the fire department facilities. Other ways include agencies providing their officers with gym membership fees (Rivera, 2001). Agencies can implement policies to allow officers on duty time for fitness. In addition, a recommendation would be to only allow adults to utilize the equipment to limit liability (Marshall, 2003).

Allowing officers an opportunity to work out on duty or as a part of their shift will come with some concerns, such as: how much time is allotted, is staffing affected, who gets to work out, whether there is a policy and if so who is going to enforce the policy effectively. Some brief resolutions to these concerns are the following: create a written policy, specify the maximum amount of time permitted, limit the amount of personnel who can work out, and stress working out is an opportunity and not an entitlement. Programs like this are better managed with onsite facilities, and supervisors must have the authority to establish the process that is the most equitable for everyone and the organization (Kasper, 2013).

Unlike many fire departments who have adopted wellness-fitness programs based on the International Association of Fire Fighter (IAFF) joint labor management Wellness-Fitness Initiative, a nationwide study was completed showing there are only a handful of in-depth wellness programs for law enforcement in existence (Hostetter, 2007). Without there being a requirement or some type of national standard, agencies may not know where or when to begin. Currently in the State of Texas, state law enforcement agencies are expected to have adopted a fitness program that is directly

related to the job duties and tasks and requires all officers to participate and meet goals specific the age and gender of the officer. (Texas Government Code 614.172, 2021).

RECOMMENDATION

It is apparent more training and awareness needs to be conducted for law enforcement officers to understand the link between obesity and the stress of policing (Hostetter, 2007). TCOLE should consider mandatory physical fitness hours to inform, educate, and help officers understand the importance of physical fitness throughout their careers and beyond. The benefits cannot be stressed enough. Not only will new and incumbent officers be made aware of how important physical fitness is for themselves but how much it can change their lives for the better. Less injuries, less stress, a healthy heart and a quality of life after retirement is what each officer should strive for. It is strongly encouraged that officers be routinely reminded to focus on their health and fitness for long term longevity in the law enforcement profession and their personal health in retirement (Hostetter, 2007).

Agencies across the United States create and implement policies and procedures for almost all incidents' officers respond to including use of force, driving, and weapons qualifications just to name a few. Physical fitness is essential for long-term health and wellness in an organization and administrators have failed in the past to understand how important this aspect is of human performance. People routinely bring vehicles in for checkups and fitness should be no different. As concerns over health and wellness become more prevalent, agencies should recognize how critical a topic this is and help officers learn to crawl before they learn to walk when it comes to fitness, and how it correlates to overall health. Law enforcement officer's focus on health and

wellness does not happen by mistake but by having a plan, an enactment of that plan and follow up (Strandberg, 2014). TCOLE should take the lead on mandating wellness and/or fitness programs in law enforcement standards.

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