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# Recruitment and retention challenges for law enforcement agencies : identifying the reasons for high turnover rates of new recruits

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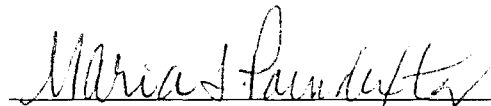
Recruitment and Retention Challenges for Law Enforcement Agencies: Identifying the Reasons for High Turnover Rates of New Recruits by Scott Alan Kearns  
Master's in Human Resource Management, University of Richmond, 2007  
Maria T. Poindexter, thesis advisor

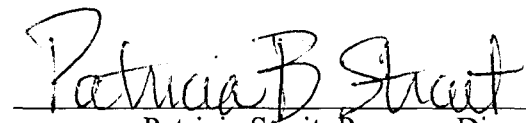
## Abstract

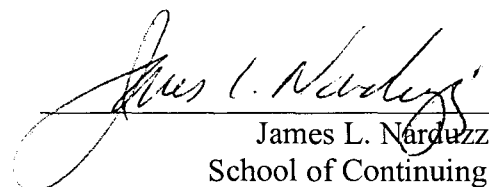
The problem addressed in this study is the challenge to police agencies to recruit and retain police officers. The Prince William County Police Department (PWCPD) has experienced the challenges of filling sworn positions as we continue to sustain our fully authorized staffing levels. This is a phenomenon many agencies across the nation are experiencing. A survey was used to identify the reasons for selecting the PWCPD for employment and what can be done to retain employees to ensure a positive return-on-investment. A multi-step process was followed in creating, distributing and analyzing the survey. Results lead to the following conclusions: knowing your target market and the strengths of the organization; having a clear mission statement and organizational objectives which can be identified by all members in the agency; creating a pay structure that is effective in minimizing the number of officers who leave for other agencies.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master's in Human Resource Management.

Signature

  
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RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES FOR  
LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES: IDENTIFYING THE REASONS  
FOR HIGH TURNOVER RATES OF NEW RECRUITS

By

SCOTT ALAN KEARNS

B.S. George Mason University, 2003

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the University of Richmond

in Candidacy

for the degree of

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May, 2007

Maria T. Poindexter  
Thesis Advisor

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *Rationale for Selection*

#### *Reasons for Selecting the Specific Topic*

The recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers over the last several years has been a significant challenge for the Prince William County Police Department. Our agency has experienced a considerable number of personnel leaving for other local and federal sworn positions, challenging the Department to sustain fully its authorized staffing level. This exodus of employees is occurring while the department attempts to expand its police force to meet the growing needs of a swelling Prince William County resident population.

#### *Reasons for Selecting Organization*

The Prince William County Police Department is the agency I have chosen as the employer for my professional career as a police officer. Currently, I am assigned as the Basic Training Manager, which has provided a clear view and exposure to the newly hired, aspiring officers; as well as the difficulties experienced by our agency in finding the highest quality recruit available to fill each of the recruit classes. Additionally, I have seen a significant number of recruits in training leave either prior to graduating the academy or within a few years of graduating.

In my position, I have the opportunity to observe, informally discuss and formally survey recruit classes. This data gathering may provide valuable



information in understanding what brought these individuals to our agency and how we might better retain them and others in the future.

***Significance of Topic***

The challenges our agency is encountering include: hiring quality officers, as well as training and retaining them to the extent where there is an acceptable return-on-investment (ROI). The costs associated with hiring a recruit police officer are significant, so minimizing those who are hired only to quit a short time later will provide a better return on investment (ROI). High costs in the hiring process include: background investigations conducted by detectives (which may require that detective to leave the state for interviews); psychological backgrounds, which requires an interview with a psychologist; full physical examinations and assessments by medical doctors, and polygraph exam.

A recent interview with our Administrative Bureau Assistant Chief (personal communication, December 1, 2006) places ROI at up to three years from date of hire. In his view, this is the point where the officer is fully contributing in all facets of the job. This time frame puts the county investment for the newly hired and trained officer at roughly \$200k, at which point the ROI begins.

The turnover rate has increased more than twice from 2003, at 5.4% to 2004, 12.8%. The trend for 2005, reveals a continuing loss of sworn officers at a rate of 10.4%. This loss of officers is also compounded by the large number of officers who are able to retire in the near future.

It is the hope of this research to understand why officers have come to the Prince William County Police Department for employment and what can be done to retain them as employees so that a positive return-on-investment can be better achieved.

### ***Delimitations***

Recruitment and retention of officers has many facets of study, which to fully understand each of these areas, would require multiple levels of research into all of these various aspects. It is my intent to limit the scope of such a broad area by focusing on the newly hired officers who are attending the six month recruit training school.

It is important to acknowledge that retention concerns do exist for those officers who have graduated the academy and have several years experience as officers; however, to fully research their attitudes and thoughts on matters similar to what the newly hired recruits will be surveyed would require a substantially different approach in the survey to be used and analysis to be conducted. This area will not be studied, enabling concerted efforts and resources to be devoted to those officers who have been employed for less than one year.

### ***Client***

Prince William County has operated under the county executive form of government since 1972. An eight member Board of County Supervisors is the legislative body who sets policies, adopts local laws, manages budget and capital

improvement programs and makes local land use decisions. Board Members are elected from seven districts with a Chairman elected at-large.

Located in Virginia, the county is 348 square miles, has population of 370,000 and has several cities which operate independently to include Manassas, Manassas Park, Dumfries, Haymarket, Occoquan and Quantico. In 1970, Prince William County transitioned from an elected sheriff, as the lead law enforcement officer, to a police department with an appointed chief. Initially, the department had 42 officers for a county population of 109,616. The department has now swelled to 500 sworn officers with a budget of 63 million dollars and a county population of 370,000.

The growth of the county over the last seven years has been substantial, realizing a rate increase in residents of over thirty-two percent (90,365) since the year 2000. It is projected that population growth will continue at just over four percent a year.

Charlie T. Deane is the current chief of the Prince William County Police, assuming command in 1988. He holds a Master of Public Administration degree from George Mason University and a bachelor degree from American University. Continued professional training includes the National Executive Institute and the FBI National Academy.

The Prince William County Police is nationally accredited through the Commission of Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), achieving its initial accreditation in 1988. The accreditation certification is

indicative of the high standards and professionalism the Prince William County  
Police Department is known for supporting.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Research of the Literature

The costs associated with recruiting, conducting background investigations, physical examinations, polygraph tests and attendance of the basic training recruit school, which lasts approximately six months are significant. As mentioned earlier, to completely recoup these costs in terms of an officer being a fully contributing member of the department, it may take as long as three years (personal communication with Prince William County Police Assistant Chief, Administrative Bureau, December 1, 2006). Haarr (2005, p. 431) supports the concern of the high costs associated with hiring and training new officers with little or no return on investment,

Resignation of police officers is a significant concern among police executives because of the direct financial costs of recruiting, selecting, and training personnel as well as the indirect costs related to the disruption of service and organizational efficiency, time spent waiting for police recruits to achieve a “street wise” competence, and providing fewer services to citizens. Despite high costs associated with resignation of police personnel, research into the reasons for resignation and turnover are sparse.

A document prepared by the RAND Corporation analyzed trends in recruiting and retaining police officers, post 9/11. Raymond, Hickman, Miller, & Wang (2005, p. 11) describes the time needed for agencies to attain a suitable ROI, “...it takes roughly three years to recruit, hire, and train a new, fully qualified sworn officer. Clearly, the ability to plan long-range for recruitment needs is critical for police agencies.” The costs for training and producing a

sworn officer are significant yet research as to why officers resign is sparse (Haarr, 2005, p. 432).

### ***Effects of September 11, 2001, on Recruitment/Retention***

Further complicating the challenges of recruitment and retention has been the changing responsibilities of police departments after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks (Raymond et al., 2005, p. 10). The RAND paper describes a changing mission for many police agencies and the burden placed on departments in terms of meeting those demands with staffing and mission preparation,

A new homeland security mission increases the demand for local police in many jurisdictions in the country. In some ways, homeland security needs to draw on traditional police skills, such as guarding places and people. But this new mission brings much greater attention to duties such as serving on joint intelligence task forces and training to execute emergency preparedness plans. Thus, many police managers see this role as requiring staffing.

Post 9/11 security issues and concerns recommend that police departments support missions which did not exist prior to the terrorist attacks of 2001 (Raymond et al., 2005, p. 7). This requires a balance to be found with newly formed post 9/11 missions, in addition to traditional police services that are more community policing oriented. The combination of these missions and their staffing needs will work directly against high turnover rates of incumbent officers, as well as, not meeting staffing requirements in bringing on new hires. Raymond et al. (2005, p. 9) details the dilemma regarding agencies requirements to meet local and Homeland Security needs, writing,

Perhaps most critical today is that no paradigm exists for how to systematically manage a police department to respond both to local

needs and to unprecedented national requirements issued under the Department of Homeland Security. These new demands are unpredictable, frequently changing, and unsupported by long-term commitments of funding and training. Thus far, most departments have been improvising as the national threat level rises and falls, as terrorist activity in their communities has been suspected, and as grants and other government funding emerges and dissipates. The uncertainty of the national commitments and local control of department resource allocation makes police personnel management a complex and difficult task.

The impact of September 11, 2001, on the future of police recruiting and retention was significant and continues to have a large impact on local agencies. As stated above, the terrorist attacks on American soil added missions which were not present prior to 9/11. Raymond et al(2005, p. 7) details the expanding duties for law enforcement, placed upon them by security concerns due to homeland security threats since September 11. Part of these new responsibilities includes infrastructure security by local and state agencies which redirected officers from neighborhood patrols to these new threat areas.

The U.S. Government reacted to post 9/11 terrorist threats by increasing the number of its federal officers by over 5,000 from June 2000 to June 2002 (Reaves & Bauer, 2003, p. 10). Additionally, on November 25, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law an act creating the Department of Homeland Security (Reaves & Bauer, 2003, p. 5). The legislation stipulated twenty-two existing federal law enforcement agencies would now be under the umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). DHS would be responsible for hiring, training and retaining these employees, the majority of whom experienced

significant increases in funding for hiring as compared to June of 2000 (Reaves & Bauer, 2003, p. 1).

The outpouring of support for law enforcement professionals was substantial post September 11, with the assumption that this support would convey to higher numbers of qualified applicants entering the public safety profession. Raymond et al.(2005, p. 14) describes the situation that evolved, writing,

The events of September 11, 2001, produced an outpouring of support and appreciation for firefighters and police officers as heroic servants. It is reasonable to expect that this public support would increase the appeal of law enforcement as a career choice....Even as these effects might be positive for police recruiting, police departments may also have to compete for high-quality recruits that are in high demand by other government agencies with a role in national security and the growing number of private security contractors.

### ***Recruitment/Retention Challenges***

A study titled *Recruitment and Retention Study Series, Sworn Personnel, April 2003*, was commissioned by a Governor's Panel in North Carolina to identify and address issues facing the state's public safety personnel. This study was part four in a series, targeting recruitment and retention strategies. Information was collected by providing surveys to 205 state and local law enforcement agencies, where a return rate of 60% was achieved.

In this study, (Yearwood, 2003, p. 22) supports the challenge local agencies would experience in competing in a post 9/11 recruiting environment, writing, "The events of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terrorism, the current



fiscal crisis and recession, as well as the war in Iraq have and will impact recruitment and retention issues among the state's police agencies." The competition for acceptable recruits can not be isolated to federal agencies and their increased funding for more officers, but can also be attributed to local agencies. Raymond writes, "local police agencies also compete against each other for recruits" (2005, p. 16). After surveying North Carolina Police departments, Yearwood (2003, p. 4) revealed:

...ten possible obstacles or barriers to recruiting more qualified applicants with the survey respondents being asked to list all which have negatively impacted upon local recruitment in the their respective agencies. The most common barriers were competition with other criminal justice agencies at over 80%.

This same study revealed that reporting in an aggregate manner of those officers who left their employing agency, did so for employment with another local police department almost 82% of the time (Yearwood, 2003).

A national survey and study conducted in October 2001, supported by grants from the National Institute of Justice, queried 1,270 police chiefs. The focus of this survey was recruitment and retention, staffing patterns and numerous other issues related to federally funded Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). This survey found that factors do exist beyond the competition from other police agencies which prevent departments from meeting their recruiting goals. Koper, Maguire, & Moore (2001) add that the pool of qualified police officer candidates nationwide does not meet the current demand. Factors contributing to this shortfall include a low unemployment rate nationally, which

lures many potential applicants to better paying jobs, and unusually high retirements due to the baby-boom generation reaching retirement age.

This federal funded study further revealed that of all agencies queried, one half to two-thirds reported some difficulty or major difficulty in finding qualified officers (Koper et al., 2001). Circumstances contributing to this difficulty center on: officer retirement, cost of living, transfer to another law enforcement agency, job opportunities in the private sector and a number of other conditions (Yearwood & Freeman, 2004).

The Rand Corporation conducted a study in 2005, which also looked at challenges police agencies were encountering post-9/11. Part of their research involved the supply and demand challenges many departments face, as well as, finding and retaining quality police applicants and officers after September 11, 2001.

Their research involved formal and informal interviews with police personnel in recruiting, training and human resources. The target of their research was the Long Beach Police Department (LBPD), which has more than 1,000 personnel. The LBPD is geographically situated with vital public interests to include Long Beach Harbor. It is also ethnically diverse and adjacent to Los Angeles County, another large metropolitan area, who also is vying for better recruitment and retention practices.

The research found unique and contemporary challenges in maintaining a department with its authorized personnel strength. Demographic factors not

previously observed, are now presenting exceptional issues in finding and hiring the most qualified police applicants. Raymond et al.(2005, p. 12) found that demographic factors previously not given attention were negatively affecting hiring. Some factors and trends were: negative trends in health and fitness of young adults; their criminal activity and drug use, and the commonplace for American youth to experiment with drugs.

These facts are important due to the drug screening process which police officer aspirants must successfully pass. Very limited use of certain drugs may be permissible, however, habitual use of these drugs or experimentation with harder drugs is cause for rejecting an applicant (ibid., 13).

In addition to drug use, obesity in the general population has proven to be a hurdle in finding qualified police applicants (Raymond et al., 2005, p. 13).

Studies reveal,

Obesity in the U.S. population has been rising steadily over the past two decades, with severe obesity increasing the most quickly (trends reveal that 1 in 200 adults were more than 100 pounds overweight in 1986; this number increased to 1 in 50 in 2000). Obesity plays a major role in disability at all ages and affects an individual's ability to meet fitness standards required for entry into policing. Particularly alarming for police recruiting purposes are the rates of overweight and obese youth. Over the past three decades, the childhood obesity rate has more than doubled for adolescents ages 12-19 (ibid., 13).

Financial indebtedness in prospective police applicants poses as real a problem to hiring as the other mentioned issues. Raymond et al.(2005, p. 14) reports the following statistics, "...from 1992 – 2001, Americans 18 – 24 years old demonstrated a 104 percent rise in credit card debt over the time...and that the

average indebted youth spends nearly 30 percent of his/her income on debt payments.” This information is important because many police departments consider significant debt a disqualifier in hiring. The logic behind this standard is that too much debt is a strong indicator for poor judgment and may lend a person more susceptible to corruption (Raymond et al., p. 14).

All these personal trait factors, combined with the post 9/11 hiring trends in federal and non-federal law enforcement, create a highly competitive environment for a very limited pool of qualified police applicants. Raymond et al. (2005, p. 15) illustrates these concerns writing,

For recruiting purposes, police agencies seek individuals who have clean criminal records, little to no previous drug use, are willing to work outdoor and in dangerous situations, are healthy and physically fit, have a high school diploma or more, who are of average to high aptitude, and who can communicate effectively with many different types of people. Competition arises because individuals with these characteristics are also in high demand by fire departments; military, federal law enforcement, and homeland security agencies.

Studies support the challenges many agencies encounter in finding qualified applicants. Compounding the trends described with the younger generations meeting the minimum in fitness, financial responsibility and drug usage are other local and federal law enforcement agencies offering positions for those who qualify, making recruiting more difficult.

### *Generation X*

A paper written by David Bland examines Generation X citizens (born 1961 – 1981), more specifically, their values, views and how entrenched existing

mind-sets in law enforcement may prove a hindrance in attracting this demographic to the profession of policing. Surveyed were students enrolled in the Florida State University criminology program. Questions were developed by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Senior Leadership Program, with seventy-seven participants returning the completed survey.

The most important question asked was: what it will take to successfully recruit, satisfy, and retain employees of this generation (Brand, 1999, p. 1). Factors lending themselves to making this question more complicated would be the evolution of the global economy.

This has allowed small entrepreneurs to successfully compete for business contracts with large corporations and has resulted in large corporations no longer offering the job security that they once did. Not only has the way that we do business been changed but the organizational and social culture of the workplace has changed as well. It now becomes incumbent upon law enforcement planners to determine what the values and expectations of the next generation, Generation X, are and to determine if there is a need to adjust the culture of our profession to meet any predicted change.

It is often assumed, and more often aptly known that the police profession has its own subculture, somewhat closed to those not in the profession. Brand (1999, p. 1) goes on further to explain,

This can result in value conflict between new and veteran members of the organization. Police commanders are granted substantial leeway in determining the course of their organization. As a result, there is an aversion to the meddling of the general public and therefore resistance to change.

Conversely, police executives realized the importance of good values in law enforcement, thus the International Association of Police Chiefs developed a police code of ethics (ibid., 1).

Development of the ethics code is an indicator that the police agencies across the nation are willing to open themselves to a mindset that is more transparent to the public, embracing ideals and values that are expected. While this has been occurring, the values of younger Americans have been changing. Historically, police agencies have done well with modifying the behavior of its employees; however, this adaptiveness has not translated well to modifications due to generational behaviors (Brand, 1999, p. 2).

In the past, a typical police officer was white, had a wife and kids, a high school education and worked in close proximity to his place of birth (Brand, 1999, p. 2). This created a somewhat homogenous set of beliefs and values that may run contradictory to the workforce pool of today, which has a substantial number of women and minorities within.

Another factor working against police agencies in bringing aboard the young and talented is how public or municipal employees are viewed. Brand, (1999, p. 2) describes how many public employees consider themselves underpaid, exploited and not too appreciated. Additionally, they have seen their ability to maintain their lifestyle and purchasing power diminish, while those who choose the private sector experience better standards of living. These issues have

not gone unnoticed by younger workers who are being offered positions as municipal employees.

To better understand the motivations of younger applicants aspiring to be employed in policing, a survey was developed and administered to criminology students at the University of Florida. The areas of study focused on: personal values, job expectations and benefits. The 43 question survey revealed areas of concern and areas which were more positive. Brand (1999, p. 9) found that roughly 30% of those surveyed thought their time off-duty was their's and should not impact their jobs as law enforcement officers. Furthermore, 28% believed that if a person has a felony arrest, they can still be a good police officer. 18% advised it is OK for an officer to be less than truthful and lie, while 31% would not leave a party they were attending if marijuana was being used.

Conversely, there were some positive discoveries regarding these Generation X respondents to include,

...an overwhelming 93% indicated that they felt local law enforcement was a profession, not simply a job. The author suspects that this answer would have been considerably different 20 years ago. A surprising 44.7% indicated that they would like to remain employed with the same agency for their entire career. Approximately, 56% of the respondents agreed that the starting pay for local and state law enforcement officers was low (ibid., 9).

Recommendations on benefits, as a result of this survey, found that cafeteria style benefits were viewed favorably and almost 92% of the respondents thought that retirement benefits were very important (Brand, 1999, p. 9). Issues of child-care, co-parenting and job movement to other cities were of great concern as well (ibid., 9).

### ***Recruitment/Retention Methods***

Before we discuss specifics regarding what works best for attracting and retaining police aspirants and officers, we should examine what makes the best police recruiter and how to increase their effectiveness.

The police recruiter should be a model of what the department hopes to exemplify in its officers. They should also be a symbolic representation of the community they serve, in terms of ethnic diversity. Lee et al. (2001, p. 18) describes the core traits of an effective recruiter as one who is competent, energetic, understands the agency's organization, policing style and culture. It is these characteristics of recruiting personnel that support an effective program in bringing forward the best applicants. Additionally, it is a recruiting system supported by competent, well organized recruiters that attracts qualified candidates for possible hiring. If the selection process is professional, efficient and timely, the positive interaction aspirants have with the agency is often conveyed to other applicants. Lee et al. (2001, p. 17) found that when the hiring process is a positive experience, the reputation and overall image of that agency is very positive. Aiding in this would be a competent recruiter. Placing the very best personnel in recruiting positions demonstrates an agencies commitment and value to bringing aboard the best applicants available. To assure lasting success in recruiting, agencies support must reach beyond the placement of recruiters but also involve support for their responsibilities and others in the agency whose jobs affect recruitment activities.



Creating a supportive structure for recruiters is an important element in the system of locating, attracting and hiring the best qualified police applicants. The benefits of fulfilling these goals do not guarantee success at recruiting and retaining officers but is part of larger system of effective recruitment and retention.

A study was conducted in 2003, by several blue ribbon panels, including the Governors Crime Commission of North Carolina regarding the recruitment and retention of sworn officers. The study focused only on North Carolina law enforcement agencies and their experiences with what techniques work best with recruiting and retention measures supported. Information gleaned from the processes of the (Yearwood & Freeman, 2004, p. 1) study revealed,

The most frequently employed and effective recruitment techniques are word of mouth, with 95% of respondents indicating this was the preferred method which their respective agencies used to recruit potential officers. The second most used and effective technique was newspaper advertising at 83% followed by recruiting through local community colleges and use of the internet. Job fairs, police corps and radio/television were the least effective, suggesting that the most effective are the most used.

A review of studies that looked at challenges for recruiting the best qualified officers found that the biggest obstacles or barriers to recruiting are, in order from greatest to least: competition from other agencies; agency budget restrictions; agency size; competition from the private sector and cost of living (Yearwood & Freeman, 2004, p. 9).

This study also was able to provide insight as to retention techniques and what programs or techniques were used and which proved most effective. The

conclusion from this analysis found that the most popular retention strategy was annual pay increases (not contingent upon performance). Next were educational incentives, in the form of tuition reimbursement, and permitting personnel to attend classes during working hours. This was followed by promotions, annual merit pay increases, formal awards and recognition. Lastly was working a favorable shift (Yearwood & Freeman, 2004, p. 12).

It was mentioned that agency size was influential in terms of recruiting/retaining officers. This point was supported by results from the (Yearwood & Freeman, 2004, p. 10) survey which found, "Nearly 80%, of the responding agencies, lost officers to larger law enforcement departments, suggesting that higher salaries and more competitive benefits may explain these losses

Information was also gleaned on the average length of time these officers were staying employed with their home agencies. Regardless of the reasons for leaving, the standard time of employment for officers before they leave is thirty-four months (ibid., 10). Yearwood (2003, p. 5) wrote further that,

Eighty-four percent of the agencies reported an average length of stay less than three years. Thus, it appears that a critical period of two years and ten months, to three years, exist in which police agencies can implement policies and/or programs to improve retentions rates and conversely minimize its attritions rate by retaining officers is beyond a three-year period.

Also from this study was a number of recruitment/retention techniques used most often by the queried agencies which proved effective. Per (Yearwood & Freeman, 2004, p. 1) they included: developing partnerships with colleges and

high schools; enhance the ability of the department to identify and attract quality applicants; become more competitive with the private sector; public recognition through marketing of the criminal justice profession; adequate resources relative to staffing; equipment and training; review and further develop career opportunities for officers. Additional retention methods included: take home car; on-duty fitness time; involvement of managerial decisions; provide housing; hire long term residents of the community who have close ties to the area and extensive insurance benefits at minimal cost.

The (Yearwood & Freeman, 2004, p. 23) panel study concluded with a summation of all recommendations, distilled down to a few points as follows,

Police departments may wish to consider launching a more aggressive recruitment strategy to fill vacancies...new innovative recruitment strategies should be explored as well as holding discussions that center on improving the effectiveness of existing strategies. Perhaps, more recruiting at the national level which would include recruiting ex-military personnel. ...increasing the average starting salary may attract a better and larger applicant pool, however study findings suggest that the greater salary concern occurs after, and not before the applicant is hired as a new officer. On the average, officers are leaving the department after two years and ten months of service possibly because of limited opportunities for promotion and/or the failure to receive an increase in their salaries.

Suggestions were also made regarding cost of living adjustments, graduated pay scales based upon length of service and merit pay increases, but not all results focused on increasing an officers income or benefits.

Interestingly, officers surveyed recognized the necessity for better pre-hiring screening as a means to reducing attrition. It was suggested that a more

effective hiring process, which involved the passing of mandatory entrance exams and minimum reading and writing tests would reduce those who entered the profession but were not capable of completing the state and agency requirements in becoming a certified law enforcement officer (Yearwood & Freeman, 2004, p. 23).

The Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, funded by the National Institute of Justice, conducted surveys of local/state law enforcement agencies, analyzing recruitment and retention issues. The surveys of over 1,200 agencies revealed that more than 50% of the queried departments had difficulty filling vacancies due to a lack of qualified applicants (Koper et al., 2001, p. 4).

It was found that agencies serving communities of fewer than 50,000 citizens, those officers who left, two-thirds did so with less than five years of service, as compared to large agencies (serving over 50,000 citizens) where only one-third left with less than five years service (Koper et al., 2001, p. 47). In a more broad analysis, 35% of those who left, regardless of agency size, did so for non-retirement reasons (ibid., 47). This is important to note because it supports the notion that officers are looking for opportunities, be it direct monetary compensation or professional growth, outside of their current employer. Additionally, these issues of maintaining authorized personnel strength may be exacerbated by the large number of baby boomers entering their retirement years (Koper et al., p. 49).

The most prevalent theme from conducted research supports the idea that effective recruitment and retention is best supported by agencies that create an environment of commitment and loyalty (McKeever & Kranda, 2000, p. 8). It also involves providing the support officers and tools necessary for officers to do their jobs. “Job satisfaction surveys consistently name appreciation and recognition as what workers want more than a salary increase”, (McKeever & Kranda, 2000, p. 8).

## CHAPTER THREE

### Actual Research

#### *Design of the Study*

The problem addressed in this study is the challenge to police agencies to recruit and retain police officers. Prince William County Police Department (PWCPD) has experienced the challenges of filling sworn positions as we continue to sustain our fully authorized staffing levels. This study examined the effect of different variables on the recruitment and retention of police officers of the Prince William County Police Department. The research questions include:

1. What factors exist that attract applicants to the PWCPD?
2. What PWCPD can do to retain applicants once they become officers?

It is hypothesized that: recruits are more likely to remain with the agency if they have family ties to the local community in which they are working; recruits are less inclined to remaining employed if they desire a significantly higher than offered salary; post-September 11<sup>th</sup> competition from local and federal law enforcement has had a negative impact on local recruitment successes, and lastly, generational differences have a negative impact on recruitment and retention accomplishments.

### ***Survey Design and Methodology***

A multi-step format was followed in creating, distributing and analyzing the survey research data. The methodology was based on a seven-step process designed by Allan H. Church. In his book, *Designing and Using Organizational Surveys, A Seven-Step Process*, Mr. Church outlines his recommendations for creating a world-class survey.

The first step requires the setting of organizational objectives. This involves gaining the support of senior management, purpose of the survey and gaining support for the research to address the research questions.

Church's recommended second step of the process involves the actual development of the survey. This includes the type of questions to be asked, content, the scale of answers and layout. Additionally, the creation of instructions to survey participants takes place, as well as the creation of the pilot survey.

There were a number of independent variables used in guiding survey items. Independent Variables included: family ties, salary requirements, post 9/11 competition and generational differences. These areas will be used to help identify factors which attract newly hired police officers to this agency; they will also be used to assist in achieving better retention of new officers.

This area of study is important due to the changing mission for local agencies in a post-September 11 environment to include expanded job responsibilities. This is exacerbated by stiff competition from federal and local law enforcement who are hiring at very high rates, seeking quality applicants from a shrinking pool of viable candidates, adding to the challenge of sustaining

fully authorized staffing levels. *Generation X* applicants pose challenges to their being acceptable candidates due to lifestyle, choices for employment and expectations they have for their employer. Complicating the matter further is the cost of living in this large metropolitan area and hiring employees from outside this area. Bringing aboard new employees not from this area can create a culture-shock due to high housing costs and long commutes. This affect is often magnified if there is no support system for the new employee in the form of local family ties.

The third step focuses on communication with the survey participants. It is vital that the survey intentions and processes be presented in a clear manner to those completing the survey. Methods used to ensure the confidentiality of their responses is related to participants, in addition to taking positive action to any concerns expressed.

Administration of the survey is the fourth step of seven. The decision on how the survey will be distributed is planned, as well as the plus/minus of mailing versus an in-person distribution. Decisions are also made regarding how the data will be collected, be it email, fax, phone responses or pencil and paper.

Step five requires the analysis of results. Reporting the actual responses is useful, but careful interpretation of the data and drawing connections and conclusions between questions is most valuable. Questions and topics for further analysis may surface as a result of the returns, requiring further research.



Delivering your findings takes place in step six. Decisions are made on how information will be provided to others, when it will be dispensed, and who will receive the information. Also, will the information be delivered via presentation, report and who is the audience for this dissemination?

Step seven puts into action recommendations based upon the survey analysis. A plan for action is established, with efforts to include those affected by the recommendations, as well as those who are instrumental in deciding what changes should be reviewed for implementation. Further surveys and data collection may be necessary, requiring the continued support of the organization; garnering that support for future research and implementation of the current findings occurs in this step process.

Threats to internal validity may be found in prior anonymous surveys created and distributed by independent entities hired by the department. Specifically, there have been several attempts by the department, in the form of anonymous surveys, to understand how employees view their immediate supervisors, senior management and executive leadership. The construction of these surveys raised concern that anonymity may not be maintained. This concern possibly impacted or influenced the nature of respondents' answers, which in turn may have predisposed my survey participants in providing less than candid answers.

### ***Participants***

Survey research was conducted to gather information from a sample of

individuals in the Prince William County Police Department (Scheuren, 2004, p. 9). Target population for this study was police recruits in a large metropolitan region similar to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The survey was used to gather self-report descriptive information about the attitudes and behaviors of the population (Rosenfeld, Edwards, & Thomas, 1995, p. 548).

The target sample for the survey was newly hired recruit officers in a large metropolitan area police academy. The survey, completed anonymously, was distributed to fifty-five ( $n=55$ ) police recruits from two recruit sessions in the years 2006 and 2007. All fifty-five recruits participated in the survey voluntarily. Survey questions focused on discovering what may have influenced recruits into accepting a position with the Prince William County Police and what factors may encourage them to remain employed with the Prince William County Police. Areas surveyed included: satisfaction with pay/benefits; the possibility of being lured to another law enforcement agency or non-law enforcement agency; cost of living in northern Virginia and how those pressures may affect the newly hired; what ties does the recruit have to this area; was this job the sole reason for relocating to the metropolitan D.C. region; educational background; prior military experience and a number of other areas that may influence a newly hired employee's level of contentment in being a Prince William County Police Officer.

### *Areas of Analysis*

The dependent variable(s) used in the study is recruitment and retention.

Key issues addressed in the survey centered on the perception by the applicant of

the police department and the impact of that perception in choosing this agency to be employed. To measure the success or failure of recruitment and retention practices, the following independent variables were used in the investigation: benefits; pay and their affect on selecting Prince William County as an employer; commuting distance; the availability of affordable housing within the County; perceptions of the hiring process; the amount of a salary increase necessary for one to consider leaving the Prince William County Police; unfulfilled promises made to the applicant during the hiring process, and what impact the reputation of the agency had on considering Prince William for employment.

Questions were formulated regarding the current commute distance to work; whether the person was a County resident before and after hiring; if not a County resident, was it due to lack of affordable housing or other reasons. Additionally, relations could be drawn from one major area of questions to another. An example of such a connection would be the distance a participant commutes daily and questions regarding salary. More specifically, what amount of salary increase would lure the recruit to another job, taking into account the commute distance to work? Also, questions about residency were a core part of this survey. Data collected via exit interviews and informal conversations raise the concern that those who came to the Prince William County Police from out of the area for the sole purpose of taking a position as police recruit, may be more inclined to leave shortly after graduation as compared to those who have roots in the area and/or are more integrated into the metropolitan Washington D.C. area.

Analyzing data regarding the recruits feelings about their commute to work, the affordability of housing in Prince William County, and what amount of salary increase would move them to another agency/career may assist HR in tailoring benefits which are more effective in retaining them as employees. The survey information gathered from participants may also assist HR background investigators in creating application questions which highlight concerns of applicants sooner, enabling recruiters to more quickly address apprehension from the prospective employees.

Questions also focused on the hiring process in an effort to discover if overt or subtle promises for choice assignments were made which cannot be reasonably met, thus leading to discouragement by the new officer. This area of questioning was important because it would provide insight to expectations the new hires have upon graduation from the academy. Unfulfilled promises by an employer may be an important factor in the employee staying with this agency or the employee choosing to terminate employment.

The data was collated and analyzed for developing and ongoing trends as it pertains to recruitment successes and challenges. The survey questions also collected information on issues of what may draw the newly hired police employee away from their current employer. For example, does recruiting from out-of-state lend those recruits to being less satisfied living in Northern Virginia, thus moving back to their home (where the cost of living may be cheaper; less congested and possibly living closer to work), as compared to those who are from

the area or already know the issues involved in living in such an expensive and densely populated area? Do former military personnel have a higher level of satisfaction in the job, thus translating to an employee who will stay longer with the agency; does the cost of living in this area negatively impact a newly hired recruit remaining in the area and employed by the Prince William County Police; is the Prince William County Police losing employee's to other agencies for small or large differences in pay; what attracted the employee to this agency; were promises made to the employee during the hiring process which cannot be reasonably met; is the distance needed to travel to work a factor which may prompt employees to consider leaving?

The survey will attempt to answer these questions, thus providing insight as to the motivations as to why the Prince William County Police was chosen as their employer. Additionally, information supplied by this study may lend insight as to how better attract and retain these employees while gaining knowledge from similar challenges other law enforcement agencies are experiencing.

### ***Concerning Validity***

This study was designed to investigate relationships between recruitment and retention and the listed independent variables. The following threats to internal validity were considered: history, maturation and instrumentation. History was a threat to internal validity because the impact of participant's previous experience with surveys was unknown. Unfavorable experiences could have lead to item responses that were not true. Not all recruits that enter the

academy for training complete the training program. This created a threat to internal validity by maturation. The survey used for this study was created by a novice researcher. Great time was taken in the design of survey items; however, the survey was used for the first time in 2006 and could have been identified as an unreliable instrument.

In conducting the study with two recruit group's, replication was used to maximize external validity so that accurate statements could be made about the sample, and inferred to the larger population. Findings can only be generalized to this population. A change in context, for example from a large metropolitan community to a rural community, prevents the inference of the findings to the rural group.

### ***Results***

It is important to understand what attracted these aspiring officers to select the Prince William County Police Department as their employer. Our agency goes to great lengths in bringing aboard officers who are ethical, moral and support the style of community policing that fosters support from the citizens of Prince William County. The Chief of our agency, Charlie T. Deane, personally interviews each and every prospective new-hire, demonstrating the personal investment he has in ensuring the best and brightest available are invited to become members of the Prince William County Police. These actions are indicative of the importance placed on sustaining a force where only the most qualified officers are hired, adding to an already excellent reputation.

### ***Reputation of the PWCPD and its Influence***

Respondents were asked what impact the reputation of the Prince William County Police Department (PWCPD) had on choosing this agency as their employer. Results found 67% of the respondents believe it factored a *great/very great extent* in their choosing the PWCPD. This revelation becomes more pronounced when taken into consideration that over 32% were offered employment with other law enforcement agencies prior to the offer by the PWCPD. A more detailed analysis of the data reveals additional useful information regarding our agencies reputation and employees intentions reported below.

Survey questions on the perceived reputation of our agency found that thirteen recruits who were positively influenced to a *very great extent* by that reputation had no plans on leaving the PWCPD for another agency. The twenty-four respondents who stated that the positive reputation factored into their decision making to a *great extent* replied with: thirteen will retire from the PWCPD; one will leave in less than two years; three will be employed elsewhere in 3 – 5 years and seven had not given it any thought. Of the eighteen remaining recruits who were not as positively influenced by the reputation of our agency, only one planned on staying long enough to retire. The balance of recruits would either leave for another job or had not taken time to consider their future length of employment with the PWCPD.

### ***Applications with Other Agencies***

Over two-thirds of the surveyed recruits applied with agencies other than the PWCPD, yet over 67% of the time, the PWCPD was the first to offer a job to these applicants. This is indicative of the efforts our agency is making to streamline and quicken the hiring process. Typically, many agencies hiring process lasts from five to twelve months. Often, for the prospective employee, it may come down to which department is the first to offer employment with a bona fide offer.

### ***Hiring Process***

There are other factors in the hiring process which can detract or add, from the perspective of the applicant, to an agencies appeal. This may include: reasonableness/personalities of the recruiters; timely responses to questions from recruiters and length of the overall process. The survey found that the length of the hiring process positively influenced 53% of our new hires from a *moderate to very great extent* in choosing the PWCPD as their employer.

### ***Compensation***

The more tangible side of attracting and retaining employees can be found in the pay officers receive. 69% of respondents described pay as having a *moderate to great influence* in their selecting PWCPD as their employer of choice. In a more specific question, recruits were asked how they would rate their pay. Returns show that approximately 53% were *satisfied* and 5.4% were *very satisfied*. Conversely, 34.5% were *neutral*, and 7% *dissatisfied*.



### ***Benefits***

The area of benefits, another form of compensation, had a series of questions that attempted to reveal their level of importance to the applicant/new hire. Surprisingly, benefits are not exclusively a concern for those who are older in age. Sixty-four percent of the respondents' ages in the survey ranged from 20 – 25 years old, with 76% of all participating advising that benefits had a *moderate to very great influence* in choosing our agency. This reveals the importance of benefits to all those who are newly employed, regardless of their age. Further support of this view was found in additional questions regarding benefits. Specifically, the current package of benefits offered by the PWCPD is viewed overwhelmingly favorable by new hires, with almost 83% being *satisfied to very satisfied* with their benefits.

### ***Housing Costs***

There are challenges our agency faces in attracting and retaining officers where compensation, direct or indirect, may influence whether they stay employed with the PWCPD. High housing costs and long commuting distances are significant concerns according to the survey respondents. The *lack of affordable housing* is viewed by 76% of the respondents as the biggest challenge to living or continuing to live in Prince William County. Additionally, if provided the opportunity to live in the County, 62% would choose to *live in the county* where they work.

The issue of there not being reasonable housing costs for new officers in or around the Northern Virginia metropolitan area leads many officers to living

further out and commuting longer distances to work. Approximately 30% commute more than thirty-one miles to work, with a large majority of these employees (20%) driving greater than 41 miles each way. How this equates to time on the road was conveyed with the respondents advising that over 60% spend more than 30 minutes driving, but more alarming is that approximately 13% drive anywhere from 46 minutes to greater than 90 minutes each way to work.

#### ***How Much Money Would It Take To Leave?***

The influence from other employment opportunities is substantial in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area for recruits, affecting their decision to remain employed with the PWCPD.

Thirty-one percent would leave law enforcement for the private sector if offered *\$10,000 or more* of a raise. Eighteen percent would take even less, leaving for a *\$5000 to \$9999*. Conversely, 49% noted that they are *not interested in leaving law enforcement for any of sum*.

This last statistic warrants further clarification. Although 49% are not interested in leaving law enforcement, what would it take for another local, state or federal law enforcement agency to draw them away from the PWCPD?

Seven percent would leave if offered a raise up to \$4999. Twenty-seven percent would depart for another law enforcement agency if the increase was \$5000 to \$9999 per year, and almost 53% would leave the PWCPD for a pay raise of \$10,000 or more. What is also notable about this line of questioning in the

survey is that approximately 13% would not consider leaving the PWCPD for any sum of money.

### ***Commuting Distances***

For those who would consider leaving the PWCPD for an increase in salary, they were asked what commuting distance would make the extra money not worth the drive. Thirty-eight percent advised that a commute of 41 – 60 minutes would not be worth the extra monies. Twenty-two percent stated that a commuting time between 61 – 90 minutes would offset the salary increase, thus not making it worth leaving the PWCPD. Eighteen percent found a commute of 31 – 45 minutes not worth the extra monies, and lastly, 7% would not make the move if they had a commute time of 30 minutes.

### ***If They Leave Where Are They Going?***

Respondents open to leaving the PWCPD were asked if they leave, where they would go? Twenty-nine percent would take employment with a federal law enforcement agency, while 18% would stay with a state or local department. This led to the question for respondents as to their intentions on how long they plan on working for the PWCPD. Almost 44% acknowledged they plan on retiring with the PWCPD. A significant 35% had not given it much thought. Fifteen percent believed they would no longer be working for the PWCPD after three to five years. Approximately 7% stated they would be employed with the PWCPD for less than two years or until another agency calls offering employment.

### ***Education Level and Their Choice***

The education level of the recruits and how long they planned on staying employed with the PWCPD revealed the ten recruits who only had a high school diploma did not have immediate plans for leaving the PWCPD. Specifically, three wanted to retire with the agency and the remainder had not given it much thought. The sixteen recruits who have some college but no degree; eleven plan on staying long enough to retire, one will leave in 3 – 5 year for a federal law enforcement job and the remaining four have not given it much thought. Of the six recruits earning an associates degree, three want to retire with the PWCPD; one will leave in 3 – 5 years and the last two have again not given it much thought. The twenty-two recruits who have earned a bachelor degree reported: seven plan on retiring with the agency; three will stay less than two years or until another agency call offering employment; six will stay only 3 – 5 years and six have not really thought about how long they will stay. The sole recruit surveyed with a master degree advised that not much thought has been given to how long they plan on staying employed with the PWCPD.

### ***Former Military***

Data collected from the twenty-eight respondents who are former military personnel or are currently reservists reveal:

- 11 plan on retiring with PWCPD
- 3 will only stay 3 – 5 years
- 1 wishes to leave for federal law enforcement
- 2 want to work for another local/state police agency
- 2 recruits plan on staying until a federal law enforcement agency offers them employment

- 9 recruits have not thought about their length of employment with the PWCPD.

The PWCPD expends significant resources in recruiting and retaining the most qualified officers available. The survey data reveals key information which may assist in continuing to attract and keep the brightest and best obtainable.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Application

#### *Implementation: Tactics and Strategies*

There are a number of challenges the Prince William County Police face in the highly competitive market of attracting and retaining police officers. To address these challenges, a multi-faceted approach to recruitment and retention is needed which will include: salary structure changes; continuation of signing and retention bonuses; tuition reimbursement expansion; overhauled merit evaluation system with unique and distinct differences as compared to other county employees, and a series of variable pay program additions.

Before developing or changing pay systems, analysis must first take place which answers questions regarding workplace environment and human capital issues. More specifically, the following information should be collected before enacting change: who are you attempting to hire; employee loyalty measures; messages (what employees are inferring based upon your current rewards/benefits packages) and current career path options. In addition to these areas, a detailed job analysis will need to occur which will focus on: why and how employees do what they do as it pertains to their duties/tasks; job descriptions; demographics of jobs; job purpose; certifications needed, as well as duties/responsibilities of employees.

### ***Salary Structure***

We have an opportunity to make our pay structure a distinct incentive to be employed by the Prince William County Police. Survey results found 41% of the respondents with a neutral to negative view on their current salaries. This finding warrants positive action to be taken in altering current pay structures. Change can come in a variety of ways but the goal should be to find and implement new, innovative means to change the view of those who are less than satisfied with our current pay structure.

One dilemma our agency faces is hiring officers, training them and not retaining them to the point where there is an acceptable return-on-investment (ROI). It is conservatively estimated that ROI is not achieved for approximately one and one-half years from academy graduation. An official with the Prince William County Police places ROI at approximately three years. In their view, this is the point where the officer is fully contributing in all facets of the job, thus putting the investment dollars for the officer by the county at roughly \$200k, at which point the ROI begins.

The survey revealed that the high cost of housing in Northern Virginia, more specifically Prince William County, is of significant concern to newly hired officers. Forty-nine percent of respondents advised that if they were to leave this agency it would be due primarily to not being able to afford housing in Prince William County or Northern Virginia. Additionally, survey analysis shows that over 76% of the newly hired recruits feel the biggest challenge to either living in, or moving to Prince William County or a nearby jurisdiction, is a lack of

affordable housing. This information presents an opportunity for our agency with a goal of creating innovative solutions to these concerns. The solutions may come in the form of modifying our pay structure as outlined earlier or by working more dutifully with the housing authority in finding unique and effective solutions to this issue.

Before salary changes are initiated, salary structure data must be mined, compared and collected. Collection includes knowing the composition of your competitors pay structure, job matching, as well as what is the current market environment. Once informal polling is collected and information on competing agencies is gathered and analyzed, it is recommended that our agency be within five percent of the other major local law enforcement agencies in the metropolitan area.

It is important to distinguish local law enforcement from federal law enforcement because the pay difference is a more significant fifteen percent when compared with federal agencies. It will take a substantial investment by our agency to be within several percentage points of salaries offered by federal agencies. With so many of the respondents (roughly 30%) stating if they were to leave it would be for a federal agency, the investment in the other compensation recommendations that are not salary make those more attractive for consideration and implementation.

From the gathered data on pay throughout the region, regression tests should be run where the recommended salary range, as compared to local law



enforcement, would be plus/minus five percent. Pay rates and ranges with distinct banding will need to be incorporated in tandem with the modifications. Vigilance must be kept to prevent ineffective bands which solely reward employees with high earnings for longevity versus performance. This can be addressed in greater detail by analyzing the merit pay system.

An opportunity exists to distinguish our agency's pay structure by adjusting the starting salary upward so that regression data reveals we are in the top band of pay. Additionally, continue to subsidize pay with the signing bonus and yearly retention bonus. The signing bonus costs approximately \$75k per fiscal year and the retention bonus expenditure is \$1.1million. These suggestions coupled with an adjusted merit evaluation system which supports a six percent merit evaluation raise for each of the first five years of an officer's career may reduce the loss of officers prior to obtaining an acceptable ROI. The goal is to "bubble" monies to officers in the first few years of their career, making other law enforcement jobs less attractive due to the potential pay loss suffered if they leave. This system, however, must work jointly with an effective merit evaluation system to ensure that officers who are not productive, do not simply collect a guaranteed pay check at these higher rates (addressed in administering effective performance evaluations).

Benefits may be another avenue to explore in attracting applicants. Thirty-one percent of the PWCPD respondents found their benefits to be a principle motivator in choosing the PWCPD and almost 53% were satisfied with

their current benefits package. This is important because in the *Generation X* survey described earlier, 92% favored cafeteria style benefits over the more traditional offerings. Both surveys underscore the importance younger adults are placing on their benefits packages. If the PWCPD currently had a benefits package that is thought of highly by its newest members as supported by the data, this is an area which should be accentuated in recruiting.

### ***Performance Evaluations***

As stated earlier, adjustments to the performance evaluation system must take place in concert with the other compensation adjustments and proposals. There are three areas to consider for further review, they are: Input; Competencies and Output.

All three areas are highly dependent on “line of sight” by the employee which has advantages for ownership and personal investment to the program. Input centers on what the employee brings to the job which includes their experience and education. This area drives the grade level of the new employee and what type of job they will fill.

The Competencies area will focus on teamwork, achievements, analytical thinking, relations with citizens (customers) and positive traits inherent with the employee. This area is difficult to quantify and can be incorporated into the hiring process, ensuring that the right people are getting into the most appropriate jobs, thus holding down costs due to their leaving or being re-assigned out of the sworn force and into the civilian ranks.

The Output portion of performance management is the most important and should garner the most attention of all the processes. It is difficult for employees to achieve if there is no clear direction or mission, therefore, the first priority would be to create a clear and simple list of organizational objectives. These objectives should be linked to identifiable critical success factors, all of which must be measurable, objective and goal driven. The measures must be simple to use, fair and have the ability to reveal how progress is being made in the short term. Additional tools would incorporate 360 degree evaluations and relative rankings, both of which will help move past merit rating issues we currently experience.

It is critical that the evaluation system specifically review the competencies and skills of the officer in a clear and objective manner. The newly proposed salary structure demands that there be only four of five categories for review which are all tied to the brief but clear mission statement. This will provide the employee with a sense of empowerment as to what sort of evaluation they will receive and will make it simpler for the evaluating supervisor.

Officers who choose to enter the promotional process have a very clear career path as they ascend the department chain of command; this is not true for the career "street officer", which is why the following recommendation should be studied further for incorporation.

Merit evaluations should be based upon officers continuing their formal education, in addition to enhancing their police skills and competencies.

Examples would be: certifications gained, specialty schools completed; mentoring duties volunteered; committee participations and a number of other efforts which demonstrate the officer is maintaining interest in the agency and themselves professionally. If objective goals are met, there is no subjectivity to the rating and the supervisor must rate the employee with a six percent increase. This system eliminates favoritism, bias and other factors which make performance evaluation systems less effective.

### ***Variable Incentives***

Variable pay incentives may be a valuable tool if the most effective methods for this compensation are chosen. Additionally, it is critical that the methods used for this compensation are reviewed for their effectiveness and cycled through a rotation of incentives.

It has been noted that non-cash awards are more than three-times as effective in motivating employees and modifying their behavior as compared to cash. One of the main reasons this occurs is because of cash's "here and gone" perception. When a cash award is provided to an employee it is diminished by taxes and often spent by the employee with little or nothing tangible to show later. An incentive that is a non-cash award, such as a take-home cruiser, is something that the employee wakes up to every day and can actually see. I liken this reward to the gift that keeps on giving daily, reminding the employee of their positive efforts. This type of program costs \$345K, with benefits to the County to include: increased police visibility; increase officer availability; reduced response times;

promotes a feeling of security for citizens; decreases maintenance costs of vehicles and is an excellent recruiting tool. These benefits are substantial when compared to the costs of such a program. It is imperative that such a reward program be clearly tied to our mission statement, in addition to being joined with the increasing skills and competencies of the officer.

Spot rewards are another area to explore as a means to encourage positive action and behavior. These will need to occur very close to the positive action by the officer which spurred the reward and should be administered by the line-supervisor. Rewards may include: complimentary dinners out; movie tickets; choice of beat area for the nights work; Starbucks gift cards and a host of other small “on the spot” gifts. Costs for such a program can be reduced by soliciting businesses for donations; having officers contribute to a small fund from which some of the gifts are purchased and budgeting \$10,000 per year, enabling each squad to have roughly \$140 per month to spend on such incentives. There would be specific actions an officer must perform and detailed guidelines for supervisors to follow, reducing the propensity for favoritism or other issues which may dilute the programs ability to be successful.

In an attempt to attract and retain the best qualified police officer applicants and incumbents, there are a number of compensation and recruitment related enhancements and changes which can be analyzed for inclusion into officer’s benefits packages and Personnel’s hiring methods.

Through a series of well thought out changes, the challenges surrounding effective recruitment and lasting retention of officers can be met with crafted solutions which not only bring forward qualified applicants but retain incumbents. Benefits of these enhancements and modifications may include improving police services to the community and realizing a better return on investment as it relates to costs incurred in producing a fully trained and contributing officer. Over two-thirds of the respondents acknowledged that the positive reputation of the PWCPD significantly influenced their decision to work for our agency.

In this revelation is a great opportunity for us to capitalize. Recruiting efforts should include a high degree of focus and attention in highlighting this area. Newspaper, television spots and our own web site should emphasize the high level of ethics of our agency embraces, challenging those who want to be a part of something positive to join us. Recruiting displays would support this strategy by having displays with a similar theme, and recruiters would be educated in how/what to promote to prospective applicants.

The Prince William County Police Department's excellent reputation is a result of hiring and retaining excellent personnel. Rapid population growth in the community requires a matching commitment by the department to maintain a sufficient number of quality, ethical officers who will provide quality service the Prince William County Police Department has been known to offer.

### ***Dissemination***

To disseminate what I have learned in this project through my research, analysis, survey and study, I will offer this work to Chief Charlie T. Deane and the senior executive leadership of the Prince William County Police. It is hoped that elements of this work will prove beneficial to our organization as we continue to expand our hiring of quality personnel to an already outstanding, progressive law enforcement organization.

Additionally, I will offer this work to law enforcement trade publications. It is hoped that my work may be used to assist others in the profession who wish to analyze their organizations methods of recruitment and retention in a very challenging and competitive environment.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Conclusion**

Recruiting and retaining law enforcement officers has been a significant challenge for not only the Prince William County Police Department but agencies across the nation. The number of personnel leaving for other local and federal sworn positions, as well as civilian Homeland Security jobs has presented challenges. Sustaining fully authorized staffing levels and finding the most qualified applicants for vacancies are important issues in the highly competitive recruitment and retention of law enforcement personnel. Additionally, measures should be taken as it relates to obtaining an acceptable ROI for incumbents. The high costs of training an officer to the extent where they are a fully contributing member of the agency are considerable and warrant new approaches to minimizing costs associated with those officers who leave prior to departments realizing an acceptable ROI.

Recommendations that address these concerns center on change that is holistic in its approach. Focus on this change would include: knowing your target market for recruiting; what are the strengths of the organization and are they being capitalized for effective marketing; having a clear, distinct mission statement and organizational objectives which can be identified by all members in the agency; creating a pay structure that is effective in minimizing the number of officers who leave for other jobs for a few thousand more dollars.



Survey results show that most are content with the benefits they receive, however, research from across the nation reveals that younger employees appreciate a cafeteria-style of benefit over traditional offerings; this may be an area for further investigation to enhance recruitment.

Performance evaluations should have clear objective and measurable standards which support the mission statement and organization objectives of the agency. Having such a system may lessen the number of employees who are unclear as to their performance expectations. Creating a series of variable pay incentives which support the performance of employees is also important in providing real-time rewards.

Variable pay incentives are a valuable tool when the most effective methods for this type of compensation are chosen. Non-cash awards are more than three-times as effective in motivating employees and modifying their behavior as compared to cash. Additionally, it is critical that the methods used for this compensation are reviewed for their effectiveness and cycled through a rotation of incentives. De-centralization is important to this form of reward, ensuring that the reward occurs as close to the positive behavior as possible.

Direct compensation was a topic of significance for recruits surveyed, but their biggest concern centers on housing costs. Most find that the principal obstacle to remaining employed with the Prince William County Police would be the high cost of housing in the Northern Virginia area. A majority would prefer to live in the county they work, but the costs associated with such a move are

prohibitive. This presents an opportunity for further study on how such a situation can be turned into an advantage. Solutions would require innovative methods and insight from housing experts with the goal of bringing public servants into their county.

The reputation of the Prince William County Police is excellent and was an important factor for many in choosing this agency to be employed.

Maximizing this strength in recruitment marketing may see positive results in filling vacancies. This outstanding reputation is a result of hiring and retaining excellent personnel. Rapid population growth in the community requires a matching commitment by the department to maintain a sufficient number of quality, ethical officers who will supply superior service for which the Prince William County Police Department has been known to provide.

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## APPENDIX A

### Survey

#### *Survey Instructions*

Thank you for your participation in this survey. The anonymous and confidential information you provide will be of great assistance in determining the motivations of why recruits chose this agency to be employed and what factors influence their being retained as officers with this Department.

Below are a few simple instructions in completing this survey:

- Circle only one answer per question with the pencil provided.
- Please do not leave any questions unanswered.
- If you need another pencil, raise your hand and the Proctor will provide you the needed supplies.
- Once the survey is completed, bring it to the front of the classroom and place it in the manila envelope provided.

Estimated time to complete this survey is approximately fifteen minutes. There is no strict time limit so feel free to use whatever amount of time necessary. Results from this survey will be shared with those of you who express interest.

Once again, I thank you for your participation and look forward to reviewing the information produced from this project.

University of Richmond  
School of Continuing Studies  
Human Resource Management

## **Anonymous Consent Form**

March 21, 2006

**Title:** Analyzing the Employment Motivation of Prince William County Police Recruits

**Principle Investigator:**

Scott A. Kearns  
Graduate Student

**Sponsor:**

Dr. Maria Poindexter  
Professor

**Introduction/Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the motivations of police recruits in choosing the Prince William County Police as their employer. Areas of interest include, benefits/pay, the hiring process, interaction with human resource personnel, affordability and location of housing as well as a number of other areas.

This study is part of a project associated with graduate course work being undertaken at the University of Richmond. Your anonymous participation involves completing the following survey which should take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. The questions are multiple-choice and focus on your current impressions as well as motivations for being employed with this agency.

The sole investigator is Scott A. Kearns who can be reached at (703) 792-6599 and is being supervised by Professor Maria Poindexter. Should you have any questions, please contact her at (804) 240-0458. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact Kathy Hoke, Chair of the University of Richmond's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Research Participants at (804) 289-8417 or [Khoke@richmond.edu](mailto:Khoke@richmond.edu).

Your participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Your name is not collected in the survey and the information collected will only be reported in group fashion to the class of graduate students in an informal presentation.

In order to ensure confidentiality, you will not be asked to sign a document indicating that you agree to participate. However, by completing this survey you give consent to participate in the study. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Scott A. Kearns at (703) 792-6599 or Professor Maria Poindexter at (804) 240-0458.

Thank you for your participation, the valuable information provided will be of great use in understanding the motivations of Department members.

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your education background? (Circle only *one*)
  - High School Diploma
  - Some College (no degree obtained)
  - Associates Degree earned
  - Bachelor Degree earned
  - Master Degree earned
  
2. What is your age (Circle one) :
  - 20 – 25 year old
  - 26 – 30 year old
  - 31 – 35 year old
  - 36 – 40 year old
  - Over 40
  
3. Did you apply and participate in the hiring process with any other law enforcement agency? (Circle one)
  - Yes
  - No
  
4. Was this the *first* agency that offered you a position in law enforcement?
  - Yes
  - No







18. Was there any sort of guarantee that you would be able to choose a specialty assignment or job shortly after completing training? (Circle one)

I Strongly Disagree    I Disagree    Neutral    I Agree    I Strongly Agree

19. If a non-law enforcement job (non-sworn) were offered to you by a private company or agency, how much more in salary would you need to earn to consider leaving the Prince William County Police? (Circle one)

- \$1,000 - \$4,999 per year
- \$5,000 - \$9,999 per year
- \$10,000 or more per year
- I do not want to leave law enforcement

20. If another law enforcement job (sworn) were offered to you by a different local, state or federal law enforcement agency, how much more in salary would you need to earn to consider leaving the Prince William County Police? (Circle one)

- \$1,000 - \$4,999 per year
- \$5,000 - \$9,999 per year
- \$10,000 or more per year
- I do not want to leave the Prince William County Police



25. **Prior** to applying or being hired with the Prince William County Police, were you a resident of Prince William County? (Circle one)
- Yes
  - No
26. **Prior** to applying or being hired with the Prince William County Police, where was your primary residence: (Circle one)
- I lived in the County prior to applying or being hired.
  - Within 10 miles of Prince William County
  - 11 – 20 miles of Prince William County
  - 21 – 30 miles of Prince William County
  - 31 – 40 miles of Prince William County
  - Greater than 41 miles from Prince William County
27. Are you currently residing in Prince William County?
- Yes
  - No
28. What is the biggest challenge to you moving into Prince William County or if already a resident, continuing to live in Prince William County? (Circle one)
- Lack of affordable housing.
  - Area too congested.
  - Don't want to live in the community I police.
  - Prefer to be in a more rural setting and commute in.
  - Other

29. Were you residing in another state prior to being employed with the Prince William County Police?
- Yes
  - No
30. Did you move to this state because of being offered a position with the Prince William County Police?
- Yes
  - No
31. If provided the choice, I would live (or remain living) in Prince William County.
- Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree
32. How long do you plan on working for the Prince William County Police? (Circle one)
- Complete training, gain my law enforcement certifications then leave
  - Until another agency calls and offers me a job
  - Less than 2 years
  - 3 years to 5 years then leave
  - Have not really thought about it
  - Plan on retiring with this agency

33. If in the above question (#32) you answered that you are not planning to stay with this agency, what employment may you take? (Circle one)
- With another (**non-federal or local**) law enforcement agency
  - With another (**federal**) law enforcement agency
  - Private sector job
  - Not planning on working
  - Do not know my next move but I know I will not be staying here.
34. Are you a former member of the armed forces (active duty)?
- Yes
  - No
35. Are you currently a reservist with the armed forces?
- Yes
  - No

APPENDIX B

# AGENCY REPUTATION

Table 1. To What Extent did the Reputation of the PWCPD have in Choosing

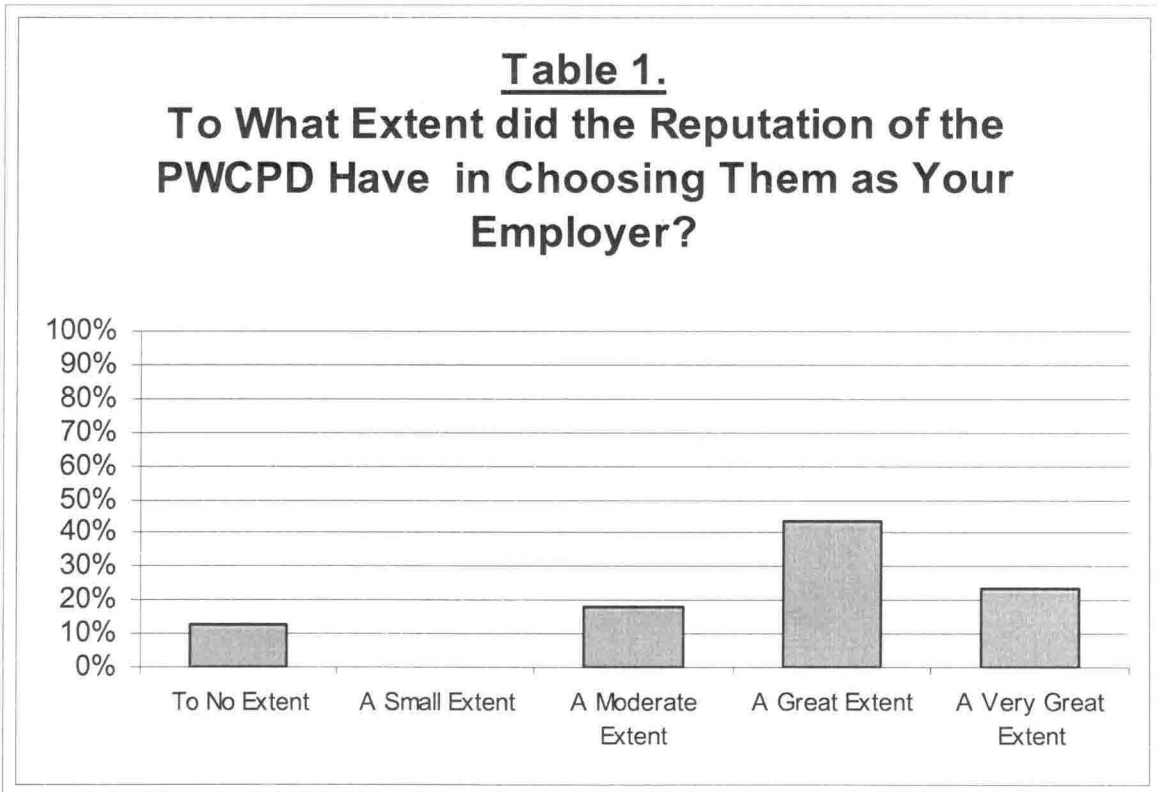


Table 2. How Long do you Plan on Working for the PWCPD?

## PROJECTED TENURE BY EMPLOYEE

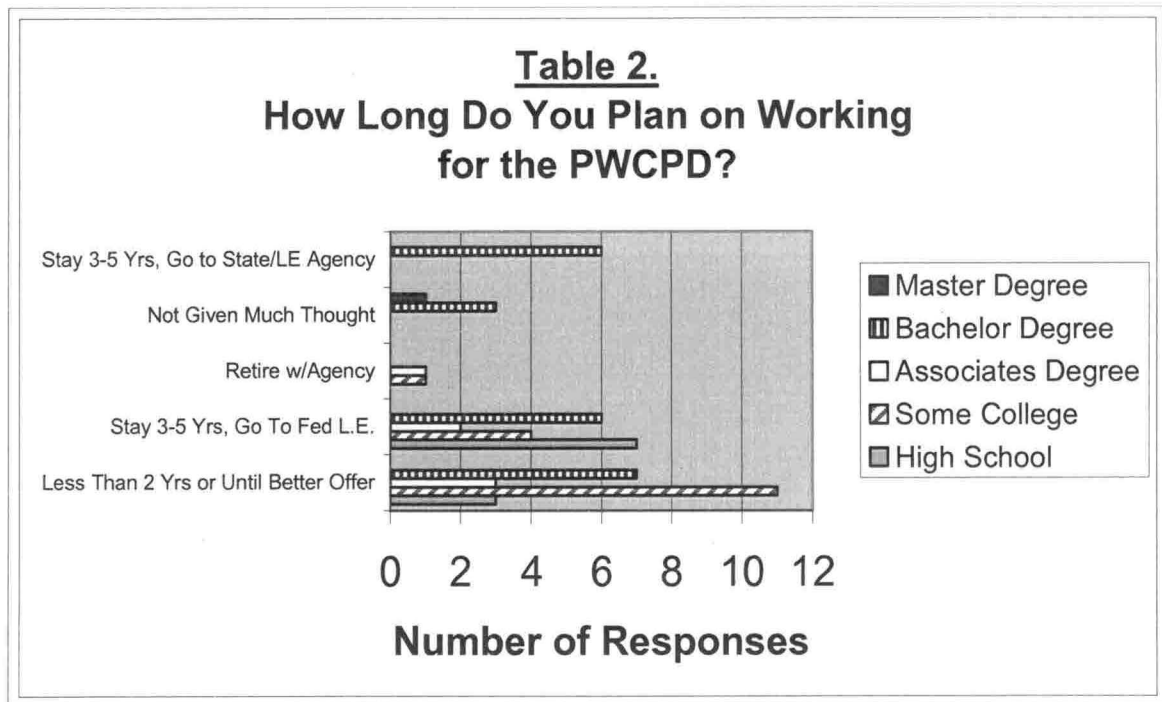


Table 3. Where officers may go if they leave PWCPD

## WHERE OFFICERS MAY GO IF THEY LEAVE

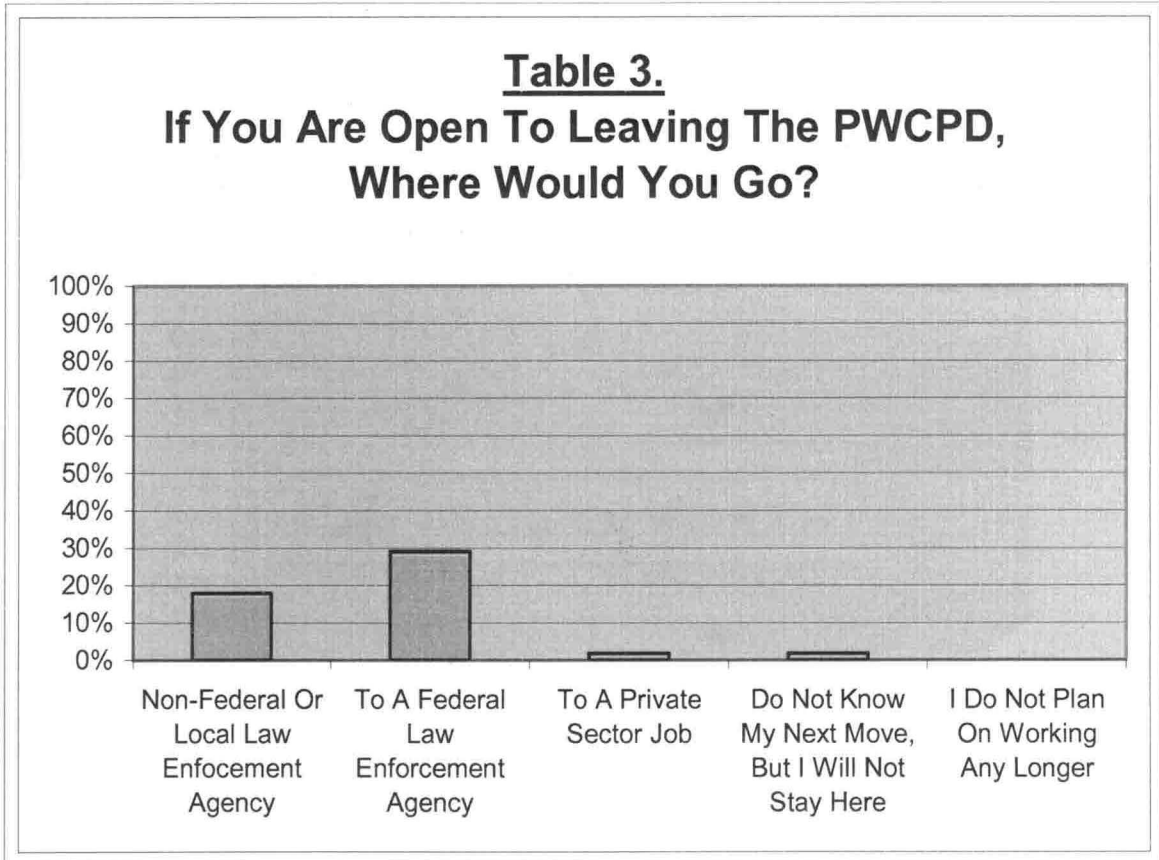




Table 4. Hiring Process

## HIRING PROCESS

**Table 4.**  
**Did The Hiring Process And Its Length Of Time Influence Which Agency You Chose For Employment?**

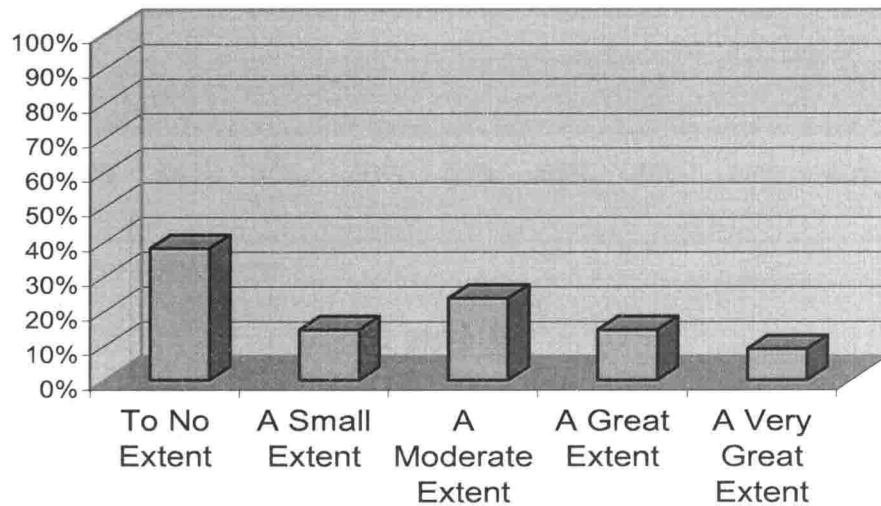


Table 5. Applications with other Agencies

## APPLICATIONS WITH OTHER AGENCIES

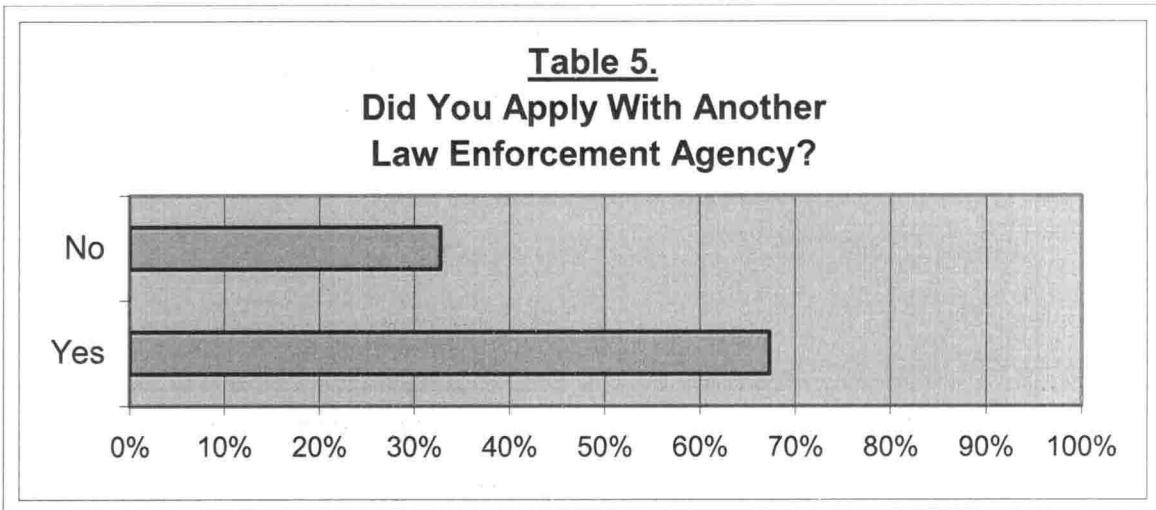


Table 6. Offers in Law Enforcement

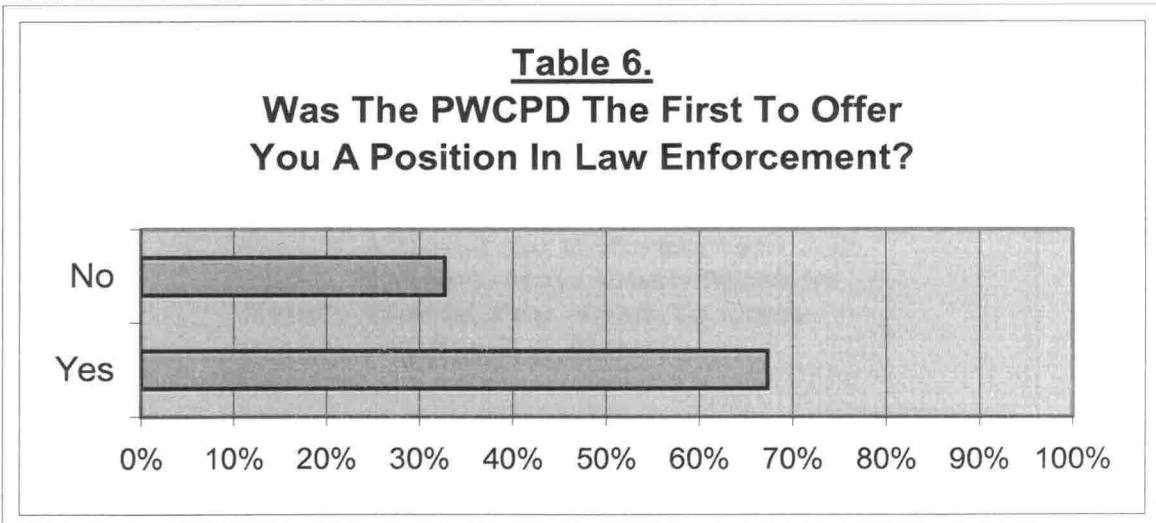


Table 7. Money Matters

## HOW MUCH MONEY WOULD IT TAKE TO LEAVE

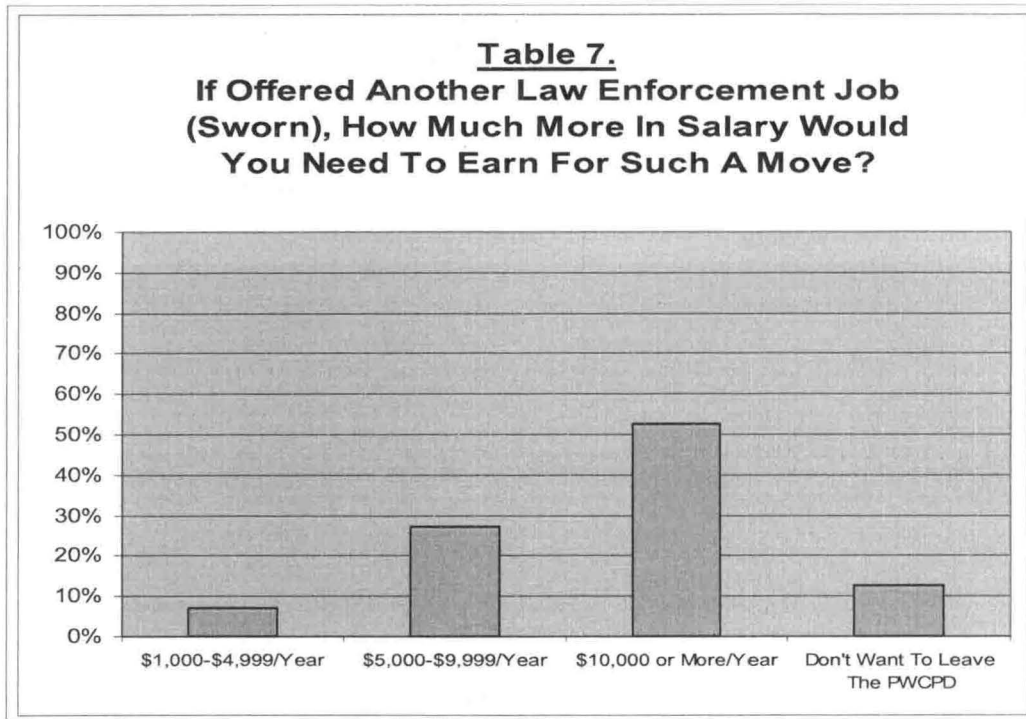


Table 8. Increase in Salary

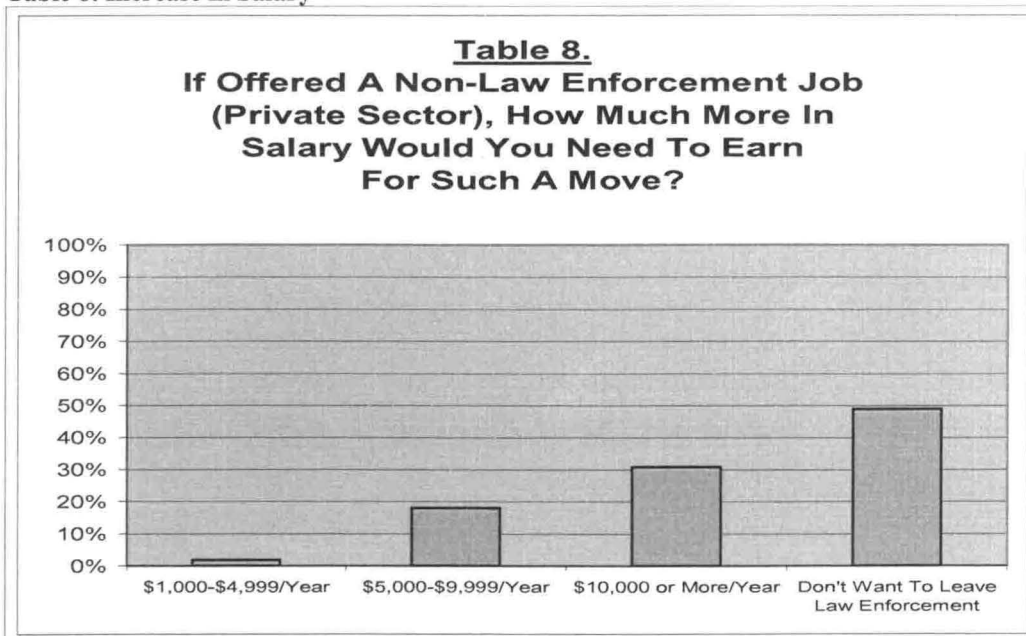


Table 9. Money to Leave

# HOW MUCH MONEY WOULD IT TAKE TO LEAVE, con't.

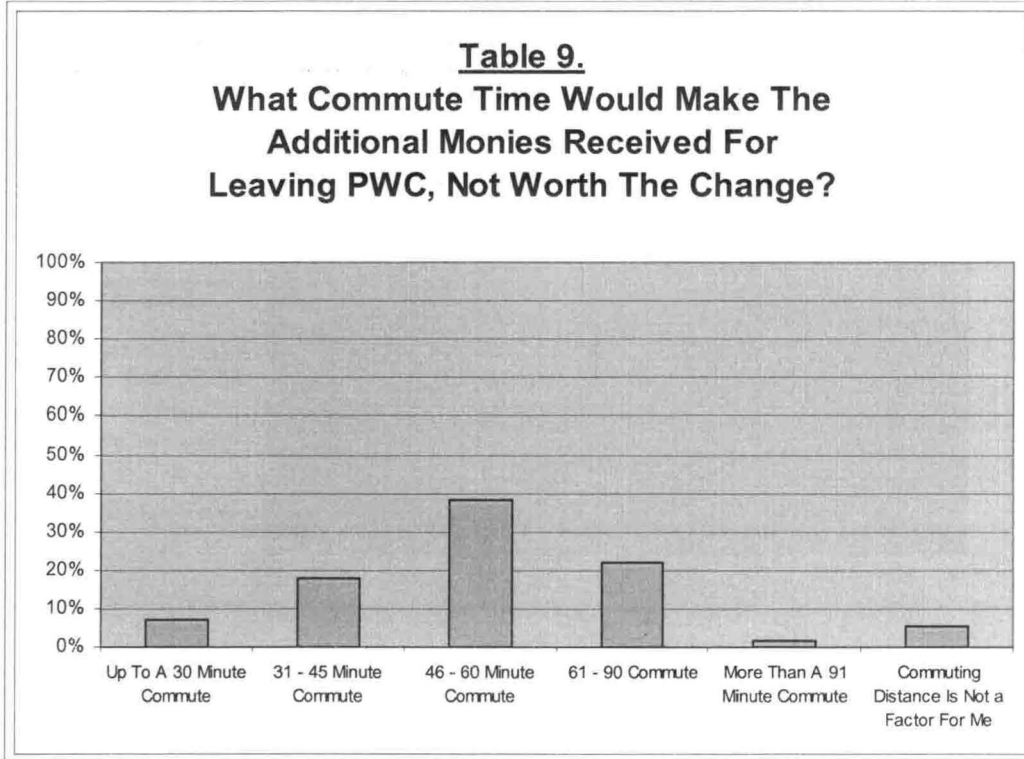


Table 10. Living/Working Challenges

## CHALLENGES TO LIVING / WORKING IN THE AREA

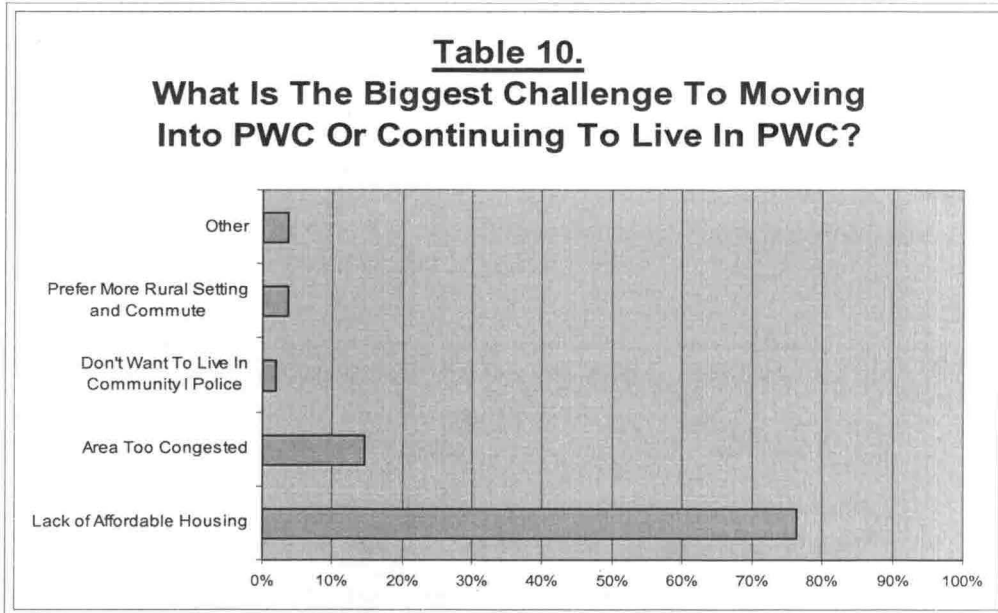


Table 11. Remaining in Prince William County

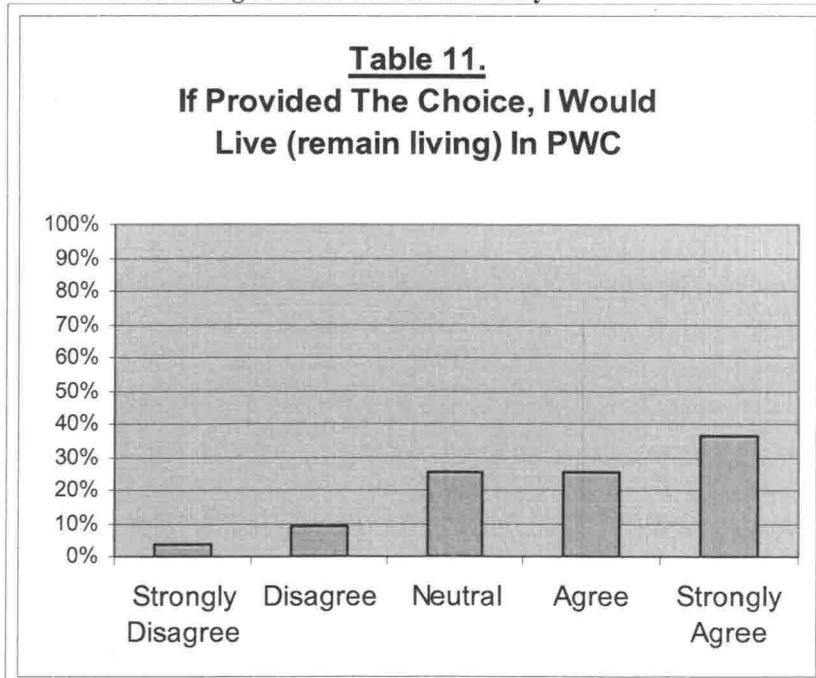
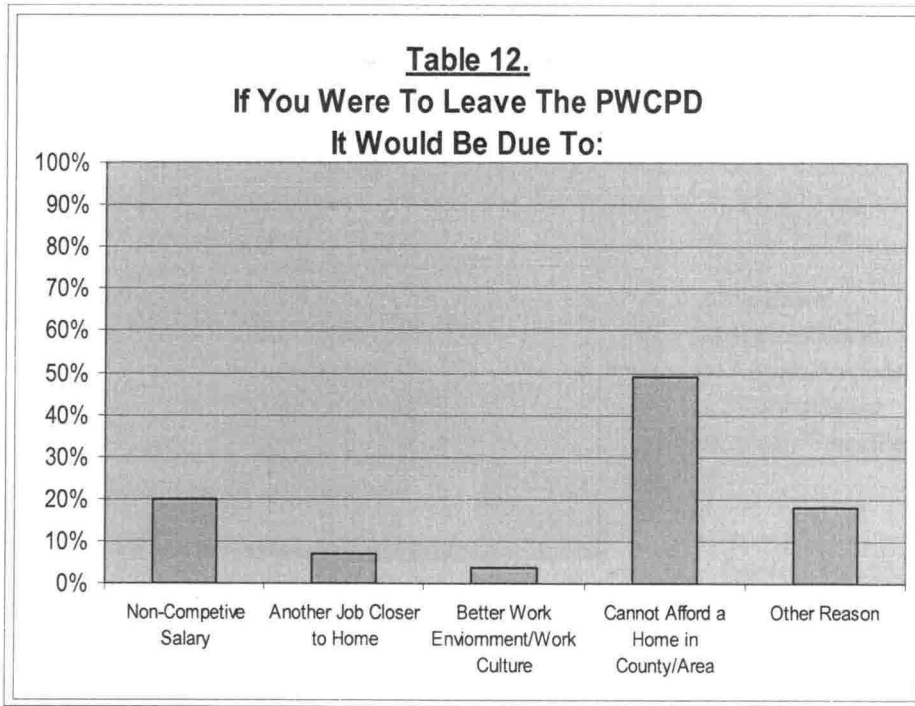


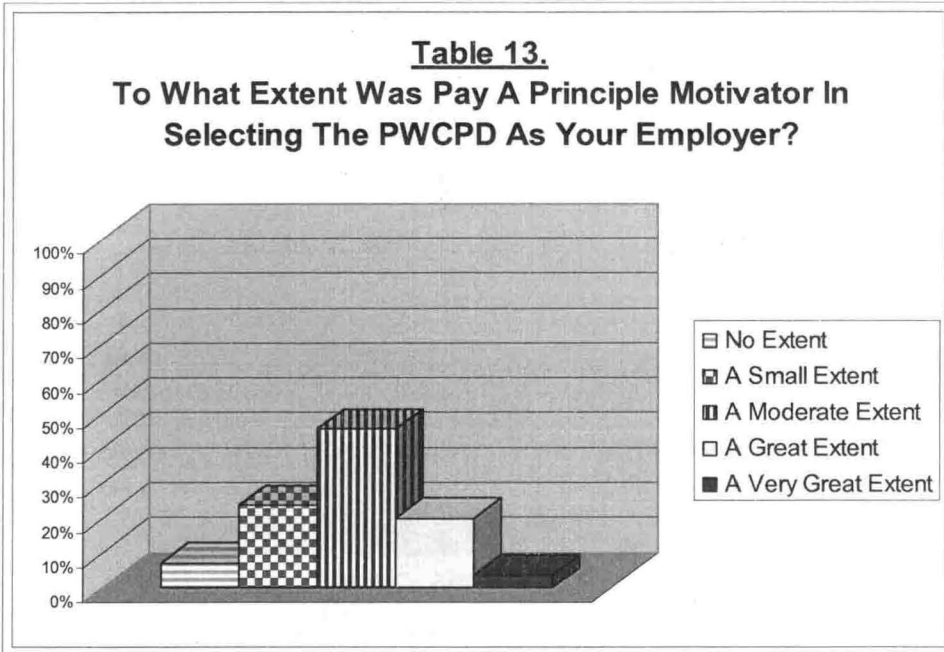
Table 12. Leaving PWCPD

## CHALLENGES TO LIVING / WORKING IN THE AREA, con't.



**Table 13. Pay and Benefits**

## PAY AND BENEFITS



**Table 14. Satisfied with Pay**

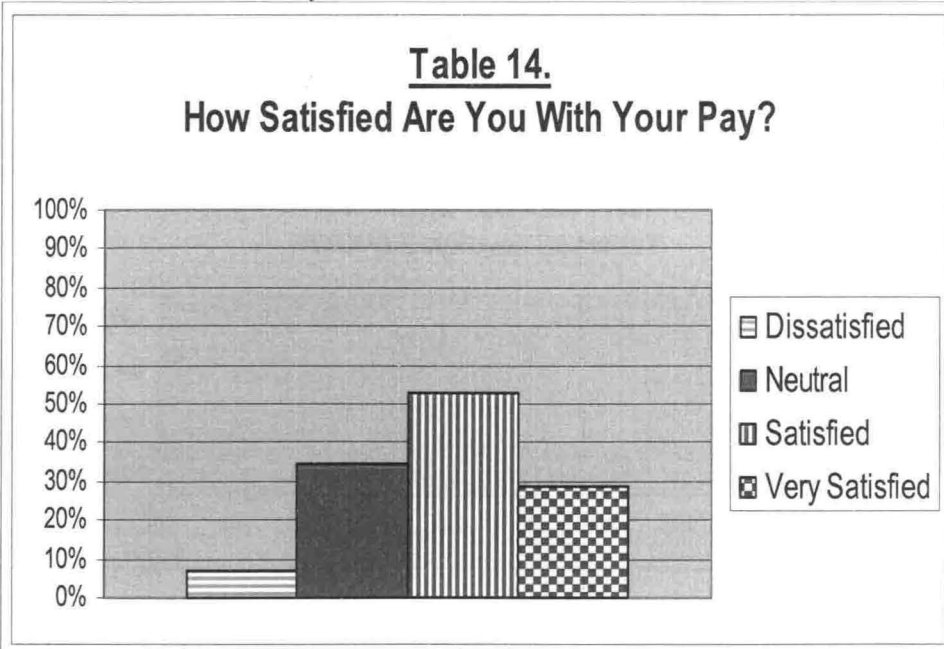


Table 15. Employee Benefits

## PAY AND BENEFITS, con't.

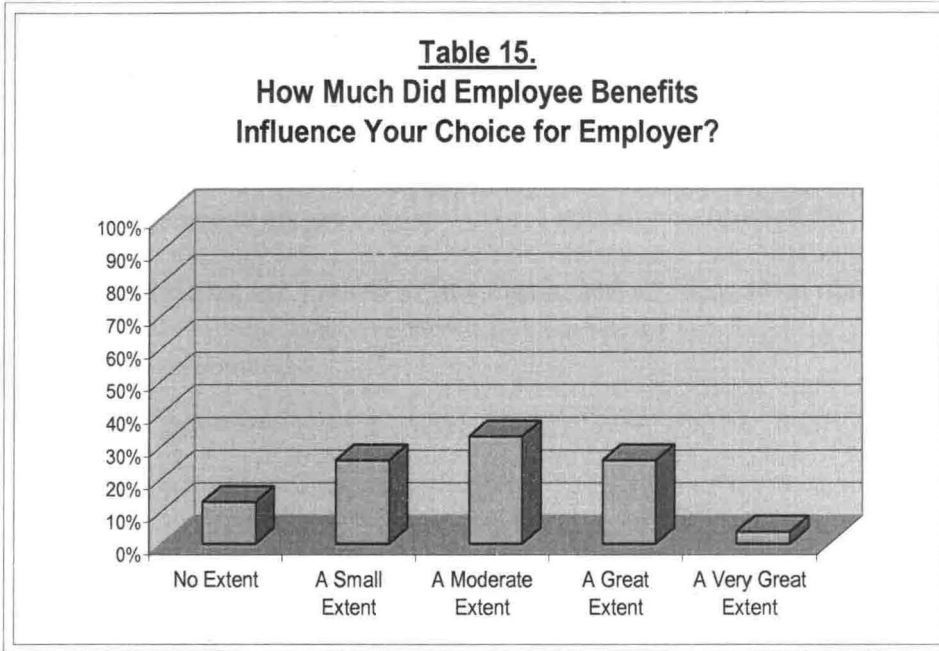
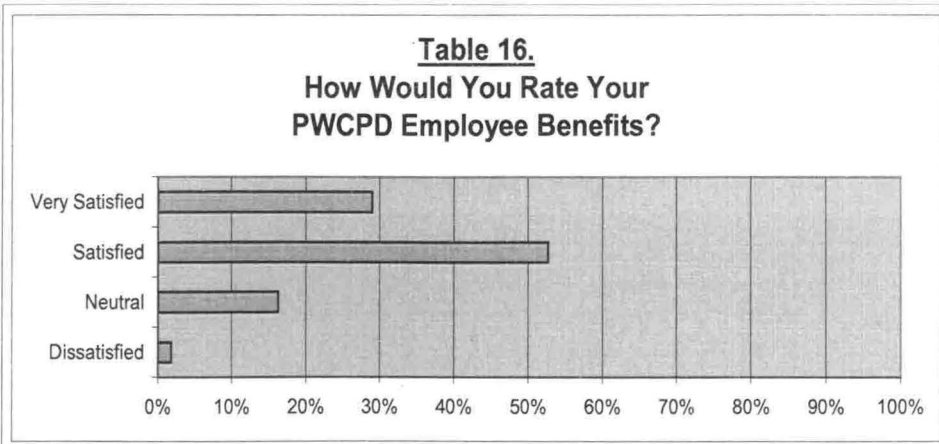



Table 16. PWCPD Employee Benefits





### **Pledge**

On my honor, I hereby affirm that this work was created by me, the writing and conclusions are entirely my own, I actually completed the research (surveys, interviews, etc.) noted in this thesis, and all ideas from others are properly cited and referenced.

Signed: 

## **Biography**

First Sergeant Scott Kearns has been employed with the Prince William County Police Department for over ten years. Prior to his employment with Prince William, he worked two years for the United States Capitol Police in Washington, D.C. He is currently assigned to Police Personnel as the Recruiting and Selection Supervisor, with past department assignments to include: patrol officer, Basic Training Supervisor and Basic Training Manager. First Sergeant Kearns completed his undergraduate course work at George Mason University, graduating in 2003. Graduate course work was accomplished through the University of Richmond where he graduated in 2007, with a Master of Human Resource Management.