



State of New Jersey

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TO: All Commissioners, Police Training Commission

FROM: Gurbir S. Grewal, Attorney General

DATE: December 4, 2019

SUBJECT: **Expanding the Work of the Police Training Commission**

The mission of the Police Training Commission (PTC) has never been more important than it is today. The PTC is uniquely positioned to ensure that New Jersey remains at the forefront of law enforcement training and professionalism, both of which are essential to public safety, law enforcement safety, and public confidence in policing. Over the last 22 months, however, I have spoken to many stakeholders, including members of the PTC, concerning these matters and it is apparent that we can and should do more. To that end, I am writing to request that we work together to make New Jersey a national leader on police training issues.

Specifically, I am asking the PTC to work with the Office of Public Integrity & Accountability (OPIA) to prepare reports on two issues that are critical to the future of law enforcement in New Jersey. I ask that you submit both reports to me within six months, by June 1, 2020.

- ***Framework for revisions to police officer training.*** The first report will assess New Jersey's current practices for training police officers and compare the status quo with best practices. Should we revise our recruit standards? How should we train officers before they enter the academy, on their first year on the job, and as their careers progress? How can we better ensure consistency across the fifteen schools approved to offer police training courses? How can we continuously update the curriculum for each of the twenty-eight currently PTC-approved courses and better evaluate changes to the course structure? How should we combine experiential and classroom learning so, for example, officers better understand the real-world impact of de-escalation training as well as the theory? I ask you to complete a report that addresses these issues, among other related topics, and explains the resources that the PTC would need to make New Jersey a national model for police officer training.



- ***Proposal regarding professional licensure for law enforcement officers.*** The second report will address an issue discussed at the most recent PTC meeting: whether to adopt a professional licensure regime for New Jersey's police officers. New Jersey licenses the practitioners of many different professions, from accountants to veterinarians and cosmetologists to plumbers. Yet we are one of only a handful of States that do not license the police officers we authorize to carry weapons and deploy deadly force. Most States operate under some form of statewide Peace Officer Standards and Training system, as recommended by the 1967 Report of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. The PTC, which already oversees basic, firearms, and instructional development training courses and certifies officers' completion of basic training courses, is uniquely well situated to prepare a report on the pros and cons of licensure; on how best to design a licensing regime that would facilitate training, increase public confidence in law enforcement, and protect officers' due process rights; on whether licensure would require new statutory authority; and on the resources that would be required to support the agency responsible for licensure.

Part of the reason why the PTC is so well-suited to address these issues is because its membership includes a cross-section of law enforcement interests in New Jersey, including representatives of uniformed officers, chiefs of police, sheriffs, jail wardens, prosecutors, municipal governments, and police academy directors. As the PTC prepares these two reports, it is important that the Commission also solicit input from a variety of community stakeholders, including civil rights, social justice, and religious leaders, especially those who advocate for the rights of historically disadvantaged communities. I know that all of us share a commitment to strengthening relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve, and it is my sincere hope that PTC can forge consensus across a wide range of interests to develop proposals that promote both public safety and public trust.

To encourage public engagement on these important issues, I intend to release both reports publicly once they are complete, and I look forward to discussing these issues with all of you in an open session of the PTC at that time.

Finally, I understand that this request comes at a time when the PTC is doing so much more than was envisioned when it was created, with so much less. I know that decades of cutbacks, combined with increased demands on its dwindling staff, have left the PTC without the resources it needs to accomplish its statutory mandate. It is time to change that.

I am making a commitment to you that, as we enter the budget cycle for Fiscal Year 2021, one of my top priorities will be ensuring that the PTC's funding is increased so that it can fulfill its unlocked potential. I am making that commitment because you have convinced me that a renewed investment in the PTC will pay dividends for law enforcement officers and the broader New Jersey public alike.

The Legislature provided for the establishment of the PTC as a unit within the Department of Law & Public Safety in 1961, after recognizing that “police work . . . is professional in nature” and finding “a serious need for improvement in the administration of local and county law enforcement . . . in order to better protect the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens.” P.L. 1961, c.56, § 1. As originally conceived, the PTC’s role included approving schools to offer police training courses; prescribing minimum courses of study, curriculum, instructor qualifications, and other requirements for schools offering police training courses; and certifying police officers who have satisfactorily completed training programs. Municipalities would send police officers holding probationary or temporary appointments to an approved school during their first year on the job, and could deny permanent appointments to officers who did not successfully complete a required police training course.

Since its creation, the PTC’s role has grown. The Legislature has charged the PTC with approving training courses for corrections officers, juvenile detention officers, Department of Corrections investigators, safe school resource officers, and public school employees serving as liaisons to law enforcement. And the Legislature has made successful completion of a required course (or successful completion of a substantially equivalent course) mandatory for police officers, corrections officers, and juvenile detention officers seeking a permanent appointment.

Today, in addition to monitoring the fifteen schools approved to offer police training in New Jersey, the PTC’s statutory responsibilities also include but are not limited to:

- Studying the methods for training police, corrections officers, and juvenile detention officers;
- Maintaining a training course on identifying, responding to, and reporting bias intimidation crimes;
- Furnishing approved schools with curricular information about high speed chases;
- Adopting a training course regarding law enforcement engagement with individuals with autism or an intellectual or other developmental disability;
- Establishing a senior citizens crime prevention program;
- Recommending standards for training programs in crime prevention; and
- Administering undergraduate scholarship programs for police officers.

While the PTC’s responsibilities have grown, its staff has been depleted. The PTC’s personnel and responsibilities were transferred to the Division of Criminal Justice in the late 1980s. P.L.1985, c.491. With the transfer, PTC staff were divided and assigned to either the investigative bureau or the Police Services Section. Over time, the PTC’s professional staff were not replaced as employees retired or resigned. The current staff consists of two academy coordinators, two field representatives, one clerical employee, and one administrator.

Exacerbating the problem, a shift in law enforcement agencies' hiring preferences over the last decade has flooded PTC staff with paperwork. In 2010, PTC staff received and processed only 90 requests to waive the statutory training course requirements for officers who were hired with prior training and experience. As budget constraints and other factors have led many law enforcement agencies to prefer candidates with previous training, the number of waiver requests has ballooned, reaching 1055 in 2018. Keeping up has required staff to divert their attention from their more substantive responsibilities to complete administrative tasks.

I know we agree that the PTC's mission is too important to allow it to continue to wither due to underfunding. I look forward to working with you to help the PTC fulfill its full promise.

CC: Thomas Eicher, Executive Director, OPIA
Veronica Allende, Director, Division of Criminal Justice