



# Critical Trends in Policing

And Their Impact on the Well-Being and Performance of Law Enforcement Personnel

## Five Critical Trends Impacting Law Enforcement for 2022

### Introduction

The Law Enforcement Survival Institute has identified five trends in law enforcement and policing that are causing major shifts in the way we mobilize our personnel and provide our services. This report does not focus on the **CAUSE** of these trends but rather the **EFFECTS** these trends have on the well-being and performance of law enforcement personnel.

### The Top Five Critical Trends Impacting Policing in 2022

- Significant Issues in Maintaining Adequate Staffing
- A Changing Public Sentiment Toward the Police and Traditional Policing Practices
- The On-going Effects of COVID-19
- An Increase in the Level and Threats of Violence on Policing and in our Society
- Unaddressed Internal Agency Vulnerabilities

#### 1. Significant Issues in Maintaining Adequate Staffing

Agencies around the world are reporting major challenges posed by short staffing due to excessive attrition, absenteeism, budget cuts, early retirements and in some cases firings.

#### 2. A Changing Public Sentiment Toward the Police and Traditional Policing Practices

2021 saw a worldwide wave of challenges and pushback to the ways law enforcement organizations do business. The focus of the Police Reform Movement included a broad swath of legislation targeting the necessity to use force, bias in how force is utilized, the use of military equipment by civilian law enforcement and the protections of qualified immunity. Some measures have persevered and others have been walked back. One thing is very clear, the public is scrutinizing the way policing is practiced and the penalties for abuse are being severely prosecuted.

#### 3. The On-going Effects of COVID-19

In addition to all the health and social problems it created, COVID-19 was also the leading cause of death among U.S. Police Officers In 2021. According to the NLEOMF of the 458 confirmed law enforcement line-of-duty deaths in 2021, Covid-19-related fatalities accounted for 301 of those, and it is anticipated that a



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significant number have yet to be reported by agencies. 2021 Covid-19-related law enforcement fatalities increased 65% over those in 2020 and will likely continue to increase through at least 2022.

## 4. An Increase in the Level and Threats of Violence in Policing and in our Society

A massive increase of violence in our society and against the police as well as threats to law enforcement and many members of our society has made for a very difficult time in our history. In the first 24 days of 2022 The Washington Times reports, "A police officer has been shot nearly every day as a growing wave of shootings and other attacks across the country claimed the lives of four officers in less than a month." The Times adds, "Through the first 24 days of the year, gunmen opened fire on cops 22 times, killing three officers, according to data from the National Gun Violence Archive. Another four officers have been ambushed in vehicle attacks.

The FBI says that intentional killings of law enforcement officers reached a 20-year high in 2021. According to preliminary data compiled by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF), 61 officers were killed feloniously by firearms which represents a 36% increase over the 45 officers killed feloniously by firearms in 2020. The leading circumstance of firearms fatalities were officers killed in ambush-style attacks. A total of 19 officers were killed in ambush attacks in 2021, a significant increase over only 6 such attacks in 2020. With increases in civil unrest and a fractious political climate, threats and violence seem to have become a common part of our lives. Unfortunately, whether or not they are the focus of those threats, or that violence, law enforcement professionals are the ones who will have to deal with it.

## 5. Unaddressed Internal Agency Vulnerabilities

Internal agency challenges, when left unaddressed, become vulnerabilities. Problems like employee suicide, organizational clarity issues and a "crisis management focus" rather than a "priorities focus", are causing an unsettled atmosphere that inhibits wellbeing and optimal employee performance.

### a. Operational Vulnerabilities Within our Agencies

#### Employee Suicides

While we need to be aware of line of duty statistics and how COVID-19 is impacting those, in order to take precautions, we really need to focus further on one of the "hidden dangers" of our profession that, despite a reduction in 2021, we still haven't gotten a handle on - officer suicides!

According to data from the NLEOMF, Blue H.E.L.P. and the FBI there were 458 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in 2021. Of those 458, COVID-19 accounted for 301 of those deaths. During that same time period 169 officers took their own lives by suicide. Prior to COVID-19 suicide numbers had passed LODD numbers.



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Line of Duty Death's	Total	Felonious	COVID	Officer Suicides
2019	139	51	0	247
2020	295	45	182	185
2021	458	84	301	169

Sources NLEOMF, Blue H.E.L.P., FBI

There is no excuse for not having a suicide prevention initiative within your organization. Suicide prevention starts with a discussion. We offer everything you need to start that discussion and begin an initiative today on our CopsAlive website, for free! Please visit: [www.CopsAlive.com/SuicidePrevention](http://www.CopsAlive.com/SuicidePrevention) for everything you will need. We have a link to a 12-minute video you can use in roll calls and staff meetings, two downloadable discussion guides and other resources to launch your program. Start your discussion today – Please!

## Lack of Wellness Support Systems

Couple the suicide risks with a lack of wellness support systems such as psychological services, chaplaincy, proactive peer support, wellness education, as well as mentoring and family support programs, which are not standardized across our profession, and we have created a situation where our personnel are more vulnerable to poor health, poor quality of life, poor decision-making and huge liability. If they don't feel comfortable in asking for help when they need it, then all of your other plans, programs and initiatives are worthless. Law enforcement principles are built on trust, and **if your people don't trust the organization to help them when they have the courage to ask for it, then you may not be able to trust them in situations where their professionalism, compassion, courage and decision-making count the most!**

### b. Organizational Clarity Issues

Organizational clarity in policing is about the unity of vision, mission, values, goals and community trust. Organizational clarity problems can include pervasively negative organizational cultures; a lack of ethics training and re-enforcement, as well as no training in problem-solving and proper decision-making can all lead to the erosion of an agency's mission and values to a point where the organization can be challenged from the outside by public outrage, political scrutiny or federal government oversight.

**Here is a simple test** – *Whoever you are, walk around your headquarters and ask people to tell you what the organization's mission is? What are the organization's values? What are their personal values? Be sure to ask the leaders too!* **Without shared ownership in purpose, values and goals, yours is a rudderless ship!**

These problems can be liabilities and become costly in time, energy, money and reputation. The Parkland Families \$127 million settlement against the FBI, the Floyd Family's \$27 Million settlement against the City of Minneapolis, Elijah McClain's parents \$15 million settlement against the City of Aurora Colorado all show a pattern of the community and justice system pushing back against "business as usual" law enforcement.



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## c. Crisis Management Focus rather than Priorities Focus

By its very nature, law enforcement can become a crisis response, reactive Band-Aid for all of society's problems. Sometimes that mentality becomes so pervasive that we are always in reactive, crisis management mode rather than a more positive and proactive one. Couple that with our paramilitary, "toughen up - you can handle anything" mentality we have developed a natural ambivalence toward wellness programming. These issues cause many, many problems within policing but the often-overlooked impact on the well-being of the people who are supposed to be protecting and serving the public should be of critical concern. No matter how much equipment and technology we buy, policing is always going to be a people business. It's about people serving and protecting other people, and our human resources are our greatest asset. The fact that we don't now spend more time, energy and money on encouraging, training supporting, and sustaining them is our profession's greatest weakness -- A "Blind-Spot" that hinders excellence in policing.

Finally, it's also high time we reexamine the methods and practices we use in hiring, as well as the types of early warning and early intervention systems we put in place to assist employees who are suffering but won't ask for help for fear of losing their jobs.

## What Can We Do About These Issues?

Again, this report is not about solving the issues causing these trends, it is about managing the effects of the trends, and most importantly managing the combined impact that all of these trends have had on our personnel. The time to build wellness and resilience programs is now, not when we get more people, or the public isn't so concerned about our budgets, or COVID is gone or the violence subsides.

Wellness is our professional "Blind-Spot" and it's time to remove it and focus our vision on helping our people!

We must take action now to help our people who suffer, so we propose a 7-step response plan:

### A 7-Step Response Plan

- Promote wellness and well-being as mission critical factors in your agency
- Train to build individual employee resilience
- Enhance your agency's support systems
- Bolster a positive organizational culture
- Focus leadership on people and their well-being
- Foster community trust by focusing on their well-being and the wellness of their police
- Re-examine our hiring, retention and intervention practices with a focus on resilience and wellness



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Consider reading: [Police Stress and Deleterious Outcomes: Efforts Towards Improving Police Mental Health](#).

The findings from this study support the literature that perpetual long-term exposure to critical incidents and traumatic events, within the scope of the duties of a law enforcement officer, have negative implications that can impact both their physical and mental wellbeing. These symptoms become exacerbated when the officer perceives that receiving any type of service to address these issues would not be supported by law enforcement hierarchy and could, in fact, lead to the officer being declared unfit for duty.

In October of 2021 a panel of police chiefs discussed what can be done to maintain staffing levels at law enforcement agencies. The discussion by Steven Casstevens, chief of the Buffalo Grove (IL) Police Department (past president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police); Bill Harvey, retired chief of the Ephrata (PA) Police Department; and James Small, public safety director of Palmyra, WI, was part of a webinar sponsored by POLICE Magazine and Vector Solutions titled "Recruiting and Retention Through Excellent Officer Training." The overarching issue addressed during the webinar was the role of quality training in attracting officers to an agency and convincing them to stay.

According to the Harvard Business Review there is proof that positive work cultures are more productive, and the University of Oxford says that happy workers are 13% more productive.

The Law Enforcement Survival Institute (LESI) is an assessment, consulting and training organization. We work with law-enforcement professionals and other first responders, and their organizations, to help them be at their best. Our focus is on PEOPLE and their wellness and resilience. We collaborate to develop healthy people, agencies and healthy communities!

We believe: *If we don't take care of our people, they won't be able to take care of THE PEOPLE!*

We also believe that wellness and resilience are symbiotic systems made up of several critical parts that must work in tandem in order for the whole to be effective. We help you reduce your "Blind-Spots".

## **We support the health and resilience of people and organizations in the areas that:**

- Create and Maintain Individual & Family Wellness and Resilience
- Cultivate a Positive Organizational Culture of Wellness
- Cultivate a Positive Community Culture of Wellness
- Build the Necessary Wellness Support Systems
- Promote Wellness Leadership
- Foster Community Health & Resilience to Build Trust and Positive Community Relationships

Give us a call at 303-940-0411 so we can have a conversation about wellness or send us an email requesting more information about all of our programs and services at: [info@LawEnforcementSurvivalInstitute.org](mailto:info@LawEnforcementSurvivalInstitute.org)