



CNA EXECUTIVE SESSIONS ON POLICING: COLLABORATION ACROSS THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: OFFICER SAFETY AND WELLNESS

On March 19, 2019, CNA convened Collaboration across the Criminal Justice System: Officer Safety and Wellness—its eleventh Executive Session on policing. Officer safety and wellness has become a prominent topic in the justice domain. Keeping officers safe from harm, and in sound mental and physical shape, is a high priority for all involved in the criminal justice system. During this Executive Session, CNA representatives and prominent speakers discussed the challenges facing officers in the law enforcement and corrections settings; approaches, training programs, and equipment used across the criminal justice system to enhance officer safety and reduce harm; and innovations in officer health and wellness.

Karl Becker, Senior Vice President, Carter Gobel Lee (CGL) Companies and former Deputy Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, began his opening keynote remarks by noting that, historically, officer safety and wellness were secondary to a correctional institution’s overall goal: keeping institutions safe. This has changed in recent years as state and local correctional systems have come under more stress and scrutiny, spurring them to devote more attention to the safety and wellness of correctional officers. Low staffing levels and high turnover rates increase the use of overtime and place correctional officers in vulnerable positions within correctional institutions, increasing burnout among the staff. Burnout, which also affects the inmates and overall organizational operations, is high among correctional officers due to working in a dangerous and inherently negative environment. Mr. Becker closed by stating that it is critical for correctional institutions to institute competitive pay and salary opportunities and implement more robust and standardized officer

safety and wellness programs, which will in turn improve organizational operations and reduce high turnover rates and officer burnout.

The first panel of the Executive Session, **Officer Safety: Tools, Tactics, Training, and Equipment**, focused on how officer perspectives on officer safety and equipment relate to officer wellness, how law enforcement and corrections are learning from each other as each field evolves, and how to identify the appropriate recruitment and communication strategies to use with staff. Chief Mary Gavin of the Falls Church, Virginia, Police Department eloquently noted

Debriefing can be a lifesaving event that helps not only the officer learn from mistakes but also the department as a whole.

**MARY GAVIN, CHIEF,
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA, POLICE DEPARTMENT**

that law enforcement equipment and training have changed and evolved over the years, including the implementation of body-worn

Dialogue is always vital and having that dialogue where we push each other and have new ideas that is where new synergies can come about and possible new solutions that we may not have thought about in the first place.

MAJOR JIMMY BARRETT

cameras and development of crisis intervention team (CIT) training, but the essential ethos and leadership goals of law enforcement have also changed. This is also true for corrections. The two professional fields can learn and grow from the lessons of the other. As noted by Major Jimmie Barrett of the Arlington County, Virginia, Adult Detention Center, correctional and law enforcement officers train together, which increases learning and mutual respect between the two organizations. Prevention, intervention, mitigation, and training are critical missions for any department. A component of these missions that is paramount to officer wellness is debriefing after a critical incident. Zoë Thorkildsen, Research Scientist at CNA, stressed the



importance of translating research findings into practical applications for law enforcement and correctional officials. Appropriate communication of training and expectations is critical for law enforcement and correctional officers to feel competent and confident in their roles.

Panelists on the second panel of the Executive Session, *Innovations in Officer Health and Wellness*, discussed recruitment, supervisors' roles in the prevention and treatment of mental health, and the parallels between officer safety and wellness in the law enforcement and corrections arenas. Dr. Elizabeth Mumford, Principal Research Scientist at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, discussed critical hiring issues affecting both law enforcement and corrections officials. In addition to the recruitment challenges, law enforcement professionals also face substantial mental health impacts. The number of law enforcement suicides reached 159 in 2018, which highlights the importance of addressing mental health challenges. Performing officer screenings and de-stigmatizing

mental health services are essential in improving officer safety and wellness. To reduce stigma, the San Antonio, Texas, Police Department requires all officers involved in a critical incident, fatal or not, to seek psychological assistance. Buy-in for mental health trainings must begin at the leadership and command staff levels, but it must also permeate throughout the entire organization, from mid-level supervisors down to first-line supervisors and line officers. Incorporating mental health training, such as CIT training and mental health and wellness concepts, into the training academy and in-service trainings will foster an authentic and trusting relationship between officers and mental health services. Patricia Dobbs Hodges, Senior Vice President at the Institute

All of public safety turns on the health and wellness of those men and women prepared to do this work. If we keep them sound of mind, it will provide confidence in the community. It will grow support for organizations like CNA and the investment necessary to take the research necessary forward and with all of that we find ourselves in a much safer society.

HENRY STAWINSKI

for Intergovernmental Research (IIR) noted that organizationally, departments should take the onus on themselves to seek help for their officers and engage in preventative tactics. Normalizing the mental health conversation is challenging in law enforcement, but it has far-reaching impacts.

Hank Stawinski, Chief of Police at Prince George's County, Maryland, Police Department, closed the Executive Session by noting that law enforcement is an extraordinarily young profession that has evolved substantially in recent years and will continue to do so. How law enforcement professionals orient themselves around fundamental policing ideas will inform the approach taken to defining the policing profession. To effectively execute the role of the criminal justice professional, organizations must prepare and support their employees. The field is in an immense time of change. The future of law enforcement is very bright, and the changes made today will substantially change the trajectory of the profession. Law enforcement officials need only the courage to start the conversations that will effect this change.

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