

**Delta Police Department
BOARD REPORT
Regular Meeting**



To: **Delta Police Board**

From: **Neil Dubord, OOM, AdeC**

Date: **June 23, 2020**

Police Use of Force and Higher Education

▪ **RECOMMENDATION:**

A. THAT the Board receive this report for information.

▪ **PURPOSE:**

To inform the Board on the research of the correlation between an officers' level of education and the amount of force used in policing.

▪ **DISCUSSION:**

Research indicates that officers with higher levels of education may possess skills to manage or deescalate circumstances minimizing the necessity for use of force in public interactions. The hypothesis is that officers with post-secondary education have developed interpersonal communication skills that allow for greater success in the use of de-escalation tactics (McElvain & Kposowa, 2008). Relevant studies support the claim that writing and communication skills are improved through post-secondary education, regardless of one's field of study (White & Escobar, 2008).

Communication skills are a crucial asset for police officers attempting to mitigate situations where individuals may be experiencing mental health crises. Police officers use communication skills to build trust, create transparency and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and empathy to gain compliance with subjects and take control of the situations. Chapman (2012) has reported that "better educated police officers could rely

on communication and problem solving skills instead of force to defuse volatile criminal engagements (p. 423).

The Project on Policing Neighborhoods (POPM) conducted a study which concluded that college educated officers use force less often than their counterparts with lower levels of education (Paoline & Terrill, 2007; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002). Other studies have examined the impact of education on an officer's propensity to discharge their weapon. One particular study utilized data from 186 officer involved shootings in Southern California and found that officers with a college degree were 41% less likely to discharge their firearms than officers with a high school diploma or some college education but no degree (McElvain & Kposowa 2008). A 2002 study (Terrill & Mastrofski) also found higher instances of use of force in police-suspect encounters where the officer had lower levels of education and experience.

Recent research on use of force shows officers with college education reduce the likelihood of using force (Rydberg & Terrill, 2010; Paoline & Terrill, 2007). A 2016 study by Stickle added to pre-existing literature supporting the premise that advanced training and formal education requirements are associated with a reduction in departmental use of force complaints. Stickle's literature supports previous long standing premise about higher education of police officers leading to lower use of force noting that "*college-educated officers are less likely to fire their weapons (Fyfe, 1988), more likely to use reasonable force (Worden, 1996), maintain better communication skills with the community (Carter et al, 1989) and are less likely to receive citizen's complaints (Cascio, 1977)*" (p. 12).

Candidates applying for employment with the Delta Police Department (DPD) must possess a minimum of 30 credits of post-secondary education from an accredited university or college. Over the last five years, DPD has seen a rapid growth in the number of officers seeking both undergraduate and graduate level education. The value of formal education in the workplace has been recognized and is acknowledged in DPD through the promotion process and tuition reimbursement. It is a priority for DPD to encourage continuous learning through formal education, in an effort to continue to professionalize the workplace.

▪ **IMPLICATIONS:**

DPD will continue to prioritize the Education Funds budget for its employees as the demand for higher education continues to grow throughout the organization.

▪ **RELATED POLICY:**

There is no policy related to this report.

- **CONCLUSION:**

Numerous pieces of literature form the foundation of valuable research highlighting the impact of college education on police use of force. The emphasis is on interpersonal communication and problem solving skills which are developed via college education of all disciplines and can be beneficial for an officers in defusing volatile engagements with the public, when responding to calls for service, therefore requiring less use of force. DPD recognizes this relationship of education and communication skills and will continue to advance strategies to encourage officers to commit to continuous learning.

- **ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Bibliography

Respectfully Submitted:



Neil Dubord, OOM, AdeC
Chief Constable, Delta Police Department

Attachment A

Bibliography

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- Chapman, C. (2012). Use of force in minority communities is related to police education, age, experience, and ethnicity. *Police Practice and Research, 13*(5), 421-436.
- Terrill, W., & Mastrofski, S. D. (2002). Situational and officer-based determinants of police coercion. *Justice Quarterly, 19*(2), 215–248.
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