

1958

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Recommended Citation

John J. Mirich, Certification of Local Law Enforcement--A Must, 49 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 92 (1958-1959)

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CERTIFICATION OF LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT—A MUST

JOHN J. MIRICH

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It has been common knowledge in the United States for the last half century or so, that teaching and law enforcement are the most underpaid and underrated of all professions. This assumption is still considered to be true in many states of the nation, but generally speaking, school teaching has been gaining the social and economic recognition it has so long deserved. Law enforcement on the city, county, and state level, on the other hand, has not received the same recognition due to the fact that it has not advanced, either socially or professionally, in comparison.

Many reasons have been given for local law enforcements' "lag" behind the other professions, but the most acceptable one seems to be John Q. Citizen. Mr. Citizen does not consider the police officer to be a professional person due to the lack of qualifications he believes the local law officers possess. The citizenry of each state must accept the blame for this attitude since they are the treasurers of the city, county, and state coffers. It appears that we must redefine the word *police officer* to the public and police officers as well to denote: those professional people whose duty is not only to bring violators to justice, but to prevent crimes from occurring, and to protect the rights of the public.

Most of the federal law enforcement agencies demand that their applicants possess a high academic, physical, and moral character. The qualifications of the F. B. I., for instance, are so high that only the most qualified young men apply for employment. This type of screening in federal law enforcement has given a professional status to the men of the F. B. I. and to the nation the best type of law enforcement possible. In comparing the foregoing caliber of men and their duties to local law enforcement, one wonders why there is so much difference in the qualifications demanded by each when the duties of both are quite similar. The F. B. I. has shown to the nation that professionally prepared officers are, in the long run, better prepared to cope with crime.

Police work, even though appealing to the educated-interested young man, cannot offer him the economic and social recognition he feels his background deserves. Thereby, the individual that seeks this very important vocation is most generally of the unskilled, untrained variety. The social prestige of local law enforcement is at such a low ebb in many sections of the country, that one is considered to be too lazy to work if he seeks this type of employment. This assumption on the part of many Americans has discouraged scores of interested-educated young men who could help lift local law enforcement to professional status. Let's be realistic about it. The taxpaying public, through disinterest and neglect, has forced this very important vocation to recruit its manpower from the ranks of the professionally unqualified. One of the ear-marks of a true profession is that it sets up standards and regulates its membership. We must encourage local law enforcement to set up *National Uniform Professional Standards* to demand and receive recognition as a bona fide profession—by improvement within itself.

Many stringent academic requirements must be met before one becomes a lawyer. But to enforce complex laws and ordinances that some of our most competent lawyers can hardly understand, the public has believed that local officers need only know how to read, write, and meet a certain height and weight requirement. If this were not true, public pressure would have demanded higher police qualifications in the past. There seems to be too much inconsistency in what the public thinks it takes to interpret the law, and what qualifications one should have to enforce them. In many cases, the officer must make split-second decisions that may result in a jail sentence, a fine, or a ruined career for innocent people, as well as the guilty. Many times the officer must act as a sociologist, a marriage counselor, a father confessor, a first aid expert, and occasionally, even a judge. Since one generally needs very few professional requirements to become a police officer, it

seems that in most cases we are expecting boys to perform men's jobs. This problem will become more and more acute now that the atomic, nuclear, and space age is demanding more academic preparation from our citizens for a highly professionalized way of life. Can we expect non-professional people to enforce complex laws and ordinances on an educated society?

The G. I. Bill of Rights has tremendously influenced the educational level of this nation. Thousands of young men received the benefits of a college education they could not have had otherwise. These same veterans, knowing the economic and social fruits their education has brought them, will more than likely have aspirations of higher education for their offspring. This whole process will mean a highly educated society in the next few years. Will local law enforcement keep step with an educated society? Will it be able to enforce laws on people who in many cases will know more about the law than the police officer? If local law enforcement cannot attract the educated applicant at the present, how can it be expected to compete for his services with other professions in the future?

Some sister social agencies, such as social work, parole, probation and various types of welfare agencies, generally have higher requirements than local law enforcement even though their duties are probably no more technical. Why the inconsistency in professional requirements? Will the citizen of today, through neglect and disinterest, leave his grandchildren heir to a profession that in many cases is twenty-five years behind the others?

It is granted that in many areas in the nation, local law enforcement is highly respected and very efficient. The fine training program offered to police officers at the Northwestern University Traffic Institute for over twenty years is certainly one of the best of its kind in the nation. Hundreds of city, county, state, and federal officers have taken advantage of this modern training and have used this new knowledge of traffic control and traffic police administration to greatly improve their departments. The Southern Police Institute at the University of Louisville has benefitted police officers throughout the Southern part of the nation. It has a school term of twelve weeks duration, three times a year. The training combines instruction with practical work. Its faculty consists (as does Northwestern Traffic Institute) of some of the best known authorities in the nation. The state

colleges of California such as, San Jose, Fresno State, Los Angeles State, University of California at Berkeley, and others, as well as junior colleges, offer masters' degrees, B. S. degrees, and two year training programs in many areas of police specialization. They also carry on an extensive in-service training program for officers of the area. The above mentioned schools are by no means the only ones; this writer is limited by space to give recognition to all deserving institutions who are providing police education programs. The fine training given the local law enforcement officers by the F. B. I. deserves mention here. They carry on periodic programs on interrogation, weapon handling, laws, identification and apprehension, etc., which has been a tremendous influence on local law enforcement. The F. B. I. Academy also has been extremely influential in acquainting the local law officer with modern crime detection and prevention.

It seems to this writer, since too much inconsistency exists from community to community, and from state to state, as to what professional requirements (some demand a high school education and others far less) the applicant should have, that a system of *National Certification* would be in order. Local law enforcement can reach professional status only through uniformity of standards. The states are obligated to their citizenry to set up police training programs in the state-supported colleges and universities such as is being done in the California Colleges, Northwestern University and the University of Louisville, and other colleges and junior colleges throughout the country. No person should be allowed to enforce a law on a face-to-face relationship without a minimum of two years of professional training above a high school education. Extreme emphasis in the officers' training must be placed on the psychology of human behavior, sociology, and other liberal arts areas. In the past, in many cases, the law officer has not had sufficient training in the U. S. Constitution nor in state and city law. He must be well versed on the individuals' rights, as guaranteed by the Constitution. A diploma or certificate should be given to the student after the satisfactory completion of all requirements. The certificate would qualify the student as a city, state, or county officer.

It is suggested that a National Board of Police Certification be set up (as in the Bar Association) as well as State Police Certification Boards. This would help keep the police appointments out of the

hands of unqualified, since only trained personnel would be eligible to become Local Law Enforcement Officers. If certification becomes a reality, persons not meeting high professional standards as set up by the law enforcement profession will not become police officers. The National Board of Police Certification should carry on an extensive program of public-police relations and co-ordinate the activities of the various state certification boards. The state boards should require the applicant to pass a proficiency test administered in the manner of the state bar association upon completion of the required academic work. His character will also be investigated before he has been certified. In order for the public and the other professions to recognize local law enforcement as a profession, it seems as though the first move is up to the *profession itself*. It should set up high professional qualifications and discard favoritism as a means of recruitment. In turn, this type of action would bring about public interest, social prestige, economic betterment, and far better law enforcement.

The long standing assumption that local law enforcement personnel will improve with higher wages is an extremely false and dangerous one. If the wages were raised before higher qualifications were demanded, the profession would soon be overrun by many more of the unqualified element. The assumption of improvement of local law enforcement by more attractive salaries might well attract *more* applicants, but it appears that what we need is *better trained* officers. We must endeavor to attract the educated-interested young man of high morals by giving him community standing, and community approval of his chosen work.

Local law enforcement should not be left to people who are inadequately prepared. They must be screened for academic achievement and moral worth before their first day as a law officer. Local law enforcement must have national uniform professional standards to avoid unqualified people enforcing complex laws and ordinances on an educated society. A person is no more qualified to enforce the law without professional education than he is to be a lawyer. Both of these areas require a great degree of skill, tact, understanding, and tolerance. At the present, law interpretation alone requires high academic standards even though the duties of law enforcement are just as complex and important. In fact, the lawyer many times has hours, days, or months to prepare his

case whereas the policeman may be required to act in a split-second.

Some of the benefits of national certification for local law enforcement include:

1. Although the various states may find that in setting up police programs in the junior colleges, colleges, and universities, they will be required to use more tax dollars, within a few years the tremendous financial burden placed on them today by crime and delinquency will be greatly reduced. The certified police officer will better understand and cope with crime and delinquency than the officer of today. He would pay his own way!
2. More cooperation between local and federal law enforcement.
3. Public acceptance, economic security, and professional pride for the policeman and his family.
4. Probability of innocent persons being imprisoned unjustly would be greatly reduced.
5. The certified police officer would be trained in crime prevention, as well as crime detection. He would considerably deter the potential delinquents, thus saving the taxpayers' money, and the potential law-breakers a life behind prison walls.

Although law enforcement is referred to as a profession, it is done only as a matter of classification. It has not reached professional standards—it does not regulate its membership, and until it demands uniform standards, it will be frowned upon by those applicants who could enhance its position in the ranks of the accepted professions.

This writer recognizes that this system of certification will find much opposition from some people in and out of the profession itself. That is why he is suggesting what seems to him to be the *minimum* requirements necessary to enforce laws in this nation today. These job classifications may or may not be acceptable to the profession, but to deny that it can reach professional status without national uniformity certainly would not appear to be sound reasoning.

1. *Certified Police Administrator*

A. A four year police training program as given by some state colleges, plus a specified experience requirement and in-service training period as the profession would deem necessary.

Some of the suggested administrative positions:

1. Heads of state patrol, state police, and other state law agencies.

2. City chiefs of police.
3. County sheriffs.

2. *Certified Police Specialist*

A. A four year police training program of which half of the training period would constitute extreme emphasis in the students field of specialty.

Some of these positions would include:

1. Parole, probation, juvenile officers, and others when attached to local law enforcement.
2. Identification experts: firearms, hand-writing, chemists, interrogators.
3. Investigators and detectives in homicide, morals, burglary, car theft, arson, and others.

3. *Certified Policemen*

A. These are crucial jobs, in that they demand split-second decisions on the part of the officer. For these individuals whose duties bring them into face-to-face relationships with the public, although they perform general law enforcement duty rather than being a specialist in some area, it is suggested that they have a minimum of two years of police training above a high school education. These individuals are delegated the responsibility of deciding, in many cases, who is guilty and what charges to file against the accused.

Some of these positions would include:

1. Foot patrolmen
2. Traffic officers
3. Cruiser car patrolmen
4. Others whose duties demand that they handle the public.

4. *Non-Certified Police Personnel*

A. These positions would require a high school education plus a specialized training period as deemed necessary by the profession.

Some of these positions would include:

1. Jailers and guards.
2. Parking meter checkers.
3. Some varieties of office help.
4. Others whose duties are classified as police work, but are not required to enforce the law on the public on a face-to-face relationship.

It can be easily noticed that many police jobs were left out of the four job classifications. It is nearly impossible to name all jobs in a paper of

this type. Just enough were inserted to give the reader an idea of how local law enforcement may separate police duties. The profession may decide to break down the cities and counties into classifications similar to the ones below.

A. Cities and Counties under 15,000 population, 3rd class.

B. Cities and Counties with 15,000 to 50,000 population, 2nd class.

C. Cities and Counties with 50,000 and over, 1st class.

The profession may further decide to slightly lower the qualifications whereas a certified policeman could be an administrator in a town of 1000 population for instance, but it is suggested that in no case should a person be allowed to enforce laws and ordinances on a face-to face relationship without two years of professional training above a high school education.

It should be re-emphasized at this point that the four classifications above are mere samples of what could be done. The profession may decide to use another type of job breakdown. There are many different duties that require various types of training in local law enforcement. This writer believes that we are several years away from the hoped-for day when the local law officer will possess only slightly less qualifications than the local lawyer. He has suggested what he feels are bare minimums for requirements, which if accepted, would be a step in the direction of true professionhood.

One of the most important aspects of this type of certification for Law Officers would be regulation of standards by the profession itself. It should have the right to require in-service training and to require its members to attend programs offered in police training at the various higher institutions around the nation. The profession may see fit to raise its requirements in the four job classifications to four, five, or six years in the future, and it should be delegated the right to do so.

Many city, county, and state law enforcement jobs throughout the nation are obtained by people who have very little education and in many cases no training, by passing a certain test of proficiency. One wonders if these various tests do any screening at all when he sees many of those who pass them. The certified police officer will be screened by the profession itself before he applies for the job, and when he seeks employment in your city, county, or state, you will know he is qualified because he made the grade.