

PROVIDE FUNDING TO SUPPORT LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES, OFFICERS, AND TRAINING ACADEMIES

ISSUE

Some agencies are struggling financially to maintain compliance with certain, non-data-related provisions of the law and deserve aid that would help them protect the public and their own officers. In addition, as Texas attempts to increase the number of qualified law enforcement officers and training personnel, the state should provide interested individuals with the means to do so.

Solutions

➤ ***Offer Additional Funding for Audio-Visual Equipment for Law Enforcement Agencies' Vehicles.***

When S.B. 1074 passed, it created an incentive for agencies to install audio-visual (A/V) equipment in their vehicles: if an agency outfits each of its vehicles with A/V equipment or applied for funding from the DPS for A/V equipment from 2001 to 2003 (regardless of whether that funding was received), the agency only has to collect Tier 1 data.

In addition to the data-based incentive included in the law, the use of A/V equipment – and the retention of tapes – offers other benefits:

- Routine review of the tapes allows supervisors to monitor individual conduct and helps to determine if unexplained disparities or patterns of bias-based profiling exist;
- Searches and seizures are documented (even from a considerable distance), which better ensures that roadside searches stand up in court;
- Officers are protected from claims against them if recorded incidents exonerate them, which in turn helps to prevent lawsuits; and
- The public's confidence in law enforcement is boosted when they know that police-public contacts during traffic stops are being recorded.

The video recording of traffic stops is good for both the citizen and law enforcement agency because it shows exactly what happens, which allows for most complaints to be resolved.

– Chief Larry Brazil, Lufkin
Police Department

Currently, there are no longer any DPS funds available to agencies to provide them with equipment (including replacements or upgrades, like digital cameras) or to help them with tape storage and review. Funds should be directed towards this effort.

In addition, should a statewide repository be created (*as discussed previously*), staff members should aid interested agencies in identifying and applying for federal and state grants that would enable them to continue to benefit from camera usage.

➤ *Create a Loan Forgiveness Program for Individuals Seeking to Become Officers*

The value and worth of a law enforcement agency is determined by public perception. If those served by an agency perceive that officers are not fair in administering their duties, they will become suspicious and distrustful of law enforcement in general. As such, Texas' law enforcement agencies have begun putting in place recruitment and hiring policies that have the potential to reduce racial bias (and the perception of racial bias in policing) by creating a workforce that reflects the diversity of Texas cities.

However, Texas must also try to diversify the policing models and theories being introduced at agencies. In order to increase the number of qualified law enforcement officers who are focused on community-oriented policing strategies, the state should use incentives to recruit, train, and retain quality law enforcement officers.

For instance, the state should adopt a loan forgiveness program for those entering the field of law enforcement with 4-year criminal justice degrees. The higher one's educational level is, the more tools that individual will have to resolve conflicts when engaging in police work. A loan forgiveness program, in which state funding is provided to graduates to help them repay their student loans, would ameliorate the burden of tuition costs and encourage individuals to enter law enforcement.

➤ *Stabilize Funding for Law Enforcement Training Academies at Council of Governments*

Currently, Texas law enforcement officers and persons interested in careers in law enforcement undergo training provided by Texas' regional Council of Governments (COGs).¹ Training Academies established within COGs provide a managed method of delivering professional law enforcement training, thus serving a critical role in satisfying the need for qualified law enforcement applicants. Academy courses provide students with the knowledge essential to begin a law enforcement career and prepare them to take the State Peace Officer Licensing Examination; Academies also offer continuing education (in-service) training to law enforcement and criminal justice personnel.

Programs provided by Academies are the primary way by which small and medium-sized law enforcement agencies – comprising nearly 80% of Texas' law enforcement agencies – require their employees to be trained. **Funding for the continued operation of these Academies must be stabilized.** Currently, the overwhelming majority of budget dollars for most Academies comes from grant awards from Fund 421. This poses a serious problem: Fund 421 dollars are allotted at the complete discretion of the Governor's Criminal Justice Division, and allotments change annually as criminal justice groups (including court/attorney organizations, juvenile justice groups, and any other organizations dealing with criminal justice issues) apply for funding. Without a stable funding mechanism for Academies, they are at constant risk of being closed down. Some Academies are 100% funded by 421 dollars; if the grant isn't approved or if

¹ COGs are voluntary associations of counties, cities, and special districts formed under Texas law. COGs deal with the problems and planning needs that cross the boundaries of individual local governments or that require regional attention. Employees serve as advocates, planners, and coordinators of initiatives that, when undertaken on a regional basis, can be more effective and efficient. Among other things, these initiatives include emergency services, law enforcement training, and criminal justice planning.

money isn't available, personnel must be fired and local law enforcement officers have no means by which to be trained. If all money for Academies was lost, each agency would be required to create its own academy to provide its officers the required 612 hours of training.

Ideally, the state would create a centralized agency to oversee the local COG Academies. Each law enforcement agency would follow its own hiring criteria to hire new employees; those new employees would attend their regional state-monitored Academy to obtain the standardized minimum training qualifications, after which point they would return to the agency to undergo additional training if required by that agency (such as required attendance at the agency's own academy). This centralized state agency model would allow each law enforcement agency to determine whether it would like to run its own academy (as many larger agencies – with large staffs in urban hubs – often do) for additional training needs.

***Note:** Currently, when an agency hires a new officer and sends him/her to the regional training Academy, the agency is responsible for paying the Academy tuition fees. On the other hand, if a person interested in a career in law enforcement enrolls in Academy programs prior to being hired by an agency (for the purpose of becoming more employable), s/he is considered self-sponsored and is responsible for paying all tuition fees. This latter group of students, which comprises about 50% of all Academy students, should be eligible for a program similar to the loan forgiveness program discussed above, but one in which Academy fees will be repaid with state funding.*