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Police Reform Essay

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The topic of police reform I chose to write about is police training and the culture new officers are exposed to. I chose this topic because I think that the best way to tackle the issues we have with policing in the United States is to start with how new officers are trained and what their first few months on the job are like. It is safe to say that there are many issues plaguing the police across America, but I believe that the vast majority of people who become officers do it because they truly want to serve and protect the people of their community. I also believe that unfortunately because of problems with training and police culture, some officers can unintentionally or intentionally become a problem for the community.

There are many different organizations and movements in place that are aiming to fix the issues that are within the police force and specifically within the training portion.

The Institute for Criminal Justice Training Reform is an organization primarily focused on this specific issue and has brought many problems and potential solutions to the table. The first issue with police training is the fact that in 37 states, officers are allowed to defer training, this means that they are able to start working as a full officer without any training and start their training after they start working. This is something that can very easily lead to intentional or unintentional problems once they start their job since they will have little to no experience in a field that can be very difficult mentally and physically. Another issue that the organization is tackling is the fact that officers do not receive enough training. They found on average officers receive less than 6 months of training. In addition, field training isn't required everywhere by law, and where it is required many states don't have minimum hours or standards that need to be met. The last issue that they deal with is that the officers are trained for the wrong things. Much of an officers training is focused on tactical skills rather than the mentality needed to do the job. Personally, I agree with a lot of the ideas put into place by The Institute for Criminal Justice Training Reform. I think that they have solid ideas and strategies for implementing those ideas and that they are able to understand both sides of the issues with the system and call for change without being too radical.

Campaign Zero is another organization that is dedicated to police reform. One of the big topics on police training that this organization touches on is the lack of training for reducing police violence, citing that on average 58 hours of police training is spent on firearms, while only 8 is spent on learning how to de-escalate situations. The organization talks about how while some training such as procedural justice training have research support behind them other methods of training such as implicit bias and mental health training have been found to not be that effective. Because of this the organization recommends that instead of pushing for more training, cities should be pushing to replace those programs with ones that de-emphasize firearms and use of force as well as ones that help to train in various areas such as procedural justice, relationship-based policing, appropriate engagement with community, and crisis intervention; meditation; and conflict resolution. The next solution that the organization suggests is to require current and new police officers to undergo mandatory anti-bias testing, including testing for shoot/don't shoot bias, as well as considering an officer's level of bias in law enforcement certification; the hiring process; performance evaluations; and decisions of where officers are deployed.

According to a report from the department of justice published in 2006 the breakdown of time spent training for state and local police followed this breakdown. 60

hours for firearms skills, 51 hours for self-defense, and 46 hours for health and wellness, while only 8 hours were spent on ethics and integrity, 8 hours on conflict management and mediation, and 8 hours on community policing strategies. While this data is old it is the most recent data I was able to find on the time spent training new officers. I think that looking at this breakdown it makes sense why firearms training, self-defense, and health and wellness are the things that the most time is spent on, these areas are crucial for someone going into law enforcement to be able to have a good knowledge on to be able to do their job well and safely. I was also very surprised at how little time is spent on other areas such as conflict management or ethics. I believe that the reason for less time being spent on these areas is that there just isn't enough time in police academy to be able to go more in depth in these areas while still being able to properly educate officers in the other areas. I don't think that the solution is as easy as take time away from firearms or self-defense training and moving it to these less trained areas, because I believe that doing so would result in officers who are incapable of doing their job and protecting others because of a lack of knowledge of how to defend themselves and others and could even lead to more violence or shootings when officers don't know how to properly manage firearms. I think that increasing the length of police academy and adding more time for these less tough

areas to be expanded on would be the best way for new officers to receive this training while still being able to execute their job successfully.

Another problem that I think contributes to problems in the police force is that many states and departments don't require officers to get recertified unless they leave the force for a period of time. This means that once an officer completes police academy and gets certified, that certification lasts indefinitely and only becomes invalid if the officer has a gap in their service. This can lead to problems where if new training programs are put into place and older officers are unaware of what new officers are being taught. The best solution for this is to require all officers to complete a recertification process every 5 years that would require them to attend classes and training for new programs and policies that are being studied and put into action.

The last big problem that is facing the police force that has to do with training is recruitment. Across the country police departments are facing a shortage of people who are going into law enforcement as a career. This is partially due to a lack of ability to sustain interest in a career in law enforcement and partially due to the large influx of police hired in the late 90s. Since the 90s there have been a few reasons why the number of people setting out to become officers has lowered. The first reason for this is

there are fewer people who are going into law enforcement from traditional sources such as family ties or the military. As policing expands into a more technological and complex profession new recruits are also needing to have more education causing people who would have previously applied to join the force out of high school to need to obtain at least 2 year degrees. Another factor that is reducing the amount of people joining the force is the growing psychological toll that officers are facing in America. According to the CDC police suicide rates run 40% higher then that of the general population. Studies have also shown that an officer dying of suicide is now more likely then an officer dying in the line of duty. All of these factors combined is creating a shortage of officers which if not dealt with could lead to a public safety crisis. Many departments are trying to draw in new recruits by lowering restrictions on who can apply to become an officer, removing stuff such as tattoos or drug convictions from things that prevent you from being able to become an officer.

Overall I think that one of the most overlooked by crucial parts of the criminal justice system is the training of new officers and their integration into their departments. If we are going to move forward as a country trying to improve our justice system we need to start at the roots and change how we train our future officers.

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