



STATE OF OKLAHOMA  
*COUNCIL ON LAW ENFORCEMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING*

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Title: Blue Line Program: Professionalizing Law Enforcement for a Safer Society

Introduction:

- The Blue Line Program aims to professionalize law enforcement, mirroring the success of the Yellow Ribbon Program for veterans.
- Law enforcement agencies, at local, state, and federal levels, face substantial risks and liabilities, necessitating a focus on professionalization.

Key points:

1. Risk and Liability:

- Law enforcement agencies face high risks and liabilities due to the nature of their work.
- According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, on average, one law enforcement officer is killed in the line of duty every 54 hours.
- High-profile cases, such as civil lawsuits against law enforcement agencies for misconduct, underscore the need for comprehensive training and professionalization.

2. Importance of Professionalization:

- Professionalizing law enforcement leads to a more accountable and effective force, benefiting society as a whole.
- Enhanced training and education reduce the likelihood of misconduct and improve public trust in law enforcement agencies.
- A study by the Police Executive Research Forum found that agencies with higher levels of professionalization have lower rates of officer misconduct and citizen complaints.

3. Challenges Faced by Local and Rural Law Enforcement:

- Many local and rural law officers struggle to afford formal education, hindering their ability to advance in their careers.
- Limited resources make it difficult for these officers to access comprehensive training programs.
- Without proper education and training, law enforcement officers may lack the skills necessary to handle complex situations effectively.

4. Training Discrepancies:

- Law enforcement academies often prioritize hard skills like driver training, firearms proficiency, and defensive tactics over soft skills, such as community policing and diversity training.
- Officers receive minimal training in critical areas, leading to gaps in their skill sets and potentially dangerous situations in the field.
- Investing in comprehensive training programs ensures that officers are equipped to handle any situation safely and effectively.

#### 5. Fiscal Impact and Long-Term Benefits:

- While investing in professionalization may require upfront costs, it ultimately saves money for governments through reduced liability claims and improved operational efficiency.
- A study by the RAND Corporation found that every dollar invested in police training and education yields a return of up to \$8 in benefits to society.
- By prioritizing professionalization, governments can build a more skilled and resilient law enforcement workforce, ultimately leading to safer communities and reduced financial burden.

High-profile cases of police misconduct across the nation have had significant impacts on society and incurred substantial fiscal costs. Here are a few examples:

##### 1. George Floyd Case (Minneapolis, 2020):

- The killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer sparked nationwide protests and renewed scrutiny of police practices.
- The city of Minneapolis faced civil unrest, property damage, and legal settlements totaling millions of dollars.
- The incident led to calls for police reform, increased accountability measures, and investments in officer training and education.

##### 2. Breonna Taylor Case (Louisville, 2020):

- The shooting death of Breonna Taylor during a botched police raid in Louisville resulted in public outrage and demands for justice.
- The city of Louisville faced lawsuits, legal settlements, and costs associated with police reforms and community engagement efforts.
- The case highlighted systemic issues within law enforcement and underscored the need for better training and protocols to prevent similar tragedies.

##### 3. Walter Scott Case (North Charleston, 2015):

- The shooting of Walter Scott by a North Charleston police officer, captured on video, raised concerns about excessive use of force and accountability.
- The city of North Charleston faced legal settlements, reputational damage, and increased scrutiny of its police department.
- The case prompted discussions about the importance of de-escalation techniques, implicit bias training, and officer accountability.

The fiscal costs associated with police misconduct include legal settlements, civil litigation expenses, increased insurance premiums for municipalities, and costs related to implementing reforms and oversight mechanisms. Beyond financial implications, these incidents erode trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve, leading to social unrest, strained relationships, and diminished public safety.

The Blue Line Program could play a crucial role in addressing these issues by promoting professionalism and better training for law enforcement officers. By providing access to formal education opportunities, including advanced degrees in criminal justice, social sciences, and related fields, the program can equip officers with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate complex situations effectively and ethically.

Moreover, the Blue Line Program can emphasize the importance of ongoing training in areas such as de-escalation tactics, cultural competency, and crisis intervention. By investing in continuous professional

development, law enforcement agencies can reduce the likelihood of misconduct, enhance officer performance, and improve community relations.

The Yellow Ribbon Program, established by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), assists veterans in pursuing higher education by providing additional funding to cover tuition and fees that exceed the standard benefits offered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Here's how it typically works:

1. **Eligibility:** Veterans who qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and meet certain criteria, such as length of service, are eligible for the Yellow Ribbon Program.
2. **Participating Institutions:** Colleges and universities voluntarily participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program by entering into agreements with the VA to contribute funds toward veterans' education expenses.
3. **Funding Matching:** The VA matches contributions made by participating institutions, effectively doubling the amount of financial assistance available to eligible veterans.
4. **Covering Tuition Gaps:** The Yellow Ribbon Program helps cover tuition and fees that exceed the maximum amount covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill, enabling veterans to pursue higher education without incurring significant financial burden.

Adapting this model to create the Blue Line Program for law enforcement could involve the following steps:

1. **Establishment of Program:** The government, in collaboration with law enforcement agencies and educational institutions, could establish the Blue Line Program to support the education and professionalization of law enforcement officers.
2. **Eligibility Criteria:** Criteria for participation in the Blue Line Program could be developed to ensure that officers who demonstrate a commitment to furthering their education and enhancing their skills are eligible for support.
3. **Partnerships with Educational Institutions:** Similar to the Yellow Ribbon Program, the Blue Line Program could involve partnerships with colleges and universities willing to provide educational opportunities tailored to the needs of law enforcement officers.
4. **Financial Support:** The Blue Line Program could offer financial assistance to cover tuition, fees, and other educational expenses not fully covered by existing law enforcement training programs or department budgets.
5. **Matching Funds:** The government could match contributions made by educational institutions and/or law enforcement agencies, maximizing the financial assistance available to officers participating in the program.
6. **Training and Professional Development:** In addition to financial support, the Blue Line Program could prioritize comprehensive training and professional development opportunities, ensuring that officers receive the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles.

Overall, the Blue Line Program could serve as a proactive initiative to invest in the education and professionalization of law enforcement officers, ultimately leading to safer communities and more effective

policing. By leveraging partnerships, financial support, and tailored training, the program could address the challenges faced by local and rural law enforcement agencies in accessing quality education and training resources.

Collaborating between the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training (CLEET) and Universities to establish the Blue Line Program could harness the expertise of both institutions and create a robust pilot program to determine efficacy. Here's how this collaboration could unfold:

1. Partnership Establishment:

- CLEET and Universities could formalize a partnership agreement outlining their respective roles and responsibilities in implementing the Blue Line Program.
- CLEET would provide insights into the specific training needs and requirements of law enforcement officers, drawing on its experience in overseeing law enforcement training programs in Oklahoma.
- Universities would contribute their academic resources, faculty expertise, and infrastructure to design and deliver educational components tailored to the needs of law enforcement professionals.

2. Curriculum Development:

- Together, CLEET and Universities could develop a comprehensive curriculum that integrates academic coursework with practical training modules.
- University faculty members specializing in criminal justice, sociology, psychology, social work, political science/public administration, and related fields could collaborate with CLEET trainers to design courses focusing on areas such as criminal law, ethics, conflict resolution, and community policing.
- Areas of specific specialization of faculty include: race and crime, gender and crime, victimology, rural law enforcement and rural crime, substance abuse, forensic science, and other areas.
- University faculty have existing working relationships with experts, both regionally and nationally, in relevant fields to assist in educating exceptional officers.
- The curriculum could be structured to accommodate the unique schedules and responsibilities of law enforcement officers, offering flexible learning options such as evening classes, online modules, and hybrid formats.

3. Financial Support and Scholarships:

- Universities could explore funding opportunities to support the Blue Line Program, including State appropriations, government grants, corporate sponsorships, and philanthropic donations.
- Scholarships specifically earmarked for law enforcement professionals participating in the program could help alleviate financial barriers and incentivize enrollment.
- Tuition assistance and reimbursement programs could be established to offset educational expenses for officers pursuing advanced degrees or specialized training.

4. Pilot Program Implementation:

- The partnership between CLEET and a specified university could launch a pilot program targeting a select group of law enforcement officers from diverse backgrounds and agencies.
- The pilot program would offer participants the opportunity to enroll in courses developed collaboratively by CLEET and the University, providing feedback on the relevance, effectiveness, and practical applicability of the curriculum.
- Data collected throughout the pilot program, including participant surveys, academic performance metrics, and on-the-job evaluations, would inform continuous program refinement and improvement.

#### 5. Evaluation and Assessment:

- CLEET and the University would conduct ongoing evaluations of the pilot program to assess its impact on participant outcomes, agency performance, and community relations.

- Key performance indicators, such as graduation rates, post-training assessments, and incident reports, would be analyzed to measure the program's efficacy in enhancing officer professionalism, competence, and accountability.

-In addition to the measures that will be developed to measure specific components of the program, the University will utilize Higher Learning Commission approved assessments to measure learning outcomes and program effectiveness.

- Findings from the pilot program evaluation would inform future program expansions, modifications, and scalability efforts.

By leveraging the strengths and resources of both CLEET and the University, the Blue Line Program could serve as a pioneering initiative in advancing the education, training, and professionalization of law enforcement officers in Oklahoma and beyond. Through a collaborative and evidence-based approach, the program has the potential to yield transformative outcomes for officers, agencies, and the communities they serve.

#### Conclusion:

- The Blue Line Program offers a proactive approach to addressing the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies, emphasizing the importance of professionalization for a safer and more effective force.

- By supporting initiatives that prioritize education, training, and accountability, we can ensure that our law enforcement officers are equipped to serve and protect their communities with professionalism and integrity.

Overall, the Blue Line Program represents a proactive approach to building a more accountable, competent, and trustworthy law enforcement workforce, thereby mitigating the occurrence of costly and damaging incidents of police misconduct. By prioritizing education, training, and professionalization, the program can contribute to safer communities and more effective policing practices.