



Policy Advisory Report Proposal: Metro Nashville Police Department Hiring Procedures

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) requested that the Community Oversight Board (COB) review the hiring procedures for Metro Nashville Police Department (MNPd) in response to an officer being hired after previously being involved in a shooting of a Black man, Deangelo Knox, on October 2, 2018, which the family of the victim believes is unjustified. This proposal aims to examine the criteria used to disqualify applicants to the police department, particularly in relation to incidents of violence and use of force.

Background

The application and hiring process for becoming a law enforcement officer varies by police department, this includes employment standards and disqualification criteria. According to MNPd, their hiring process takes 4 to 8 months on average.¹

MNPd employment standards cover a range of qualifications required to apply to become a police officer. These employment standards include minimum education, employment, or active military experience; a minimum of 21 years of age; having not been convicted of or pleaded guilty to or entered a plea of nolo contendere to any felony charge or to any violations of any federal or state laws or city ordinances relating to force, violence, theft, dishonesty, gambling, liquor or controlled substance; all arrest history should be expunged and expungement paperwork must be included with the personal history statement; acceptable driving record; honorable discharge from military service; physical suitability; and the standards set by the Tennessee Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (POST) and adopted by the Tennessee General Assembly.²

In addition to the above standards, the law enforcement officer certification requirements that are outlined in the POST Rules include having good moral character as determined by a thorough investigation conducted by the employing agency; and/or the POST Commission; and having been certified by a Tennessee Licensed Health Care Provider qualified in the psychiatric or psychological fields as being free from any impairment, as set forth in the current edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association at the time of the examination, that would, in the professional judgment of the

¹ "Frequently Asked Questions About Becoming a Police Officer" (Metro Nashville Police Department, 2020), <https://www.nashville.gov/Police-Department/Get-Involved/Become-a-Police-Officer/Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx>.

² "Police Officer Employment Standards" (Metro Nashville Police Department, 2020), <https://www.nashville.gov/Police-Department/Get-Involved/Become-a-Police-Officer/Employment-Standards.aspx>.

examiner, affect the person's ability to perform an essential function of the job, with or without a reasonable accommodation.³

To verify compliance with MNPd and POST standards, MNPd conducts background investigations of all candidates. These investigations may disqualify applicants if they do not meet the departmental and POST standards.

The NAACP raised concerns about the standards used to vet applicants in response to the hiring of Officer Nathan Glass who, while working as a security guard at The Pharmacy in East Nashville, shot Deangelo Knox on October 2, 2018.⁴ The officer was hired on March 16, 2019 by MNPd, a month after the District Attorney's office decided that Glass had acted in self-defense and the case should not proceed to the grand jury.⁵ After the NAACP's involvement, Officer Nathan Glass was decommissioned on October 27, 2020 by Interim Chief John Drake after learning that prosecutors were reviewing the 2018 shooting case again. On November 12, 2020, Glass was indicted on one charge of second-degree murder for his alleged involvement in the fatal shooting of Mr. Knox. Glass' bond was set at \$50,000 and he was released from Davidson County Sheriff's Office custody on the afternoon of November 12, 2020.⁶

This incident raises broader questions about the role of background investigations and the types of past events that are disqualifying for employment as a police officer. This report will assess the background investigation process broadly and how MNPd determines whether applicants should move forward in the hiring process.

Proposed Study

This report will focus on Metro Nashville Police Department's hiring process, specifically the criteria and investigations used to disqualify applicants in relation to incidents of violence and use of force. We will focus on two main questions:

1. What are the criteria for background checks and how are they conducted in the recruitment process?

³ "Rules of The Tennessee Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission" (Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (POST), October 22, 2014), https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/commerce/documents/post/resources/POST_Rules.pdf.

⁴ Joshua Cole, "NAACP Asks for Homicide to Be Investigated as Hate Crime" (WSMV, October 20, 2020), https://www.wsmv.com/news/davidson_county/naacp-asks-for-homicide-to-be-investigated-as-hate-crime/article_32f371a0-12f5-11eb-bdde-b3c84be31933.html.

⁵ Harriet Wallace, "Family of Man Killed in 2018 Sues Decommissioned Officer, Calls for His Termination," *Fox 17 WZTV Nashville*, November 4, 2020, <https://fox17.com/news/local/family-of-man-killed-in-2018-sues-decommissioned-officer-calls-for-his-termination>.

⁶ Mariah Timms and Brinley Hineman, "Security Guard Who Later Became a Police Officer Faces Murder Charge in 2018 Pharmacy Shooting" (Tennessean, November 12, 2020), <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2020/11/12/pharmacy-shooting-man-faces-second-degree-murder-charges-two-years-later/3761211001/>.

- a. Specifically, as it relates to past incidents of violence or use of force what are disqualifiers for employment eligibility?
2. What are the processes for investigating potential biases of recruits prior to employment by MNPd?

Methodology

The Metro Nashville Community Oversight (MNCO) research team will review Metro Nashville Police Department policies and procedures related to the hiring process for sworn officers. Specifically, this review will focus on the background investigation process and what criteria is used to disqualify applicants before they begin training at the MNPd Academy. Additional information about this process may be acquired through interviews with law enforcement officials from MNPd and/or accreditation agencies such as POST. MNCO will also review existing research and literature on police recruitment and applicant background investigations on a national level.

Broader Impact

This review of MNPd's hiring policies and procedures may result in recommendations for improvements to the current background investigation process used for the hiring of sworn officers. This type of review could help prevent the future hiring of individuals who are unfit to serve as police officers in Nashville and Davidson County due to past incidents of violence or use of force. By reviewing disqualification criteria, this research may also help contribute to a larger discussion around current requirements for becoming a law enforcement officer and whether they present an unjust barrier to the profession for certain individuals.

References

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