



news release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 13, 2008:

USE OF FORCE PANEL SUBMITS REPORT TO COUNTY POLICE

An independent panel formed to review the Use of Force Training taught to police recruits and veteran officers at the Westchester Police Academy has concluded that the training offered there meets or exceeds state requirements.

The panel also made recommendations on how the Academy's current training can be enhanced. Public Safety Commissioner Thomas Belfiore said the department is always looking to improve training and is prepared to implement a number of the panel's recommendations immediately.

In addition, he will seek support from state and local law enforcement to implement other panel recommendations that aim to improve Use of Force Training by all police agencies in Westchester and around the state.

The panel was created in the aftermath of the death of Mount Vernon Detective Christopher Ridley. It formally convened on March 10, 2008, and was asked to report its findings within 60 days.

"It is our hope that this and other efforts will avoid such a heartbreaking occurrence from ever happening again," Belfiore said.

The panel of academics, law enforcement professionals and community representatives reviewed three aspects of Use of Force training: the training taught to police recruits from all Westchester departments at the Westchester Police Academy; the In-Service training on use of force as taught to veteran Department of Public Safety officers at the Police Academy, and the In-Service training provided by Westchester's municipal police departments to their members.

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“I would like to thank the panel members for their time and for their dedicated undertaking of an issue that has wide-ranging implications for the safety of all police officers in Westchester County,” Belfiore said.

The panel noted that it had been granted access in a timely fashion to all “records, documents, guidelines, lessons, personnel and equipment necessary to the preparation of (its) report.”

Among its findings, the committee concluded that:

- The Department of Public Safety meets or exceeds New York State training requirements on the use of deadly force;
- The Police Academy provides two hours of recruit training in off-duty confrontation situations, though not required to do so by New York State, and
- The Police Academy curriculum currently includes both stand-alone lessons concerning the use of physical and deadly force and a variety of other lessons that integrate the topic.

Belfiore said some of the panel’s recommendations will be implemented right away by the Department of Public Safety. These include:

- Expanding the amount of time spent on tactical use of force training (currently 9 ½ days), to make more use of the Firearms Training Simulator, survival house and simunitions;
- Increasing the time allotted for training on off-duty confrontation situations;
- Having recruits and officers experience, through role-playing, being both the confronting and the confronted officer;
- Utilizing a demographically diverse cast of instructors and role players in these training exercises.

The panel expressed its support for a training facility known as a “tactical village,” which would permit more “real world” training scenarios. Belfiore noted that a tactical village is already in the planning stages. In addition, he said the Academy staff was a diverse group of men and women and would remain so in the future.

Belfiore noted that some of the panel’s recommendations relate to the In-Service training provided by municipal police departments, and not the Police Academy, to their members. Changes to that training will require a review by agencies such as the Department of Criminal Justice Services’ Municipal Police Training Council and the Westchester Chiefs of Police Association. As the current chairman of the Municipal Police Training Council, Belfiore said he would urge the body to support a number of the panel’s recommendations.

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These include:

- Mandating that all police departments in the state develop and follow a standard protocol for handling off-duty confrontation situations;
- Requiring that such a standard protocol be taught to all police recruits and during In-Service training for veteran officers, and
- Mandating annual firearms recertification/qualification for all police officers in the state.

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