



# Preparing for a Career in Law Enforcement



## A Special Note to Prospective Waubonsee Community College Criminal Justice Students

Welcome and thank you for considering a degree in Criminal Justice from Waubonsee Community College. Our program is open to any student interested in learning more about the exciting field of criminal justice. However, if you are interested in a *career* as a law enforcement officer on a federal, state or local level, you should know the following about the profession:

### Criminal History

It is highly unlikely that a law enforcement agency will hire an applicant who has been convicted of a felony offense. Some agencies may hire people convicted of certain misdemeanor offenses, depending on the seriousness and circumstances. Traffic and other petty offenses are normally considered on a case-by-case basis. Agencies will also evaluate all criminal arrests that did not result in a conviction. Both adult and juvenile records of police officer applicants are reviewed.

### Illegal Drug Usage

Depending on the frequency, type, and how long ago the drug was used, some agencies may hire an applicant who has used illegal drugs or legal drugs for an illegal purpose. Some agencies have a zero tolerance policy and will exclude an applicant who has used illegal drugs – even one time - from completing the testing process. Selling drugs will probably result in exclusion from further consideration. Most agencies require a drug test prior to appointment and some have random drug tests after appointment.

### Background Investigation

Most agencies conduct a very thorough background investigation on the applicants. The background often includes a criminal history check through a national law enforcement computerized system, a check with local police departments where the applicant has lived and/or worked (to include juvenile records), a canvass of work associates and neighbors, a credit check, and a driving record check. Most police departments will also check popular social media sites such as FaceBook to determine the character and fitness of an applicant.

### Physical Fitness and Health Related Issues

Law enforcement agencies are not required to hire people with physical disabilities. If an applicant has a disability that prohibits or significantly restricts running, climbing, lifting, using a firearm, or manipulating handcuffs, it is highly unlikely that the applicant will be hired. The applicant will also be required to pass a physical examination and agility test before being hired and as part of the academy experience. Many agencies now require officers to pass physical exams and agility tests on an annual basis. Most agencies have minimal vision standards that require correction to 20/20.

### Mental Health Issues

Most agencies require applicants to take a psychological examination, including a face-to-face interview with a psychiatrist. Applicants who have substantial mental health issues including personality disorders will find it difficult to be hired by a law enforcement agency.

### Honesty and Integrity

Agencies require that all applications be completed thoroughly and honestly. Failure to do so will result in exclusion and in some cases, termination after hiring. Many agencies will require applicants to submit to a polygraph (lie detector) examination. Applicants found to be dishonest will be excluded from further consideration.

### Tattoos and Body Piercings

Some agencies prohibit certain tattoos and body piercings that may be visible to the public while on duty.

### Education Requirements

Education requirements vary from agency to agency. Most require a high school diploma or a GED. A trend in the area has been a minimum requirement of two years of college. Some agencies now require a bachelor degree. Many federal agencies require a bachelor degree in specific fields and may require several years of related experience. Applicants are routinely required to submit an official copy of their transcripts.

### Age Requirements

Most agencies require the applicant to be at least 21 and no older than 35 at the time of appointment. Some federal agencies require the applicant to be at least 23 years old. Other agencies will allow the applicant to be older than 35 with prior law enforcement experience.

### Citizenship and Language

Most agencies require applicants to be citizens of the United States at the time of appointment. Most agencies also require a command of the English language, both spoken and written. Fluency in a second language is usually a benefit to the applicant.

### Other Considerations

The hiring process and requirements vary from agency to agency. You should contact and consult any law enforcement agency that you are considering, to determine if you meet the minimum requirements. If you meet the requirements, request to ride with an officer or job shadow an agent to learn more about the organization and to determine if you would be a good fit.

Once hired, you should be prepared to work in a paramilitary organization with strict rules and regulations that govern your behavior and appearance, both on and off duty. Your agency and the public will constantly evaluate your character and fitness. You will work different shifts including weekends and holidays. You may be required to work in harsh or dangerous conditions. You may also be required to move and live within a set geographic boundary.

***Consider your career in law enforcement as a profession, not just a job!***

If you have any questions, please contact:

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