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And Vice President Ben Therriault .

job with PORAC is your go to podcast for insights into the challenges and opportunities facing law enforcement professionals here in California and across the nation. Our goal is to provide an inside look at these issues from the perspective of officers who risk their lives to protect and serve their communities.

Welcome to On the job with PORAC. You're inside track to the world of law enforcement.

I'm Brian Marvel, president PORAC and my cohost, Ben Therriault. Vice president of track. On this episode, we're diving into the vital topic of how women are reshaping policing and the push to boost their representation. Joining us today are two incredible guests, Doctor Tanya Meisenholder director of policing research at New York University School of Law. Brings 30 years of law enforcement and drives the 30 by 30 initiative to advance women in policing.

And Veronica Limon vice president of the San Diego County Probation Officers Association, director at large for PORAC and a board member of the State Coalition of Probation Organizations for California. And she has 17 years of experience. I want to welcome everybody and let's get started. I want to thank you for being here today.

Why don't we start with the big picture? Maybe, Doctor Meyers and older Tonya, if I can say that, you've studied this for years. You've been, you've seen the representation of women in law enforcement over evolve over time in the US. So, where do we stand today? Great question. And thanks so much for having me.

I'm, thrilled to be here with both you and Ben today. So in terms of the representation of women in law enforcement in the United States, we are at about 19% of women entering into police recruit classes. That's up from a percentage point over the last couple of years. Overall, in terms of the representation of women, we're around 13%.

But it's important to note that that, really should be disaggregated by type of agency. As you know, there's over 18,000 agencies. And so when you really look at local versus sheriff versus state, it averages out to about 13% overall. The other point that I would make of those 18,000 agencies, we still have 40% that have no full time sworn women officers at all.

And a lot of those numbers haven't changed much in the past couple of decades. You see, the biggest difference between municipal and maybe rural sheriff's departments is that where you see the real big difference. So the highest number of women is actually in campus police followed by federal agencies, and the lowest is in state police, which is around 7%.

I'm curious about the data here. What does the research say about how women officers impact policing outcomes? Like community trust or use of force? I know there's a lot of studies. I wouldn't say a lot. I know there's some studies out there that actually say women. You know, they they change that dynamic. And I'm sure Ben and I have seen it firsthand.

Working out on the streets and and Veronica, clearly, you know, as a probation officer, I think, sees it firsthand to in that arena or to things that are important to note about 30 by 30, as it's really backed by the empirical academic research as well as the experiences of women in law enforcement. And what the research says, from a number of studies.

And the research continues, you know, as we go on and on, is that women tend to use less force, less excessive force, and be better at de-escalation. I should be very clear about how I'm saying this, because it's how do women police differently? Not, we by no means are implying that women are, you know, better than men at certain things.

There's men that can de-escalate just as well as women. I say that because we get some pushback on that at times. We also know that women tend to be better with, victims, especially of sexual assault, in terms of how they're perceived, which I don't think is a surprise, given the nature of, of many women. They receive fewer complaints from citizens, and they're named in fewer lawsuits.

And they're also perceived by the community to be more honest and more, empathetic and trustworthy. And so when you think about where policing is going with respect to de-escalation and emphasis on our victims than women do, add value to police departments and law enforcement more broadly. I always say that we're hoping, folks continue to do more research in this space as well.

And, and I'm sure, you have your own experiences with women officers. Yeah, absolutely. And I really, I'm a real big evidence to base, research. You know, it's it's interesting about law enforcement is, is we collect so much data and we have the ability to analyze this stuff, but a lot of times, and most probably most recently, we're starting to see a lot more research going into, all of the items that we're talking about here.

But traffic stops, arrest and all that type of stuff. So I think stuff like this is really good bodes well for the or, the profession, because it allows, managers and administrators to actually make decisions that are based on concrete set of facts versus, you know, hey, this sounds good. Let's try this. And maybe it works.

And I get where you have to do that sometimes. But the reality is, is I think there's some really good stuff here in the by initiative is really a positive step in that direction. And speaking of that. So, obviously there's going to be a big part of our conversation. It's my agency down in San Diego.

They've adopted the _____ by _____ initiative. I think you're seeing it, rolled out. So a lot across America. What's the status of that right now? And are you getting more agencies that are inquiring about it? They want to be a part of it. You know, what's the story on that? So _____, the celebrated or _____ th anniversary, we officially launched in March of _____.

We have over _____ agencies that range again across geography, type of agency, size of agency. We just released our first milestone and Momentum Impact report that talks about the progress that we've seen agencies make over the past couple of years in terms of policies for parents and caregivers, in terms of recruitment strategies, hiring assessments, any number of things.

And, you know, for us, this work continues. It goes on. And we still have agencies, joining us on a regular basis and committing to this work. To be clear. I think it's important to note that _____ by _____ is not just about increasing the representation of women in law enforcement. Yes, we want more women in law enforcement.

They add value. And it's an untapped pool of people in many cases, when law enforcement is facing so many challenges around recruitment and retention. But what we want at the end of the day is for police departments to be healthier, to improve policing for everyone that works there, and to ensure that women's unique needs or needs are met.

It's not enough just to bring women in the door. It's to create a culture and an environment where they can advance and where they want to stay. So that _____ % in some ways, you have to take that with a grain of salt, because for some agencies, they're already really close to that and others, they've never had a female officer.

What? And then for either one of you guys, I'm curious on the, back end and then front, not front end. Maybe for you, Ronnie. Like what? What strategies have you seen that have been more effective than others in recruiting? And, retaining female officers?

I don't know if my department has, like, direct strategies that they've applied, maybe intentionally, but maybe unintentionally. I know that when we have recruiting events, they do open it up, you know, department wide. They don't just, you know, say, hey, you're doing it, you're doing it. So they open it up. And a lot of the, officers that volunteer are females because they try to do it in the region.

You know, because probation, we are county wide. So they try to do it in different regions of the county. So a lot of the officers I volunteer like myself, I like to volunteer when it's in my region. And I have seen, you know, when we're out in the community, females come up to me or little girls come up to me because they've never seen, like a female in law enforcement or whatever it is.

And they're like, oh, I want to be like you. I didn't know that. You know, I could do it as a female. So I think maybe unintentionally, that's some of the strategies that they have done. So I think

including females in recruitment events, kind of making it like having that visual and having a female out there is it's one of the ways to do that.

to to add on to that or ask you a follow up question, Ronnie would be the what are you seeing as the major hurdles for women to to get into the law enforcement profession, in regards to probation or, municipal or the county? I mean, what are what are you seeing out there?

I think personally for me, when I was first trying to do it many, many years ago, I think some of the struggles were, you know, the physical agility tests, which were mainly geared towards like male recruits, you know, they were like upper body, you know, strength, which that's not a strength for females.

I don't know if that I'm hoping throughout the years has changed and maybe they've had maybe like a two tier system that may be kind of engage. It's one for males, one for females and just kind of, you know, make the requirements more, you know, gender based. But those were some of the struggles that I saw, you know, in years before.

And I know that everybody's agencies are different, different as far as requirements for physical agility. But as far as for the probation department, which is what I can speak to, we're lucky enough that, you know, our job descriptions kind of vary, you know what I mean? We have people that work in the institution outside in the institution that are, carry a firearm, some that don't.

So we have a variety of work. So that's something that I try to promote when I am out in recruitment events or any type of community events, I use that as a, modes of recruitment to try and get females in the door, because some of them may think, well, hey, I don't necessarily want to carry a firearm, and that's okay.

There's plenty of work in law enforcement that doesn't necessarily have you carrying a firearm.

Yes, maybe for, Tanya, understanding that in the research that you're doing is the by initiative, does it have proposals on there for agencies to maybe, try to figure out a way to best recruit women? Using some sort of analytics or a system that would, you know, allow a greater percentage of women to make it through the process.

We encourage agencies, one, to really understand their data. And I think data is so critical. And your point earlier about evidence based policing and the importance of that, I'm glad to see like a growing trend and in that respect across law enforcement. But we have so many agencies that because of the way their systems are built or how you get the information out, we're asking them questions that they've some of them have never thought to look at.

So at what point are people falling out in the hiring process, whether it's the physical fitness or the psych or the background or whatever the case may be, and really trying to understand at

every point, where people are affected in the hiring process, recruiting, you know, what type of events are they going to, who's showing up at those events?

Tyrannies point representation matters. It's important for women to see other women so that they can understand that this is a viable career option. And then, of course, we also focus on promotions process and what that looks like. You know, to add to some of what, Ronnie was saying, you know, we ask officers all the time, like, why is the representation of women so low?

And some of it is lack of awareness of what those opportunities are. And if you think about some of the recruitment advertisements for law enforcement, they, historically have been very male dominated, advertisements. So as I mentioned, if you can't see yourself in that or if it's not portraying the reality of policing, that's potentially problematic for folks that are considering it as a career option.

We've had a number of agencies that have taken a hard look at their recruitment strategies and really altered the material and the way they talk about their agency, and being very clear about the expectations of what a job in law enforcement entails. And that seems to have made a big difference in a number of the agencies that we work with across the board.

I think that's really tied into workplace culture. Right. And then, you know, getting changes and a lot of, you know, types of culture and, and making that shift is very hard. I mean, I know where I worked at, you know, there were a lot of struggles that I observed over the years, to, to get things where they're at today and they're still, you know, previously made.

But I think, you know, hopefully things like _____, _____, I mean, address those things well, and I mean, I just think that's all that's one of the bigger sticking points is because it's interconnected to so many different, reasons for recruiting and retention. Female officers. Yeah. One thing I would add to, you know, we did, listening sessions across the United States as we were starting by _____ to really talk about the issues that were affecting women in the field.

Now, the academic, work is so important, but hearing from, the lived experiences from those women is even more, critical for us. So, you know, in terms of culture, we heard a lot of things about lack of support for, pregnant women, for caregivers. That could be male or women, you know, challenges with uniforms, differences in training when it takes for a woman to conform in a male dominated environment, latitude for mistakes.

So sometimes women are held to a higher standard. And kind of this culture of disrespect, where sexual harassment is still quite acceptable in the workplace. So if you think about all of those challenges that, you know, I'm not saying that all law enforcement is like that because every agency is different. Some have much healthier cultures and others, but there's some where frankly, I wouldn't encourage a woman, to go work at until they've made a lot of improvements in what their agency stands for.

And you've probably heard this before, but we asked people all the time, would you want your daughter? Would you want your niece? Would you want a female or woman in your life to work in your agency? And if the answer is no, then you know you've got some work to do. Yeah, absolutely. So I guess, you know, the culture being a big piece of this.

And we talked a lot about the the recruiting piece of it, but what are the things that we can do today to retain, these qualified women to extend their careers versus maybe cutting it short and choosing a different type of career, or just calling it quits in the law enforcement. What do you see in in that space?

I think one of the things, Brian, that was great out of San Diego was adding the daycare, and I think that came out of, you know, San Diego PD because I think that's one of the main struggles for females because we always think about it, you know, like we have responsibilities at work, at home, you know, with family.

And I think that's one of the biggest barriers is child care. So hopefully many other departments follow what San Diego PD is doing in that sense.

Yeah, they've definitely had great success with that program. Obviously it's something Perak has taken on. We're trying to get it at the federal level level to be a grant program. You know, the the, the childcare is up and running.

In San Diego, we've heard folks in New York, the trade unions were very interested in that. I think that's a huge plus, because even outside of the discussion in regards to to women in law enforcement, we're seeing a lot of single parents. And obviously, you know, if you work in law enforcement, the hours are very odd.

And this provides a safe space to bring your children to work if you're called out, if you're a detective, if you're having to work late night, I think this is a great program. I'm looking to see that this expands, outside of San Diego in some of the other places, because I really think this is just an added bonus, not only for women, but for men, that have childcare issues, to keep people in the profession because, obviously the recruiting and retention is has been a problem for many, many years.

And it's not something that's just going to go away. So anything we can do to help and support, officers through their careers, whether it's a child care or the wellness or anything else like that, I think is, is a huge positive for the profession as a whole.

And I can add to that, too, Brian, we did a webinar recently with some folks on childcare centers, and there's a couple of them that are popping up across the United States, not necessarily the same model, but it is really important for everyone. It's in law enforcement to think about that. I think that's one of the primary barriers for people, as you said, you know, the hours, the forced over time, the whatever the case may be, you know, my husband's still on.

So we deal with those those things. Now and the other thing I would point to is Washington state passed bill on flexible work options. So that's for people that are already on the job. That's not, you know, encouraging people to come on that aren't qualified. But that may at some point in their career need to make fewer, work fewer hours, and they can stay in their pension system and they don't lose any of their other benefits.

So I think that's really important to consider as well. And then the last thing I'd mentioned is exit interviews. You know, we we have so much data that we collect in a number of agencies. We did some work with Research Triangle, RTI and a number of our agencies collect exit interview data. They don't actually do anything with it.

So you're collecting this information from your employees that are telling you about things that you can change your, you know, department, some under the police chief's control, some not. But if you're not actually utilizing that data you collect, then it kind of raises the question of what's the point?

Yeah. You know, it's, one of the things I'm an advocate for and not really it's not for my organization, but personally is is I think, like the teachers, we should have sabbaticals, for law enforcement professionals to where, you sort of take a break from being out on the street or doing the work.

But in the meantime, you're, either, you know, seeking advanced degrees, certificates, improving your wellness or something like that. I haven't really worked out all the details of what it would look like. But I think it would be great if we had sabbaticals in law enforcement to improve ourselves personally. Like they do with professors and teachers throughout the United States.

I love that idea. There's, there is an agency in, South Dakota, Rapid City, that they are, doing some work with sabbaticals, and they've had a lot of success with that in terms of the officers, feelings of, of safety and well being. I think that's a great idea. Yeah. I like the, the flex schedule stuff, because I could see a lot of, potential there.

So it'd be interesting. I'm going to talk to my buddies in Washington and try to get that, you know, obviously, you know, we've talked about the recruiting, the retention, solutions, progress. Obviously, that really falls into your bailiwick there. At the, or at the university. What are the what are the types of things that you're seeing outside of what we've mentioned in regards to, to supporting women within the profession to expand the the knowledge and the information about this is a good career.

It's a good middle class job comes with retirement security. A lot of those things are you don't see really, in the United States. So, what can we do? And and to get the word out that this is a good profession for women to get involved in.

Either one, a, and then, I think continuing the recruitment efforts that that's really it. And then having that representation, like I said, and I think also, you know, not forgetting about our, our male counterparts and the role that they play because they can really be our champions in, you know, how being this sturdy by initiative as well.

Yeah. I, I echo that I think having men at the table and supporting having women in law enforcement is really, really important. You know, we this isn't you know, women work to advocate for women. We need everyone together to think about what the solutions are and how we can benefit law enforcement as a whole. And continuing to think about the reasons why women may not be joining, what's preventing them from joining, and what can we do about that?

As well as what's what are the things that they're leaving for sometimes prematurely. So whether that's childcare or whether it's a, you know, two officers working in the same job, you know, my husband and I were both, you know, on at the same time. And that that caused challenges. And I think that's sometimes well, it is common in law enforcement.

But really maintaining this commitment that women do belong in the profession, that they're needed in the profession, that they're welcome in law enforcement, is really crucial. And that's where I think entities like out can be very important by doing things like this and highlighting the importance of having women in law enforcement.

And then addition to that, I would say like having like leadership, classes, conferences or anything like that where women can be mentors to other women and kind of helping them along the way through their career.

I think that would be extremely helpful.

I know the California State Chiefs of Police Association puts on the women in law enforcement. I don't know if it's a symposium or conference, but, it's a great opportunity. We we actually we have a booth. There we go every year to that. I think they have great success with that.

And I know, personally through my department, they also have a, a women mentoring program within the agency itself. So I think that's, that's been a huge plus. I guess this would be more for, for Tonya in all of the research and the work that you've done, what stands out, what's like this top thing that you've seen, what stands out?

What agency is it really doing it? Well, that maybe we could, we can provide information in our show notes on our website, but, something that would be really like, hey, you should take a look at this. This is a super successful program. And what they're doing. Yeah, I'm glad you asked that. And we're going to be pushing out a series, in the near future, highlighting particular agencies and some of the work that that we're doing.

But, you know, we've seen so many successes from agencies and, you know, it's not one size fits all. So what's needed in, you know, San Diego may not be what's needed in New York because every you know, it just doesn't work. That way. And I, I think some people assume with programmatic efforts in law enforcement, you can just pick one up and drop in another agency and everything works out.

But we've seen, you know, Mesa, Arizona is on my mind in terms of two things. Their recruitment campaign in the videos that they share. Are really, really well done. And they also have a pre hire program that help them to increase the number of women in their officers, I mean, in their workforces. You know, I'd have to give a shout out to Waco, Texas because there, Chief Sheryl Victorian.

We talk about Ronnie. You know, representation matters. She took it upon herself after working with by to write a children's book about, you know, it's the me I see. You know why? Like, from a very young age, we've seen a number of mentorship programs pop up in a range of places across the country. And, there's just so many agencies that, I'd point to different things that they're doing, whether it's in terms of Washington, DC creating their first women's conference, making sure it's in their strategic plan, the recruitment strategies, an emphasis on making sure that you're hiring and assessment processes are fair and validated.

You know, Ronnie raised a point about physical fitness, and we get asked this and sometimes we get accused of trying to lower standards. And that's not what we're about. We're not about lowering standards. What we want is to make sure that the standards are validated and and they make sense for the people that are doing the job.

Well, but we just have so many agencies doing incredible things. It's kind of tough to pick out, too many. And I don't like them to, to pit them against each other too much because I like them to keep up the good, the good work. Competition and in trying to, do it. But it really comes down to commitment.

You know, we ask our agencies to commit to doing this work. It's on them, you know, after that to how long they're going to stay committed. And, you know, in law enforcement, it's easy to take your foot off the pedal when, when something else arises.

Yeah. And and also, I think that, you know, something like this and programs similar to this require the person at the top to fully embrace it.

You know, one of one of the critiques I have on the wellness stuff is, is the chiefs and the sheriffs all talk a good game, but when it actually comes time for the rubber to meet the road, it's, it's it never seems to materialize. That's why we continually harp on it and push it out. And I think this is a very valuable, opportunity for law enforcement to try to expand our ranks, because we should be trying to recruit the best people, irrespective of, of gender or nationality or whatever, because those are going to be the best people to represent the department, the communities that they're serving, and they're going to want

to do a good job, protecting those folks, which we were hired to do. So, I really appreciate the opportunity to speak about this, and have a greater conversation. And it's really going to dovetail nicely into the brief that we're going to be pushing out. We'll have all the by information in our show notes.

And I think it's really important that we continue to have conversations about this, and it's good to see that a lot of agencies are starting to pick this up, and move the ball forward, which I think is vitally important. I don't know if there's any other closing comments. Tanya, Ronnie, you want to I want to say thank you for highlighting this issue.

And, like I said, it's really important to have, male advocates in this space as well. And, happy Women's History Month. Yes, definitely. Well, thank you. And that wraps. Oh, go ahead. We're going as I'm running now. Thank you. Okay. Next. And that wraps up another impactful episode of On the Job with PORAC. Huge thank you to Doctor Tanya Meisenholder and Veronica Limon for eliminating the critical role of women in law enforcement.

Knowledge is power. So stay informed about your rights, your workplace, and the policies policies shaping your profession. For more details, check out the show notes, including Poor Women in Law Enforcement Issue Brief and resources from the by initiative. Please like, subscribe and share this podcast to help us grow our reach. This is Brian Marvel and Ben Theriault reminding you to stay informed, stay safe, and keep up the great work.

Until next time. On the job of PORAC.