



Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board

JB Pritzker, Governor
Keith Calloway, Executive Director

Phone: 217/782-4540
Fax: 217/524-5350
TDD: 866-740-3933

July 14, 2023

VIA EMAIL: reports@ilga.gov

Mr. John Hollman
Clerk of the Illinois House of Representatives

Mr. Tim Anderson
Secretary of the Illinois Senate

Re: PA 102-719 – Report on the Police Intern Program

Dear Honorable Clerk Hollman and Secretary Anderson:

Public Act 102-719 requires the Illinois Law Enforcement Training & Standards Board to complete a report, in collaboration with the Community College Board and the Board of Higher Education, on the credits and coursework required for the Intern courses operated in accordance with the Law Enforcement Intern Training Act. Because the required coursework is established under Section 7 of the Police Training Act and “credits” are customarily determined by the college conducting the course, this report explored all points of interaction between the Intern Program and community colleges. 50 ILCS 705/7. This report follows:

History of the Intern Program

The Board was established in 1965 to ensure that law enforcement officers throughout the state were trained to basic minimum standards regardless of where they worked. 50 ILCS 705/1. In 1976, all officers were required to attain “certification” by completing a course of study at an approved academy. 50 ILCS 705/8.1. In 1984, a standardized exam was utilized as a measurement of proficiency and accomplishment. In the following years, the Board developed in-service and specialized training options to keep officers abreast of the evolving best practices and national trends.

Throughout these developments, the duty in Illinois is on the employing law enforcement agency to ensure that their employee officers complete the required trainings and function in accordance with the approved standards. For this reason, Illinois remains a “certification” state compared to “licensure” states which allow individuals to complete police related trainings independently with the hope of getting hired in the future. This approach was further supported with the SAFE-T Act which placed even greater reliance on employing agencies to take responsibility for the performance of their agent officers. See 50 ILCS 705/9.2

Nevertheless, the idea of an individual exploring an interest in law enforcement prior to employment was considered by Board members throughout its history. In the mid-90s, the Board developed its “Law Enforcement Intern Program” to allow individuals to complete the police academy at their own expense.

Those completing the program were afforded 2 years to find full-time employment as a final step to attaining their official certificate. The program has historically attracted a handful of individuals each year with approximately half completing all components of the program.

The Intern Act and Administrative Rules

Under the Law Enforcement Intern Training Act (the Intern Act), individuals must be at least 21 years of age, be free of any disqualifying criminal conduct, be of good character and meet the Board's educational and psychological criteria. 50 ILCS 708/2. The corresponding Administrative Rules require Intern Program participants to complete the same physical fitness prerequisites as standard police recruits and mirror their academic and disciplinary requirements. 20 Ill. Adm. Code 1725.101 *et seq.* Initially, a four-year degree was required to participate in the program, but this was later reduced to an associate degree. Currently, there is no academic requirement set in the rules.

In the Spring of 2022, the General Assembly passed Public Act 102-719 which required the Board to create a report with recommendations to the General Assembly for establishing minimum requirements for credits that may transfer from public universities to satisfy the requirements of the intern courses. Upon subsequent discussions with the bill's sponsor, we also focused on exploring ways in which the Intern Program could be more attractive to community college students.

Discussions

In the initial discussions with the Community College Board, it was learned that statewide standards or guidelines regarding criminal justice and police related programs are not in place but rather, community colleges often tailor such programs to specific local interests and needs. Nevertheless, the ICCB was able to share a list of community colleges that operate such programs – which were ultimately contacted to inquire as to the similarities and differences that can be inferred from the respective curriculum.

We discussed the role of intern candidates with chiefs from rural and suburban communities from across the state. Collectively, they appreciated the ability to hire an intern officer and put them to work immediately as they had already completed the basic academy and passed the certification exam. However, they mentioned that intern candidates customarily required extra mentoring and professional guidance as those components were absent from their academy experience.

We also had the fortune of discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the Intern Program with academy directors who had been involved with the basic academy instructional components over the years. They noted that intern candidates were often highly motivated, but faced challenges integrating into the social frameworks of the academy setting as they were distinguished from traditional police recruits. One challenge was the inability to offer long-term opportunities for interns as space was limited, by statute, to extra seats not taken by traditional police recruits.

Finally, we hosted a webinar for program directors from community colleges across the state which operate criminal justice or police related coursework for degree programs. After explaining the background of the Intern Program these directors had additional questions about the specifics of the program and the timeframes typically required for attaining an intern certificate. Generally, they were very supportive of the idea of offering the 16-week academy as part of a 2-year degree program but did not have specific suggestions as to the coursework that should accompany or be required for this concept.

Attendance of the Intern Program is customarily recognized for a semester's worth of credit at the community college level and can be transferred to an applicant's host college. Eventually, the group

began to offer suggestions as to how the Intern Program may be made more attractive to the students' participation in their respective degree programs.

Most significantly, they mentioned that the cost of the Intern Program (approximately \$6,500) was likely an obstacle as it is approximately 3 times higher than a typical semester at a community college. Additionally, they suggested that the age requirement of 21 would likely distract those seeking to complete their program directly after high school. As to the 2-year requirement to gain employment, they noted that if more time was offered to complete additional schooling or gain other life experiences before committing to the police profession, they believed degree program students may be more inclined to complete the Intern Program, particularly if they have enough time to return to their home college and complete their degree program in a familiar environment.

Recommendations

After conducting the above discussions concerning the Intern Program, some changes could be explored that would likely have a positive impact to generate interest and may increase enrollment from students across the state.

- A. Age Requirement: Changing the statutory age limit from 21 to 20 (or perhaps even 19) would allow more students at the community college level to participate in the Intern Program. While we understand the logic of this suggestion, many municipalities are prohibited from considering police applicants before they reach 21 and there are unique FOID complications that would come into play regarding firearm possession to and from training sessions.
- B. Hiring Requirement: Changing the statutory hiring requirements from 2 years to 3 years would allow intern candidates more time finish their degree programs or gain other life experiences before committing to the police profession. Nevertheless, the longer an individual waits to apply the skills from any academic or professional training the more they may require a demonstration of continued proficiency. Furthermore, most intern candidates are now being hired at the time of graduation, rarely needing the afforded period for job-seeking.
- C. Designated Intern Seats: As academy attendance levels return to “normal” pre-COVID numbers and academies take advantage of infrastructure expansions, the statutory requirement that Interns “shall not take the place of an LEO meeting basic training requirements” may no longer be necessary. Allowing an academy to maintain a designated number of intern seats in each class would allow the program to gain a stronger foothold within the community.

In addition to those statutory changes, the Board's Administrative Rules could also be modified to reflect policies that are more conducive to fostering academic partnerships and cross-promotion at the community college level:

- D. Scholarships and Grants: As the cost of attending the Intern Program is relatively high compared to the academic costs of community college courses, reducing, or eliminating this obstacle would be welcomed. Perhaps “Recruitment and Retention” grant funds could be dedicated for this purpose; particularly if eligibility and commitment thresholds are established related to academic accomplishments and job performance.
- E. Part-time Options: Historically, the Intern Program was operated in conjunction with a basic law enforcement academy consisting of 14-16 weeks as is required for “full-time” police officers.

Nevertheless, the part-time training program operates over an 8-month period and combines on-line coursework with weekend classroom sessions. Allowing intern candidates to participate in these part-time sessions may be of interest to those unable to make a full-time commitment.

- F. Set an academic requirement: While there has been debate over the years as to what level of education should be required of intern candidates, all involved in the related discussions agreed that those in the Intern Program should be supporting their development with degree related coursework as well. This would be particularly important if the age requirement is reduced to those under 21. As the statute allows the Board to set minimum criteria for educational standards, completion of, or enrollment in, some form of post-high school coursework could become a pre-requisite.

As these recommendations indicate, some simple changes could be made that would ensure the transfer of academic credits and likely generate more interest in the Intern Program. The Board looks forward to continuing its discussions with the Community College Board and the Board of Higher Education, as well as the stakeholders involved, to discuss improvements to the Intern Program.

Respectfully,



Keith Calloway,
Executive Director

JRK/jrk