

NOVEMBER 2018

Officer Safety and  
Wellness Group  
Meeting Summary

Less-Lethal Weaponry,  
Post-Traumatic Stress,  
and their Impact on Officer  
Safety and Wellness

*EMERGING ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS*

Wellness Teach  
Support Safety  
Leadership Define  
Culture Prevent Education  
Balance Strength



**COPS**  
Community Oriented Policing Services  
U.S. Department of Justice

**BJA**  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
U.S. Department of Justice

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# Letter from the Director of the COPS Office

Colleagues:

Since 2011, the Officer Safety and Wellness (OSW) Group has worked to improve the health and well-being of the men and women of our nation's law enforcement agencies. In recent meetings, the group has focused on officer resilience; officer suicides and felonious assaults; and mental health, peer support networks, crisis hotlines, and other programs to help address law enforcement health and safety.

In November 2018, the OSW Group convened to discuss officers' physical, mental, and emotional health and safety and the ways these can be impacted by less-lethal techniques and technologies; the importance and difficulties of gathering and analyzing data; and the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2018. As the U.S. Department of Justice noted in its report to Congress on officer mental health and wellness, the current state of support for officers' mental health nationally is often disjointed and faces both cultural and logistical obstacles—but expanding access to mental health and wellness services can help officers get the support they need and will save lives. This meeting looked into those obstacles and began to identify solutions: establishing health and wellness programs in departments, maintaining relationships with communities, and involving families in officers' care and treatment.

The COPS Office is proud to partner with the Bureau of Justice Assistance to support the OSW Group. We are grateful to Strategic Applications International for facilitating the meeting and preparing this report and to the law enforcement officers, leaders, subject matter experts, and others who continue to offer their time and effort to the group's work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Keith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Phil Keith  
Director  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

# Acknowledgments

It is with great appreciation that we recognize the work of Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) staff members Deborah Spence and Helene Bushwick and Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) staff members Deborah Meader and Michelle Martin, who together oversaw preparations for the November 2018 Officer Safety and Wellness Group meeting.

We also extend our thanks to Chief Joe Collins of the Two Rivers (Wisconsin) Police Department for his excellent meeting facilitation and to James Copple, Principal and Founder of Strategic Applications International (SAI), for his expert facilitation design and leadership throughout the event. Additional members of the SAI team included Colleen Copple and Jessica Drake, as well as facilitators Jason Drake and Mary-Jo Robinson, all of whose contributions we deeply appreciate.

Furthermore, we would like to spotlight meeting participants and the depth of knowledge and experience they brought to the table. Each of them was specifically selected for their expertise and represented their agencies with dignity and respectfulness. For that, we commend and salute them.

Meeting participants are quoted throughout this document, with citations that indicate the name of the individual quoted and the agency they represented at the meeting.



# History of the Officer Safety and Wellness Group

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), both components of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), formed the national Officer Safety and Wellness (OSW) Group in 2011 to bring attention to the safety and wellness needs of law enforcement officers following a number of high-profile ambushes of police that resulted in officer fatalities. Since 2011, the OSW Group has raised awareness and increased knowledge about officer safety and wellness, and encouraged law enforcement agencies to adopt practices that recognize that their most valuable resource is the men and women who put their lives on the line every day to keep their communities safe. For this reason, it is critical that the COPS Office and BJA—with support from DOJ leadership—research, discuss, share, and promote the best possible strategies to keep our nation’s law enforcement officers safe on the job.

To that end, the OSW Group regularly brings together law enforcement practitioners, researchers, and subject matter experts (SME) to amplify new and existing practices designed to improve officer safety and wellness in the field. The goals of the OSW Group are

- to create an enabling environment for law enforcement organizations and researchers to collaborate on improving officer safety and wellness;
- to bring together law enforcement organizations and researchers to share knowledge and information about officer safety and wellness initiatives;
- to broadly disseminate information and best practices to the law enforcement field.

The OSW Group identified 16 priority areas on which to focus, grouped under four main themes:

## I. Operational and emergency responses

1. Injuries and deaths from gunfire
2. Premeditated and unprovoked ambushes
3. Rifle, long-gun, and assault weapon threats
4. Task force operations (federal and local)
5. Offender history and behavior during incident
6. Court security

## **II. Leadership and management**

- 1. Leadership and safety practices**
- 2. Equipment**
- 3. Deployment strategies and communication technologies**

## **III. Mental and physical health and wellness**

- 1. Physical health (i.e., addressing common health conditions)**
- 2. Psychological health**
- 3. Maintaining good health**
- 4. Former military in law enforcement**

## **IV. Training**

- 1. Education and training**
- 2. Emergency vehicle operation and safety**
- 3. Foot pursuit safety**

Since 2011, the OSW Group has discussed these critical officer safety and wellness issues at regular meetings and produced a number of resources that encourage law enforcement agencies nationwide to adopt a culture that recognizes and elevates the value of officer safety and wellness. The COPS Office and BJA continue to strive to provide agencies with all the tools necessary to respond effectively to the most persistent and prevalent safety and wellness challenges facing law enforcement officers today.

Given the upward trend in violent attacks against law enforcement since 2012 and the resulting need to facilitate the growth of resilient officers and organizations, the OSW Group convened in November 2018 to continue its discussion of officer physical and mental health and safety. This document serves as an official summary of that meeting and seeks to provide readers with critical information, promising practices, and recommendations from medical authorities, law enforcement leaders, and SMEs from across the nation. When first responders have the tools and support they need to take care of themselves and manage the stress and trauma of their jobs, the benefits have far-reaching positive effects on their personal and professional lives as well as the lives of those they serve and protect.

# Overview of the November 2018 Meeting on Less- Lethal Weaponry and Post-Traumatic Stress

Since its formation in 2011, the OSW Group has met on a semiannual basis to address the physical and mental health challenges that members of the law enforcement community confront on a daily basis. While protecting and supporting our nation's officers has always been the primary objective of the group, recent meetings have proven especially poignant and necessary as the relationship between some departments and the communities they serve has deteriorated as a result of unfortunate incidents. Law enforcement officers in 2019 are subject to a complex cross-section of internal and external stressors: Their methods are filmed and condemned on social media, their policies are scrutinized by an increasingly biased eye, and at times their families and livelihoods come under attack while they are left alone to bear the emotional weight of these trends.

Typical line-of-duty occurrences expose law enforcement officers every day to the threat of physical violence, injury, or death as well as to traumatic events that can trigger mental distress such as post-traumatic stress (PTS), panic attacks, and chronic depression. By continuing to convene the OSW

Group in Washington, D.C., this administration reaffirms the Federal Government's commitment to promoting officer physical fitness and mental wellness. The November 2018 meeting of the group featured presentations by subject experts that focused on four specific areas of interest:

1. **Less-lethal technologies:** Can they reduce line of duty deaths and injuries?
2. **Data:** If we are measuring what matters, how do we better measure officer injuries?
3. **Post-traumatic stress:** What do we know and what can we do about it?
4. **Officer safety and wellness:** What is still missing from the conversation on wellness?

Presentations served as a springboard for more in-depth conversations and debates about meeting topics and how they are interwoven with the work of the OSW. Ultimately, they led to the drafting of recommendations for best practices and policies and the direction of future research, and to a call for the establishment of a nationwide database to track line-of-duty injuries and deaths.

## NOVEMBER 2018 OSW GROUP MEETING ATTENDEES

### Experts from the field

#### Nicholas Augustine

Captain,  
Montgomery County  
(Maryland) Police Department

#### Marcelo Blanco

Treasurer,  
Peace Officers Research  
Association of California

#### Jeff Bragg

Captain,  
Olathe (Kansas)  
Police Department

#### Madeleine Colaiezzi

Manager,  
Government Relations  
National Sheriffs'  
Association (NSA)

#### Dwayne Crawford

Executive Director,  
National Organization  
of Black Law Enforcement  
Executives (NOBLE)

#### Val Cunningham

Deputy Chief,  
Indianapolis (Indiana)  
Metro Police Department  
National Association of Women  
Law Enforcement Executives  
(NAWLEE)

#### Rosemary DeMenno

Program Manager,  
International Association  
of Chiefs of Police (IACP)

#### Patricia Dobbs Hodges

Senior Manager,  
Institute for Intergovernmental  
Research (IIR)

#### Alex Eastman

Senior Medical Officer,  
Dallas (Texas) Police  
Department

#### Andrea Edmiston

Director of  
Governmental Affairs,  
National Association of  
Police Organizations (NAPO)

#### Thor Eells

Executive Director,  
National Tactical  
Officers Association

#### Chris Granberg

Managing Director  
of Public Policy,  
Sergeants Benevolent Fund

#### Rick Gregory

Director,  
Institute for Intergovernmental  
Research (IIR)

#### Gina Hartsfield

Chief Executive Officer,  
Institute for Intergovernmental  
Research (IIR)  
VALOR Program

#### Domingo Herraiz

Director of Programs,  
International Association  
of Chiefs of Police (IACP)

#### Cynthia Herriott-Sullivan

Chief of Compliance, Diversity,  
Inclusion, and Public Safety,  
National Organization of  
Black Law Enforcement  
Executives (NOBLE)  
Rochester Housing Authority,  
Rochester, New York

#### Mark Kirschner, Ph.D.

Police Psychologist,  
Past Chair, International  
Association of Chiefs of Police  
(IACP) Police Psychological  
Services Section (PPSS)

#### David Kennington

Assistant Manager,  
Behavior Health Services,  
Nashville (Tennessee)  
Metropolitan Police  
Department

#### Stephanie Lash

Project Coordinator,  
International Association  
of Chiefs of Police (IACP)

#### John Matthews

Director of Federal Partnerships,  
National Law Enforcement  
Officers Memorial Fund  
(NLEOMF)

#### Michael McHale

President,  
National Association of Police  
Organizations (NAPO)

#### Jennifer McNeal

Director of Crisis Response  
and Support Section,  
Montgomery County  
(Maryland) Police  
Department

#### Robert Michaels

Chief Executive Officer and  
Founder, Serve & Protect,  
Chaplain, Federal Bureau  
of Investigation (FBI)  
Memphis Division

**Edward Mullins**

President,  
Sergeants Benevolent  
Association (SBA) of the  
New York City Police  
Department (NYPD)

**Andy Norris**

Lieutenant (Ret.),  
Tuscaloosa (Alabama)  
Sheriff's Office

**Tim Richardson**

Senior Legislative Liaison,  
Fraternal Order  
of Police (FOP)

**Cindy Rodriguez**

President,  
National Latino Police  
Officers Association

**Rick Scarbrough**

Executive Director,  
Law Enforcement  
Innovation Center

**Jack Schaeffer**

President,  
San Diego (California)  
Police Officers Association

**Jon Sheinberg**

Trooper,  
Texas Department  
of Public Safety

**Madeleine Sloan**

Research Associate,  
Police Executive  
Research Forum

**Darrel Stephens**

Chief (Ret.),  
Charlotte-Mecklenberg  
(North Carolina)  
Police Department

**Sean Smoot**

Managing Partner,  
21 CP Solutions, LLC  
Executive Director,  
Illinois Police Benevolent and  
Protective Association (PBPA)

**Timothy Stout**

Senior Manager,  
Hennepin County  
(Minnesota) Sheriff's Office

**Jonathan Thompson**

Executive Director and  
Chief Executive Officer,  
National Sheriffs'  
Association (NSA)

**Robert Thompson**

Medical Student,  
University of Texas  
Medical Branch

**Jessica Toliver**

Director of  
Technical Assistance,  
Police Executive  
Research Forum

**Hector Velez**

Assistant Chief,  
Prince George's  
County (Maryland)  
Police Department

**Timothy Whitcomb**

Sheriff,  
Cattaraugus County  
(New York) Sheriff's Office

**Daniel Zivkovich**

President,  
International Association  
of Directors of Law  
Enforcement Standards  
and Training (IADLEST)

**Federal****Government staff****Jon Adler**

Director,  
Bureau of Justice Assistance

**Helene Bushwick**

Supervisory Senior  
Policy Analyst,  
Office of Community  
Oriented Policing Services

**Robert Chapman**

Deputy Director,  
Office of Community  
Oriented Policing Services

**Deborah Meader**

Policy Advisor,  
Bureau of Justice Assistance

**Gilbert Moore**

Senior Advisor,  
Office of Community  
Oriented Policing Services

**Jesse Panuccio**

Principal Deputy Associate  
Attorney General,  
U.S. Department of Justice

**Deborah Spence**

Assistant Director,  
Office of Community  
Oriented Policing Services

# Opening Remarks

Robert Chapman, Deputy Director of the COPS Office, welcomed meeting participants by reminding them of the purpose of the OSW Group and the value DOJ places on their expertise. He acknowledged the physical risks and challenges faced by officers while emphasizing the negative impact on officer morale of the media's recent depictions of community-police incidents: "[Media coverage] is far too often unfair and certainly doesn't portray the real and important work an officer does each and every day." Chapman went on to underscore the impact of the recommendations of the OSW Group and how they have guided the field of law enforcement in addressing the mental and emotional health needs of officers.

Chapman highlighted recent projects that have received funding or direction from the COPS Office and BJA before presenting an infographic map that detailed line-of-duty deaths (LODD) in each state for 2015–2018. In setting the context for the discussion of LODDs, he noted that data from the Officer Down Memorial Page (ODMP) indicated a 21 percent increase in gunfire-related LODDs between January 2015 (Officer Down Memorial Page 2019a) and October 2018 (Officer Down Memorial Page 2019b). Chapman observed, "Obviously, those numbers are staggering. It really makes a lasting impact, [especially] on the officers and deputies themselves, their families, their colleagues, but [also on] all the brave men and women that pledged to serve and protect our communities."

Officers and deputies did not commit to their line of work because of the salaries or the hours. Instead, for the majority of the 800,000 law enforcement professionals across the country, the job is about service. They do it because they want to make a difference in the lives of everyday citizens. Because they want to preserve and advance American society and, indeed, our officers do make that difference.

— Acting Associate Attorney General Jesse Panuccio

Jesse Panuccio, then Acting Associate Attorney General, declared support for law enforcement to be a top priority of the administration. Reflecting a nuanced understanding of the issue's multifaceted nature, he acknowledged that officer-involved shootings can be a product of an officer's poor decision-making; can result in casualties; and deserve the dignity of swift, decisive action supported by a detailed investigation. However, in furtherance of Chapman's point regarding biased media coverage, Panuccio lamented the imbalance of attention and support offered by the public when an officer is the victim of a shooting, stressing that "these issues are complex and they deserve our full attention." He pointed out that the National Blue Alert Network reported that by October 2018, "there have (sic) been 171 [officers] shot and 44 deaths. That is an alarming trend, and ambush-style attacks are increasing. This rash of officer shootings should be met with alarm, outrage, and action by the people that our officers have sworn to protect and serve." (COPS Office 2019) Panuccio's appeal shone a light on officers' role as members of the communities they protect: "An attack on law enforcement officers is an attack on civil society, an attack on the rule of law. It is an attack on all of us."

Continuing to underline the public perception of policing as it is framed by the media, Acting Associate Attorney General Panuccio posited, "Unfortunately, we continue to see mostly negative stories about police officers and law enforcement. Which in recent years involves, I think, the anti-police narrative in the country. Is it any surprise then that police chiefs and sheriffs across the country are having some difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified officers?" If the daily news cycle is driving the country's perception of proper police procedures and officers feel as though the morality and civility that serve as the foundation of their desire to "serve and protect" are being challenged by a skeptical and outspoken community, it should be no surprise that recruitment campaigns in the wake of recent high-profile community-police incidents have fallen woefully short, leaving units understaffed and overworked. An August 2018 report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, a component of DOJ's Office of Justice Programs, described a three percent reduction in the number of full-time sworn officers nationwide from 2013 to 2016—a shortage that departments can ill afford given the mental and physical demands of modern policing. (Hyland 2018) Panuccio encouraged meeting participants to become advocates for good police work and to help change the narrative surrounding policing in the United States to one that reflects the good work the majority of law enforcement officers are engaged in every day. He noted a recently funded national public service awareness and education campaign—Supporting the Blue—and funding of Police Athletic League (PAL) programs as examples of actionable steps the DOJ, BJA, and the COPS Office have carried out in the interest of advancing the conversation between the community and the police, as well as bolstering OSW.



Before closing, Acting Associate Attorney General Panuccio called attention to the work of the COPS Office in support of the National Blue Alert Network. With 31 states in the development phase of a Blue Alert plan (as of November 2018) and the other 19 engaged in outreach with the COPS Office, agencies and departments will soon be able to access a nationwide network of fellow law enforcement, media outlets, and public broadcast systems to facilitate the pursuit and capture of offenders who may have “killed, seriously injured, or pose an imminent threat to law enforcement” or to identify an officer’s location during search and rescue missions.

Acting Associate Attorney General Panuccio concluded by thanking attendees for their ongoing commitment to the OSW Group and for the time they had dedicated to the health and well-being of officers whom most will never meet. Finally, before yielding the room to the meeting facilitator, Chief Joseph Collins of the Two Rivers (Wisconsin) Police Department, Panuccio asked attendees to reflect on their contribution to the ever-evolving narrative about policing in the United States and challenged them to continue supporting efforts by the DOJ to cultivate a strong, vibrant, and inclusive law enforcement community.

Historically, this meeting has done an awful lot . . . . Putting [officers’] seat belts on. Putting their vests on. Making sure that the airbags were able to work inside the vehicles and not being deterred by the computer and everything in our cars. Those are some of the discussions that started here, and now, we have transitioned into dealing with so many different, complex situations . . . . We really went after a lot of the external things, the vests, the seat belts, because they are important. But we didn’t go inside because that was territory that was maybe uncomfortable. But if the officer is in the car and if their mind and their heart aren’t in the right positions when they’re responding to a call because they’re distracted either with a call they just went to or something that’s going on at home—then what type of response are they going to have?

— Chief Joseph V. Collins,  
Two Rivers (Wisconsin) Police Department  
OSW Group meeting facilitator



# Less-Lethal Technologies and Techniques—Improving Officer Safety or Increasing Risk?

**A**cross the country, police departments, their policies, and their practices are enduring a heightened level of scrutiny from communities and the media following noteworthy incidents that have occurred since 2012. While some in law enforcement may interpret the current public outcry for transparency and accountability in the wake of these incidents as a call for policing that follows a community-first interpretation of the law, other departments have begun to address the issue from a preventative perspective by incorporating less-lethal weapons into their operational toolbox. Brian Montgomery, a frequent presenter at OSW Group meetings, represented the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) as one of its general engineers in the field of officer safety.

Montgomery opened his presentation by reviewing a 2010 study conducted by the University of South Carolina. (Smith et al. 2010) It examined use of force outcomes resulting from various less-lethal technologies and hand-to-hand engagement techniques. The researchers found that among participating agencies, there was a 70 percent reduction in officer and suspect injuries when less-lethal technologies—e.g., conducted energy devices (CED) (Tasers) or oleoresin capsicum (OC) spray (pepper spray)—were employed in the process of establishing control over a situation compared to incidents when an officer was involved in a physical struggle with one or more suspects. Montgomery stressed, “There’s a balance, and you have to figure out which one could go and which would reduce injuries of both the officer as well as the suspect if you can.” The study determined that

when departments limit how and when CEDs or OC spray are deployed, officers become more likely to lean on physical force to control suspects, which increases the likelihood of injury to the suspect by 50 percent. However, the likelihood that officers in that scenario will be injured increases by 300 percent. (Bozeman et al. 2018)

Complicating the analysis of how less-lethal weaponry increases the risk of officer or suspect injury is the need for a common lexicon that identifies types and severity of injuries. Montgomery mentioned additional studies that have used wide-ranging definitions of types of injuries, thereby creating gaps and outliers in the data that had not previously been observed.

Montgomery then reviewed a second study conducted in September 2009, which compared agencies that used CEDs and those that did not. The study found that six of nine safety measures had improved safety, and upon implementing those measures, the officer injury rate improved, the

*The study determined that when departments limit how and when CEDs or OC spray can be deployed, officers become more likely to lean on physical force to control suspects.*

suspect injury rate decreased, and the number of severe injuries fell as well. (Taylor et al. 2009) The study also found that the number of officers and suspects who suffered injuries requiring medical attention or hospitalization was reduced by the timely and appropriate use of less-lethal weapons. In support of these findings, there was a general consensus among OSW Group participants

that, according to their observations and hands-on experiences, use of less-lethal technologies allowed an officer to control a suspect or situation from a safe distance in a quick, low-risk manner.

After nearly 30 years of employing CEDs, the most common request by departments vis-à-vis their use is the need to improve performance in three areas: (1) accuracy, (2) consistency, and (3) efficacy. As product manufacturing is critical to the successful use of CEDs, fine-tuning the process surrounding product updates is directly related to quality assurance and agencies' ability to influence companies that generate those updates. Officers frequently receive unannounced equipment updates that can leave them scrambling to acclimate to an entirely new weapon while actively engaged in police activity. As Montgomery broadly noted, the introduction of any new or updated technology requires an adjustment period that includes training to build upon prior knowledge and reestablish familiarity with products.

Research about CEDs continues to evolve, and for every answer there seems to be a new question. In response to increased demand for lighter, more precise, more efficient technologies, the DOJ has developed partnerships with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to encourage the development and implementation of industry standards for CEDs as well as to monitor their evolution. Currently, these partners have different working definitions of "safety," which has created a gap regarding what constitutes an appropriate use of force by law enforcement.

The follow-up conversation featured a number of comments about when to employ less-lethal tools and weapons, with Thor Eells of the National Tactical Officers Association observing that the only consistency in the development, testing, and deployment of less-lethal technologies is the inconsistencies observed between different operators and their subjects. This reality can make it difficult to write and enforce policy, build training programs, and successfully integrate procedural updates into an officer's daily routine.

A number of participants raised the issue of appropriate level of force. While acknowledging that some officers may tend to overcompensate when reaching for a weapon, numerous participants shared anecdotes that painted the picture of uncertain police forces fearful of prompting another public incident. In response, a proactive approach to reducing the potential for negative officer-community interaction is being put into practice by some departments. Through the use of public service announcements (PSA) to educate the community on how and when less-lethal technology is deployed, the community gains an understanding of departmental policies and procedures. In turn, this understanding may serve to lessen the negative response to a legally justified use of force incident: The public sees an incident from one perspective, but an officer may have a completely different response. All too often, law enforcement is asked to evaluate a situation in real time while at the same time experiencing external and internal influences that may be life-threatening. The impact of this process is amplified when the officer is subjected to post-incident briefings and analysis that can reflect politics behind the scene rather than application of the law.

Further conversation reflected comments made during one-on-one interviews conducted prior to the convening of the working group. Participants expressed concerns that lower levels of force were being used for fear of attracting the wrong kind of media attention. Such attention often leads to a trial by public opinion. These responses can negatively impact an officer's family, career, and future. Moreover, pressure from citizen review boards and other groups for officer accountability about whether a use of force decision was appropriate affect an officer's decision-making process. Recent incidents that had received national coverage were cited by the OSW Group as examples of split-second decisions that led to situational uses of force, lethal or less-lethal, that have been adjudicated by the public. This reality can impede the judgment of an officer during a potentially life-threatening situation.

The conversation concluded with a consensus on the necessity for new recruits to leave the academy with consistent instruction on the enforcement of laws and policies from departmental administration and command staff. Officers need to know that their commanders support them. That support needs to consistently reinforce their training in order to build confidence from the top down and combat negative perceptions of the police.

*Participants expressed concerns that lower levels of force were being used for fear of attracting the wrong kind of media attention. This media attention often leads to a trial by public opinion.*



# The Challenges of Data and Data Analysis

Issues surrounding data and data collection were a consistent theme throughout the day's discussion. Who bears responsibility for collecting, analyzing, and reporting on data? Who maintains databases, and how will the data be stored and protected? What regulations will inform and guide the process? One observation that arose persistently during discussions was the need for federal standards in data collection and a common lexicon to define injury and use of force. Development of a national database that provides departments with access to comprehensive data analytics in exchange for more thorough data entry on a regular basis needs to be explored.

To provide some background on current studies and data collection efforts, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) was represented by Rosemary DeMenno, Program Manager, and Stephanie Lash, Project Coordinator, of the Injury Reduction and Tracking project. In presenting a study conducted by the BJA and IACP that analyzed data collected from 18 agencies in 2012, the following data points were highlighted:

- Officers sustained 1,295 injuries.
- The 18 agencies employing those officers lost 59,380 labor hours.
- Those agencies suffered approximately \$3 million in related labor costs (lost hours + overtime = 60,000+ labor hours; these figures take into account only the cost of labor and not associated medical costs).
- Newer officers (those on the force less than five years) are more injury prone.
- Seat belts and body armor are two effective tools for decreasing injury severity and occurrence. (IACP n.d.)

Focus then pivoted to the IACP's contributions to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Use-of-Force Data Collection program. (IACP 2019a) This initiative uses the FBI's Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal to provide departments with a data collection tool that directly informs the conversation on use of force incidents and their outcomes. Once departments go through a registra-

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tion process and begin the monthly input of data, access is provided to a comprehensive array of datasets and reports including those on types of injuries, circumstances of injuries, and time of day.

The conversation then turned to gaps in data collection that are generated by the nature of the profession. Quantifying and capturing

the sequence of events that occurs between a suspect and officer on both mental and physical levels relies on a real-time feed of data—e.g., heart rate, temperature, blood pressure—that is not feasible with current technology. Participants shared the questions they typically ask when reviewing or generating reports on officer-involved incidents:

- What procedural steps did the officer follow to control a suspect or situation?
- Upon arrival, how was the scene processed and objectives prioritized?
- Did the officer employ verbal tactics to diffuse the situation?
- Was the option of a less-lethal method of physical force considered prior to the deployment of weapons?
- Were less-lethal weapons—e.g., pepper spray, CED—in working order and operated correctly?
- What was the officer's physiological response to the heightened state of awareness experienced during an emergency?

Sean Smoot, of 21CP Solutions and the Illinois Police Benevolent and Protective Association, expressed a concern that officers are hesitant to be transparent about their actions for fear of potentially facing an indictment. He suggested that, while many in law enforcement feel that the public needs further education on the stresses of policing, the criminal justice system needs to be involved in facilitated discussion along with special interest groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union. "To the extent that we talk about having a consistent message, not only within our profession, I think we need to be educating the public. I think we need to be educating the judges and the prosecutors."



Tim Richardson of the Fraternal Order of Police expressed similar concerns. "Recognizing the necessity of a constant flow of information and ever-evolving training techniques, let me paraphrase and apply a metaphor penned by former Vice President Joe Biden: 'You have to keep cutting the lawn, the weeds are going to grow back.' So, it's not anything that we can push out, any project, any training program, any media response strategy that will ultimately fix our problem. We're going to have to mow the lawn again eventually."

Participants emphasized the need to develop a common lexicon that addresses what constitutes an officer-related injury, what constitutes less-lethal technologies, and when less-lethal versus lethal methods are appropriate. It was observed that less-lethal technologies have evolved faster than the public, and even command staff, can follow. Education and awareness are consistently needed in in-service or academy training settings. The rapid pace of evolution fosters an unrealistic level of expectation as to how and when these technologies should be deployed. Eells stressed that an expanded and comprehensive approach to training on these weapons and the policies that govern their deployment is needed across all ranks and agencies of law enforcement.

Within the discussion, a consensus was reached on the following ideas and suggestions:

- Departments and training organizations need to be intentional about developing a curriculum that stresses the importance of data collection and its influence on policy development; course options on data collection, analysis, and reporting at the academy level need to be included to achieve compliance with new policy.
- Following policy revisions, implementation should include active participation by labor organizations and police unions to ensure that a consistent message is being delivered across the field of law enforcement and to prevent the sense of isolation some smaller departments may experience.
- All levels of government, as well as researchers in the private sector, must combat the expectation that data will be "weaponized" against departments by focusing on the reporting process and the risk reduction benefits.
- The law enforcement community as a whole should move toward a common language with consistent definitions for referencing use of force or officer-related incidents.
- PSAs and social media campaigns about use of force policies should be employed by departments, as they have proven to be effective means by which to educate the public and media on policy updates, to promote police-community sponsored events, and to nurture a healthy police-community relationship.



# Law Enforcement Mental Health, PTS, and Officer Suicide

The discussion of PTS focused heavily on officer suicide and the need to better diagnose PTS. The working had addressed officer suicide in the past and has collected significant data on the nature of the problem. As Alex Eastman of the Dallas (Texas) Police Department suggested, “We know we have a problem; it is time we start doing something about it.”

Deborah Spence, Darrel Stephens, and Sean Smoot led a discussion on two major reports to Congress (Spence et al. 2019; Copple et al. 2019) prepared by the DOJ in fulfillment of a requirement of the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 (Pub.L. 115–113). The first provided recommendations to Congress for improving mental health and wellness in state, local, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies. The report looked specifically at practices in the DoD, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), crisis lines, peer support programs, and annual mental health checks.

The second report contained case studies in the following communities:

1. Bend (Oregon) Police Department
2. Indianapolis (Indiana) Police Department
3. Los Angeles (California) Sheriff’s Department
4. Nashville (Tennessee) Metropolitan Police Department
5. Tucson (Arizona) Police Department
6. Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department
7. Dallas (Texas) Police Department
8. Las Vegas (Nevada) Metropolitan Police Department
9. Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Police Department
10. San Antonio (Texas) Police Department

An additional case study examined the Cop2Cop crisis line based in New Jersey.

Spence spoke about the programs run by DoD and VA that offer promising models of effective mental health support to the law enforcement community while allowing for differences between how services and insurance are handled in the military and in state and local law enforcement. She and her colleagues conducted a series of consultation interviews to inform the recommendations by providing insights, reactions, and ideas to the literature and program review. She concluded by reiterating the overarching necessity of looking at officer wellness from a holistic perspective and

*This kind of support or buy-in encourages officer engagement in services that might otherwise be stigmatized or viewed as a threat.*

the concept that, while prevention and education start in the academy, strengthening officer safety and wellness should be a career-long process.

Stephens offered a series of observations about the case studies that defined current efforts and identified common elements among them that could be replicated.

Strong leadership from executives in rank-and-file organizations, including unions or police officer associations, is critical. This kind of buy-in encourages officer engagement in services that might otherwise be stigmatized as a threat. It is clear that departments that initiated efforts to dispel the stigma in the 1980s and 1990s have robust programming and have had the advantage of testing numerous strategies. These programs have the potential to serve as models and resources for departments currently developing programs.

Common elements of successful mental health programs include peer support, chaplains, employee assistance programs, and financial support services. Consistent with all these programs is the need for strong assessment and evaluation capacity to assess impacts and to make course corrections throughout project implementation.

Partnerships are an important component to add breadth and depth to service delivery. Departments should avoid the tendency to go it alone when there are valuable resources in the community that could strengthen service delivery and reduce costs. The case studies revealed that this type of collaboration gave officers confidence that they were receiving quality services that help to promote their mental health development. Departments should be intentional about providing access to psychologists and about promoting annual mental health screenings and other mental health services as part of their institutional culture.

Finally, the case studies revealed that programs are best sustained when they become part of the annual budget process and are not viewed as simply a luxury program within a department. As one participant stressed, "This is not icing on the cake; when it comes to officer safety and wellness, it is the cake."

Participants looked at the variables that contribute to stress and the stigma of depression. Dr. Jon Sheinberg of the Texas Department of Public Safety spoke for much of the group when he said, "I take the suicide challenge very seriously. We can't survive by research alone. Research is what is intended to guide us on how we act but what research points up as one of the zillion links on the website or the research pillar illustrates, research doesn't save lives. We need to be proactive."

There was consensus among participants that departments need programs that can accurately assess and facilitate interventions for individuals contemplating suicide. How can we assess vulnerability? How do we move beyond stigma? Suicide is real in law enforcement, yet our data are insufficient and our interventions inadequate to the challenge at hand. Because of public perceptions about law enforcement and increased scrutiny by the public and policy makers, officers feel under siege.

PTS has many different manifestations: substance abuse, depression, anger, and violence. Sheriff Tim Whitcomb from the Cattaraugus County (New York) Sheriff's Office made the point that "PTS is a diagnosable injury. It is measurable. Because it's an injury, it is as manageable as a physical injury. However, diagnosis often comes too late." Robert Michaels, a chaplain with the FBI's Memphis, Tennessee, field office responded that "Referring to PTS as an injury is so important for reducing stigma and encouraging officers to seek help."

Doctors Sheinberg and Eastman reminded the group that approaches to officer wellness must also consider obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and fitness counseling. Departments need to develop comprehensive wellness programs that include mental and physical fitness for duty.

*Because of public perceptions about law enforcement and increased scrutiny by the public and policy makers, officers feel under siege.*



# What is Still Missing from the Conversation on Wellness?

The attendees viewed an episode of *What's New in Blue*, a roll-call video on the relationship between cardiovascular health and service in law enforcement (COPS Office 2018). The video prompted considerable discussion, and participants affirmed that this type of communication was helpful to the field. Participants were asked to identify future topics for the OSW Group to address.

Eells argued that we have “an obligation to be more aggressive in re-instilling some degree of physical fitness standards in our profession. This is a lifetime career assessment.” There was consensus among participants that the profession must establish standards for fitness that enhance the capacity to survive a physical encounter with a suspect. Further, physical fitness contributes to mental fitness. Future discussions should include a review of literature on physical fitness and mental fitness.

“Trust is important, consistency, who you are as a department or even as a command staff person, how you educate the community, or make that effort to build trust and relationships through conversations. I haven't seen a substitute for it yet.”

— Cynthia Herriott-Sullivan  
National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives

Openness in addressing mental health must be cultivated and encouraged by command staff and fellow officers. Jack Schaeffer of the San Diego (California) Police Officers Association reflected upon his own experiences: "Trust is key. I've seen a culture shift in my department. At the beginning of my career, there's no way I would have told anyone I was going through a mental health program. That has really changed now. Exposure and encouragement are important. Wellness programs that engage with officers beginning at the academy level have a greater chance of success. It's so important, everyone needs to get active on these issues."

Cynthia Herriott-Sullivan of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) recognized that the level of trust within agencies and departments has been damaged. "There's a certain level of trust between communities and law enforcement, and let's face it, whoever is in charge has a big hand in that. Because sometimes you're going to need those relationships to carry you through."

There was agreement that there needs to be more emphasis on the involvement of families in mental and physical fitness programs. Particularly in the area of mental health and mental fitness, families need to be involved in the discussion around PTS. This is an area for future discussion and research.

Daniel Zicovich from the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST) argued that a curriculum needs to be developed for Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) directors on the concept of holistic wellness. Recruits and academies should make this a priority.

John Matthews of the National Law Enforcement Officer Memorial Fund said that a study on police-on-police shootings would make a valuable contribution to the discussion of officer safety.



# Conclusion

The conclusions that emerged from this OSW Group meeting on less-lethal weaponry and PTS gave rise to a broad range of future discussion topics. First among them is the role of the media. How law enforcement communicates with media and how issues such as less-lethal weaponry or PTS can be shared with media in an informative and enlightened manner were questions begging for answers. How do rank-and-file officers view media, and how does media coverage impact officers' mental health and sense of self-worth? Data collection and data analysis remain challenges that require further examination. Departments' use and communication of data require more consistency, while bearing in mind the data needs of local jurisdictions. The OSW Group further discussed the balance between officers' physical and mental health. The group stressed the need for standards, but defining those standards remains an open question that merits further attention.



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# About SAI

**Strategic Applications International (SAI)** facilitated President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. SAI provides training, technical assistance, and organizational development strategies for domestic and international nongovernmental organizations; nonprofits; and local, state, national, and international government organizations responding to crime, violence, and substance abuse. SAI provides facilitation and mediation services and brokers relationships between public and private sectors to address critical issues facing communities.

In partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice and the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, SAI has facilitated 22 governors' summits on methamphetamine and, in collaboration with state and local agencies, developed comprehensive strategies with measurable outcomes. With funding from the COPS Office, SAI worked with 40 tribal law enforcement agencies seeking to address drug abuse in tribal nations.

SAI is a global firm with projects to prevent and treat HIV and AIDS in South Africa and Swaziland; gender-based violence in Kenya, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Rwanda; and criminal justice reform, counterterrorism, and deradicalization in Kenya. Globally, SAI addresses development issues around community policing, substance abuse, gender empowerment, climate and the environment, and youth employment.

SAI builds capacity, supports research, develops publications, and promotes community action with all its partners and clients.

To learn more, visit SAI online at <http://sai-dc.com>.

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# About BJA

The **Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)** helps to make American communities safer by strengthening the nation's criminal justice system: Its grants, training and technical assistance, and policy development services provide state, local, and Tribal Governments with the cutting-edge tools and best practices they need to reduce violent and drug-related crime, support law enforcement, and combat victimization. To learn more about BJA, visit [www.bja.gov](http://www.bja.gov) or follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/DOJBJA](http://www.facebook.com/DOJBJA)) and Twitter ([@DOJBJA](https://twitter.com/DOJBJA)). BJA is part of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.

# About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, round tables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov). This website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.



In November 2018, the OSW Group continued and expanded on previous discussions of methods of supporting emotional health and organizational wellness; this meeting focused particularly on line-of-duty deaths (in felonious assaults as well as in accidents), mental health and suicide, and crisis hotlines and other programs to help address law enforcement health and safety. There is important work to be done in this area, and families, community members, and others can contribute as well by supporting officer safety and wellness, participating in conversations and programming, and working to reduce the negative stigma surrounding mental health issues.



**COPS**

*Community Oriented Policing Services*  
*U.S. Department of Justice*

U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services  
145 N Street NE  
Washington, DC 20530

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