

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2322

As Reported by House Committee On:

Criminal Justice & Corrections

Title: An act relating to requiring prehire screening for law enforcement applicants.

Brief Description: Requiring prehire screening for law enforcement applicants.

Sponsors: Representatives McDonald, Delvin, Kristiansen, Pearson, Lovick and Shabro.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Criminal Justice & Corrections: 1/21/04, 2/3/04 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Makes it mandatory for all new applicants that have been offered a conditional offer of employment as a full-time or part-time officer or a reserve officer that has been out of work for more than two years to take and successfully pass a psychological and polygraph test.
- Requires that the psychological and polygraph tests be administered by the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC).
- Requires each new recruit and returning reserve officer to pay a portion of the testing fee based on the actual cost of the test or \$400, whichever is less and authorizes the CJTC to establish a payment plan for those officers that do not readily have the means to pay for the testing fee.
- Requires new recruits and reserve officers to pass the psychological and polygraph tests as a condition of continued employment as a peace officer and requires the CJTC to deny peace officer certification to any applicant or reserve officer that has failed the psychological and polygraph tests.
- Prohibits local law enforcement agencies and the Washington State Patrol (WSP) from hiring officers that have not successfully completed the psychological and polygraph tests and obtained a certificate of basic law enforcement.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives O'Brien, Chair; Darneille, Vice Chair; Mielke, Ranking Minority Member; Ahern, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kagi, Pearson and Veloria.

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background:

The CJTC provides basic law enforcement training, corrections training, and educational programs for criminal justice personnel, including commissioned officers, corrections officers, fire marshals, and prosecuting attorneys.

CJTC Boards. The CJTC consists of two training standards and education boards: 1) the Board on Law Enforcement Training Standards and Education, and 2) the Board on Correctional Training Standards and Education. The Board on Law Enforcement Training Standards and Education (Board) is a 13 member board in charge of advising and recommending minimum curriculum standards to the CJTC for all training and education programs conducted for criminal justice personnel within their specific purview. The CJTC may adopt any curriculum standards as recommended by the Board and may also establish any rules and regulations recommended by the Board relating to the physical, mental, and moral fitness which governs the recruitment of criminal justice personnel where such standards are not prescribed by statute or constitutional provisions.

Training. Basic law enforcement officer training is generally required of all law enforcement officers, with the exception of volunteers, and reserve officers employed in Washington. The training consists of a 720-hour program covering a wide variety of subjects, including constitutional and criminal law and procedures, criminal investigation, firearms training, and communication and writing skills. All law enforcement personnel hired, transferred, or promoted, are required to complete the core training requirements within six months unless the employee receives a waiver from the CJTC.

Law Enforcement Certification. In addition to the basic training requirement, all Washington law enforcement officers must obtain and retain certification as a peace officer. As a prerequisite to certification, a peace officer must release to the CJTC all personnel files, termination papers, criminal investigation files, or any other files, papers, or information that are directly related to the certification or decertification of the officer. The CJTC has the authority to grant, deny, or revoke the certification of peace officers.

Furthermore, although not statutorily required, the Washington State Patrol (WSP) and several local law enforcement agencies around the state also require the successful completion of a psychological examination or polygraph test as a part of their hiring process for law enforcement officers.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

All new full-time, part-time, and returning reserve officers must pass a psychological and polygraph test as a condition of continued employment as a peace officer.

The CJTC must require and administer a psychological and polygraph examination to each law enforcement officer applicant that has been offered a conditional offer of employment and each reserve officer that has been out of work for two years or more. The CJTC is authorized to require those applicants taking the psychological and polygraph tests to pay a portion of the testing fee based on the actual cost of the test or \$400, whichever is less. In addition, the commission may establish a payment plan for those instances where a peace officer may not readily have the means to pay for his or her portion of the testing fee.

The CJTC must deny peace officer certification to any applicant or reserve officer that has failed the psychological and polygraph tests. Local law enforcement agencies and the WSP are prohibited from hiring officers that have not met its minimum standards for employment with the agency and have failed to successfully pass the psychological and polygraph tests.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The CJTC, instead of local law enforcement agencies, are required to administer the psychological and polygraph tests. Only applicants that have been offered a conditional offer of employment as a peace officer, instead of "all" applicants that apply for law enforcement positions, are required to take and successfully pass a psychological and polygraph test. Applicants must pay a portion of the testing fee based on the actual cost of the test or \$400, whichever is less. The CJTC may offer a payment plan for those officers that cannot immediately afford to pay the testing fee.

A provision is added that requires new recruits and reserve officers to pass the psychological and polygraph tests as a condition of continued employment as a peace officer and as a condition of receiving their certification as a peace officer.

A provision is added that clarifies that local law enforcement agencies and the WSP are prohibited from hiring officers that have not successfully completed the psychological and polygraph tests and obtained a certificate of basic law enforcement.

Appropriation: None.**Fiscal Note:** Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This bill is not intended to relate to every applicant throughout the state who applies for a law enforcement position. It is only intended for commissioned law enforcement officers.

Citizens have the right to expect that persons in uniform, more specifically law enforcement officers, are worthy of trust. There is a problem when law enforcement officers are commissioned without being tested to see if they are actually psychologically fit for the position.

This bill should be put into place for the safety of the public regardless the cost of the bill. The Department of Fish and Wildlife has administered psychological exams since 1985 and it is an extremely important piece of their hiring process. The department requires their applicants to pay a portion of the testing fee.

(Concerns) The original bill as drafted does not state whether a person would have to pass the psychological or polygraph exam. In addition, under federal law a polygraph test cannot be given until an offer of employment has been given. The bill can also be a quite substantial cost for smaller law enforcement agencies. (The substitute bill addresses these concerns).

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative McDonald, prime sponsor; Michael Parsons, Criminal Justice Training Commission; and Bruce Bjork, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

(Concerns) Larry Erickson, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs; Sophia Byrd, Association of Counties; and Jim Justin, Association of Washington Cities.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.