

SUPPORT FOR COLLEGE TUITION REIMBURSEMENT
FOR PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS

OPEN LETTER TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
AND ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN ASHCROFT

FROM NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

- Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)
- International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST)
- National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)
- Police Association for College Education (PACE)

In support of appropriation for federal financial support of college expenses for police officers proposed as HR3355 – 103rd Congress, and authorized under Part B. Section 200102 et. Seq. of Public Law 103-322 (42 USC Section 14091 et seq.), VIOLENT CRIME CONTROL AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 1994, for which the authorized appropriation has not been passed.

A. BACKGROUND

Several national commissions and the Federal Courts have declared that a four year college degree is the minimal education level to be a well qualified police officer. Since the recommendations have been published, several new research projects have established that officers with four-year degrees have significantly less abuse of police powers than officers without such education.

This principle was well articulated in the dicta of the Federal Fifth Circuit Court in Davis v. Dallas (777 F. 2d 205, 5th Cir. 1985) (Certiorari denied to Supreme Court May 19, 1986).

“Thus, police officers are left with their more essential task which includes social control in a period of increasing social turmoil, preservation of our constitutional guarantees, and exercise of the broadest discretion – sometimes involving life and death decisions – of any government service. The need for police officers who are intelligent, articulate, mature, and knowledgeable about social and political conditions is apparent...(A) college education develops and imparts the requisite level of knowledge” (emphasis added) (p. 219)

As Saunders similarly stated in his authoritative book, Upgrading American Policing. “We must first improve the police officers to improving policing.”

Both Police Executive Research Forum (Police Chiefs serving cities over 50,000 populations), and the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training have passed resolutions in support of four-year college degree requirements for police officers, to improve the quality of police services.

B. HISTORY

The Congress in passing the Law Enforcement Assistance Act of 1968, Part G. Section 705 found, that it was in the national interest to have college educated police officers and authorized/funded grants to institutions of higher education for financial assistance to students already employed in or intending to enter the criminal justice field. This program lasted to 1980 during which time 714,000 in-service students with duplicate counts (approximately 90% of total) sought and received this financial assistance, with only approximately 10% by pre-service students. Of the total criminal justice students in the program, 69% were in the police field. Based on a non-duplicative count of 316,000 students, 151,320 received four-year or graduate degrees.

Again in 1994, the Congress found that it was in the national interest to have police officers with four-year college degrees in authorizing and passing Part A, Section 200102 et. Seq. Of Public Law 103-322, by funding four-year scholarships for students planning to become police officers. However, Part B of the authorization which provided funds for in-service police officers to complete their college was not funded, and has not been funded in the ensuing years.

C. DISCUSSION

Today it is estimated that approximately 30% of the Nation's police officers have four-year or higher degrees. However, the percentage of officers with some college is much higher. Therefore, the most efficient, lowest cost and fastest benefit for improving policing in the United States is through funding in-service officers to complete their college education. The need and demand for such a program is evident from the Law Enforcement Education Program (1965-1980 where approximately 90% of student assistance went to in-service officers.

D. CONCLUSION

Given that five national commissions and the Federal Courts have recommended that police officers should have four-year college degrees for proper performance, that subsequent research has shown that college educated officers have much lower rates of abuse of power, and that the Congress has found that it is in the national interest to have college educated officers both in 1968 and 1994, the Congress is urged to provide financial assistance for in-service police officers to complete their college degrees, with an appropriation similar to HR3355, 103rd Congress, as already authorized by Part B of Section 200102 et. Seq. of Public Law 103-322 (42 USC Section 14091 et Seq.)
VIOLENT CRIME CONTROL AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 1994.