

Law Enforcement Task Force Meeting

Monday, March 27, 2017

Department of Natural Resources Boardroom – Suite 1252 East Tower
2 Martin Luther King, Jr., Drive SW, Atlanta, GA 30334

Meeting Minutes

ATTENDEES

Task Force Member	Present	Absent	Excused	Comments
Verda Colvin, Superior Court Judge		x		
Gerald Couch, Sheriff Hall County				
Eddie DeLoach, Mayor Savannah	✓			
Sonja Fillingame, City Manager-Union City			✓	Casandra Jones-Police Chief Union City (for Sonja Fillingame)
Bert Flewellen, Chief Operating Officer DCS	✓			
Tyler Harper, Senator	✓			
George Hartwig, DA Houston County	✓			
Vivadon Horton, Citizen Liaison	✓			
Dan Kirk, Assistant Director GBI	✓			
Michael Persley, Police Chief Albany	✓			
Alan Powell, Representative		x		
Mitch Ralston, Sheriff Gordon County	✓			
Pat Strode, CIT Program Administrator	✓			
Ken Vance, POST Director, Co-Chairman	✓			
Chris Wigginton, GPSTC Director, Co-Chairman	✓			
Scott Woodell, GSP Training Director	✓			
Others Attending				
Angie Bowen, GPSTC	✓			
Cheryl Greathouse, GPSTC	✓			
Sharla Shockley, GPSTC	✓			
Bennie Horton, Guest	✓			
Ray Saxon, GPSTC	✓			
Terry Norris, GA Sheriffs' Assn.	✓			
Tonia Welch, GA Sheriffs' Assn.	✓			
Robert Paris, Chief Deputy Gordon County	✓			

PURPOSE

Governor Nathan Deal appointed the Law Enforcement Task Force to examine the Basic Law Enforcement Officer Training Course and establish competency-based standards for any course revisions deemed appropriate.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chairman Chris Wigginton

The Task Force meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m.

OPENING REMARKS

Co-Chairman Chris Wigginton

Good Morning, thank you all for being here. We will discuss the five topics that are most important to each of you for the Task Force to address in our recommendation to the Governor. The reason I only asked for 5 is because we could be here into the evening if we don't limit the discussion. I think 5 is a good starting point. We will go around the room and let each of you discuss areas you think we need improvement or more discussion on. At this time we will start with Scott Woodell.

Discussion

Scott Woodell, Use of Force is hot button at this time. Communication goes hand-in-hand with Use of Force. Retention without changing standards.

Michael Persley, general understanding of Law Enforcement. Basic Law, need to know more about case law with a firm understanding of statute law. Scenarios help to learn how to apply case law. CIT, do not need to replace what is now being done within the communities, but an overview within Basic regarding mental health and understanding what it looks like. Also, mental health of the officers is a concern. Community policing. Firearms and defensive tactics are also important, because you cannot talk your way out of every situation.

Eddie DeLoach, mental and relationship help for Law Enforcement is important. Community policing, CIT.

Pat Strode, peer education at the academy level, what to look for after traumatic experiences. Spouse and family recognition and what to look for in their loved ones. Special populations, understanding juveniles and their brain not being developed completely and dealing with the elderly. More education for officers around the mental health codes. Law Enforcement apprentice program at a high school level.

Dan Kirk, basic police tactics and strategies, more scenario based training. Basic constitutional law and case law updates, decision making. Community policing, understanding the community you work in. Generational and cultural differences.

Bert Flewellen, echoes sentiments of Captain Woodell and Chief Persley. The four classes required for in-service; cultural awareness, fostering positive community relations, police legitimacy and procedural justice, use of force and de-escalation options. Would like to see those concepts somewhere in Basic. With the added requirement that the student would have to take a scenario based test not just a written test. Thorough prerequisite for CIT. Something that introduces those concepts. Course about the criminal justice system in general and the officer's role in the system.

Tyler Harper, agree with everything that has been discussed. Important to pass along information for to the legislature regarding issues that may be in the way of officers doing their jobs. It may take legislation to correct some of these things and that is helpful for the legislators to know how they can help. Georgia gives their officers a lot of discretion. It is an important tool and I am a fan

of officers using their own discretion, but they must understand it is not to be abused. Hire good people at the agency level. Scenario based training is very important.

Vivadon Horton, basically the same as everyone else. Communication and education! Quality applicants, start in High School. Common Sense will go a long way. Mental disorder. Retention in small communities.

Casandra Jones, sitting in for Sonya Fillingame. Agree with everything the others have said. Scenario based training is the way to go. Example MP City.

Mitch Ralston, have done it all, been a Trooper, police officer, and Sheriff seen it from all sides. Agree with what the others said. Get your communities behind you.

George Hartwig, agree with what the other said. Scenario based training is key. Firearms advanced training w/ scenarios and basic law, physical training. Evidentiary issues, knowing what evidence is and how to collect evidence, so a case can be prosecuted. Report writing.

Ken Vance, nothing to add or subtract.

Chris Wigginton, Mrs. Horton you said you didn't know why you were placed on this committee. Everyone around the table has referenced community involvement, which is why you are here.

Mitch Ralston, differences between Sheriff Deputy, Police Officer, and State Trooper. A Deputy Sheriff is more in-line with the responsibilities of a State Trooper. Do we need to add something in basic mandate related to transport of prisoners?

Michael Persley, orientation portion and academy understanding different roles. Going back to departments that are small, twenty or less, they may not have investigators, understanding that officer is the most important person on the scene.

Chris Wigginton, report writing and scenario based training will make more successful officers.

Michael Persley, graduate on Friday, you could respond to your first domestic call on Saturday. Maybe the week before graduation you go through "hell" week. Scenario based training and then putting it all on paper (report writing).

Ken Vance, communication, one extra minute talking to people could make a difference. Scenario based training is key.

Scott Woodell, element missing is field training. Scenario based training is great, but when the rubber meets the road, what makes a Trooper is the 90 days of field training.

Ken Vance, review a sample certification test. Unless you can apply what you've learned in the academy, you really haven't learned anything. Everyone that calls themselves professionals has a licensing exam, except for law enforcement officers in Georgia. This is a sample of a 250 question test. We give this test to a lot of different academies. If there is a question that has a but...then we will look at that and see what their reasoning is, if it is justifiable then we will look at it and give them credit for it. Wants everyone to look at the sample test, but will have to take them up when they are done. We have a test bank of 1000 randomly selected questions for the 250 question test. We would like for this to be one of the things officers have to take at the end of the academy. There

is a mid-term and a final exam that is based on their training; however, it is not based on today, on many if any scenarios, like this test gives. I am big fan of testing and scenario based training. Those are the lessons that keep you alive and keep you out of the courthouse.

Chris Wigginton, everyone take a minute and go through the sample test.

Bert Flewellen, just to clarify, how is this being used right now other than officers coming from other states?

Ken Vance, we are BETA testing in the academies, not all the academies, North Central every class that goes through. We did Fulton County and a Tech School a couple of times. I believe we did ABAC.

Ray Saxon, no, none of GPSTC's have been tested.

Ken Vance, we didn't do ABAC?

Ray Saxon, no.

Ken Vance, North Central isn't one of yall's?

Ray Saxon, no.

Ken Vance, well we haven't done any of theirs, but we do North Central's every time they graduate.

Chris Wigginton, what is their success rate?

Ken Vance, 88 – 91% which is good.

Bert Flewellen, are they required to pass it?

Ken Vance, no, just BETA testing.

Chirs Wigginton, Ken can you explain to the group about the certification? If we move from current system now to certification, what does that entail? If they do it this year and they graduate what's the requirement from here on out?

Ken Vance, they go through academy and take the test at the end of the academy. If you pass the first time fine. If you don't pass it you can take it again as soon as the next day. You have to wait at least six months to take it the third time. Three attempts is all you get. Can you work until you pass the test? Yes, you could work during those 6 months. If you don't pass the third time you would have to start over.

Dan Kirk, wouldn't that require a law change?

Ken Vance, yes.

Scott Woodell, what has been your response in your BETA testing, pass/fail rate?

Ken Vance, between 88 and 91%. Some classes are better than others.

Scott Woodell, why not more distinct answers? As opposed to variable answers. Instead of “the best answer” why not a distinct answer?

Ken Vance, good question

Scott Woodell, the way I was trained, my response to #1 would be to disband the party. Yall are too loud and have caused a public nuisance. Report to DFACS for a follow-up.

Ken Vance, you’re not the first to say that.

Pat Strode, the children have been drinking, that’s a health issue.

Scott Woodell, an officer will look at the situation in totality based on the call he was given.

Ken Vance, question was what would your choice be regarding the children?

Chris Wigginton, takes away some of the officer’s discretion. There is not a right or wrong answer as long as you use your discretion, take care of why you were called there and take care of the children you’ve covered those grounds.

Ken Vance, whatever I did A or B, am I right in doing either of those things? Yes.

Scott Woodell, this is the problem. If someone fails this test you are going to get but....

Ken Vance, people like the test because it makes them think. Some of these you have to read the question correctly. We have had very little blow back from the takers of the test. I do not disagree with anything anyone has said, it’s a fluid document. It’s not perfect.

Dan Kirk, do we really want people out there working who have not passed the test?

Chris Wigginton, where did the 6 month number come from?

Ken Vance, arbitrary. It’s a fluid thing, nothing is stone.

Ray Saxon, we have hit almost everything talked about here today. We need better FTO programs. Agency culture, the Sgt. and Lt. have to follow up on what we teach in basic mandate. I have written down everything yall have suggested and we will try to implement them all, but you have to have the time and the resources.

Terry Norris, Georgia Sheriffs’ Association, great ideas, great thoughts. We have to understand whatever we do one size does not fit all. There are vastly more local officer than state officers. The local officers are the ones answering 9-1-1 calls. Doesn’t mean they are more important than anyone else, they are just the first ones there. Everyone should go to the same class, Troopers set next to Rangers, and so on. Go through period and then they all guy back to their specified agencies and have specialized training and not just FTO training. How much closer would we all be if we were all together as recruits? I think it would be phenomenal. Hope this committee will recognize, one size might not fit all. The testing, could be a problem.

Chris Wigginton, Terry, to address some of your comments, the Center's population last year 89% of our population was counties and municipalities. Only 11% was State agencies. We are meeting a good demand with locals. Other than the Patrol in the State of Georgia they all attend the same training in mandate. One size doesn't fit all—I disagree, I understand the \$9 per hour in comparison to what they make in the metro areas, but they still enforce the same state laws, constitutional laws, and case laws. When they come through the gates of the Training Center I don't care what color they are wearing, but when they pull out they should have received the best training in the State of Georgia and across the Nation. If they don't the staff has failed and I have failed. I take it very seriously. The days of feuding should have been over a long time ago. We all have the same goals to protect the citizens of the State of Georgia.

Old/New Business

Review of final certification test.

Next meeting will be at POST Council and we will let you know as soon as the date is set. Lunch will be served after the meeting.

Adjourned at 12:00 p.m.