



DESIGNATED PARTY COMMENTS

*House Select Committee on Mass Violence Prevention
and Community Safety*

General Comments Regarding
Interim Charges

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August 13, 2020

General Questions for all Designated Parties from Representative Blanco:

1. What specific statutory recommendations could you make to improve long-term workforce needs in your area?

Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program: Last session SB 16 by Hancock established the student loan repayment assistance program. It is already serving as a powerful recruitment tool for law enforcement agencies. However, program participants are limited to those officers who became initially employed on or after September 1, 2019. If the program was made available to more officers, the ability to assist them in paying down student loan debt could help in retention.

Ample evidence exists that the higher level of education an officer has, the fewer complaints the officer tends to generate, the better cases they make, etc. In addition to helping in recruiting and retention, we would also be focusing our efforts on recruiting and retaining better officers.

Worker's Compensation Reform: In the last two sessions the Texas Legislature has made revisions to the workers comp statute to encourage employers and carriers to provide first responders with medical treatment in a timely manner. The objective is to get the first responders back to work as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, too many officers injured on the job must go through an extensive arbitration process with their employer's insurer which often leads to delays in needed medical care. It has been proposed that legislation could be drafted to ensure that the insurer pay for necessary medical exams to determine needed treatment. There is still work to be done here.

For officers who are permanently disabled in the line of duty, the disability benefit offered by most workers comp carriers is not enough to provide for even basic needs. It is at least worth looking into the possibility of offering re-training for another line of work or supplemental disability coverage.

Municipal Civil Service: Civil Service creates more stability in a department and professionalizes the agency. Currently under some city charters, officers who work for a municipality, but who are not citizens of that municipality are restricted from collecting signatures for a civil service campaign. It has been proposed that because an officer employed by a municipality has an inherent interest in how the municipality is governed, that legislation should be contemplated to specify that an officer employed by a municipality has the right to collect signatures for a civil service campaign even if the officer does not live in the municipality.

Sheriff Civil Service: The purpose of the civil service commission is to have true civilian oversight over law enforcement agencies. However, some sheriffs and district attorneys have been granted broad authority in who they appoint to serve on the commission. In some cases, this authority could lead to politically motivated decisions

and disparity in the way those systems are administered. HB 3894 (86R) by Muñoz sought to address these concerns by setting out provisions relating to such a civil service system.

2. What barriers of entry do you see in your field and do you have recommendations on addressing those?

Money and politics.

3. Are there examples from other states that you have seen to help improve the long term workforce needs in your respective areas?

Worker's Compensation Parity: As mentioned, other states pay higher worker's compensation benefits for injuries sustained in the line of duty. By increasing disability payments to have parity with other states, officers will know that if they are injured, there is an adequate support system to assist them.

4. How has the surge in gun violence, mass violence, domestic terror threats impacted the training and education of professionals in your areas? Is there any particular focus on addressing, preventing, or identifying these threats in your profession's education and training?

Active Shooter Training: Peace Officers performing the function of School District Peace Officer or School Resource Officer must complete the School Based Law Enforcement Training and a TCOLE approved SBLE Active Shooter Training.

5. What policy recommendations, based on your experience, training, and education, would you make to prevent or deter future mass violence incidences?

Programs like **Leadership Academy: Texas** (LAT) help create a positive view of law enforcement from an early age. This not only improves students' perception of law enforcement but allows law enforcement to identify troubled youth before there is an incident giving officers and counselors the opportunity to mentor students.

Intelligence Sharing – a system much like the fusion centers which track possible terrorist attacks has been proposed to allow local, state and federal law enforcement to share intelligence for the purpose of anticipating and preventing mass violence incidents.

6. Can you elaborate on the role your profession can play in helping prevent mass gun violence?

Staying up-to-date on the latest trends and best practices in law enforcement is critical to being a well-informed officer. TMPA offers cutting-edge training suited to individual needs. Our goal is to help law enforcement officers be better educated, as educated officers are likely to make better decisions when dealing with confrontations, creating a safer work environment for our officers, and the public.

Trainings TMPA offers include, but are not limited to the following:

Basic Response Survival Training: Officers will be placed in real world scenarios such as traffic stops, pedestrian contacts, family fights, alarm calls, building clearing, crimes in progress, and violent critical incidents during this customizable course.

De-escalation Techniques This course involves the use of techniques to reduce the intensity of an encounter with a suspect and enable an officer to have additional options to gain voluntary compliance or mitigate the need to use a higher level of force while maintaining control of the situation.

Use of Force Topics include: Texas Penal Code Chapter 9, liability issues, alternatives to using deadly force, preventive measures, media and community relations and social, economic and political aspects.

7. How can recent mass violence incidences inform or update the education and training requirements in your respective fields?

Active shooter training and mental health de-escalation trainings are already available

Smaller agencies are often underfunded and have difficulty in sending their officers to trainings because they cannot afford it.

TMPA offers state-wide training across the state. We recently incorporated a virtual reality system into that training. This new technology has enormous potential, but it cost-prohibitive on a large scale basis.

General Questions for all Designated Parties from Chairman Darby:

1. What can the state of Texas do to invest in long-term solutions for law-enforcement, mental health, and cybersecurity workforces? Does Texas have shortages in your respective field?

It is no secret the law enforcement is under attack both physically, and occupationally. Elected officials from all levels of government should affirm their support for the men and women who keep their communities safe. Many already have, and we are grateful. However, some have chosen to pursue policies which not only hurt recruitment, but are causing officers to either change agencies, or seek employment in a different field. Simply put, if there is instability in any job sector, it makes recruitment difficult.

Anti-police rhetoric not only causes instability, it puts officers in harms way. Since January first of this year, 188 officers have been shot, and 30 have been killed.

2. Do you have any immediate recommendations for the Select Committee to address the education or training requirements in your specific field?

Required law enforcement training should be based on best practices. There have been many calls for change to police training which are based on fear instead of facts. Better training leads to better officers, but we must ensure that our officers are receiving the right kind of training.