

MEMO

To: Chief, Pete Tyler

From: Deputy Chief, Dennis Naylor

Date: February 26, 2019

Re: Recommended Emphasis Towards Mindfulness Based Resilience Training

One of the six established “pillars” for our profession, as defined within the final report of President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, is that of *Officer Wellness and Safety*. Recommendation 6.2 of this pillar states that, “law enforcement agencies should promote safety and wellness at every level of the organization.”¹ In accordance with this finding, along with the fact that nationally, officer suicides are exceeding line-of-duty deaths, I strongly advocate that we adjust our training model with an ardent focus on the pressing topic of officer wellness.

Policing regularly exposes officers to trauma-based situations, thus chronic stress, PTSD, depression, risky behavior, obesity, anxiety, addiction, and suicide are all possible results.² Studies show that within the first year in law enforcement, a police officer has a 90% chance of being exposed to an acute trauma event and by year three, the likelihood rises to 97%.³ Also, the recurrent stresses and exposure to trauma causes the release of cortisol into the bloodstream, making one prone to a host of health issues, including cardiac arrest.⁴ Some studies show that an officer’s lifespan is decreased by seven to ten years; moreover, a study conducted in Buffalo, NY found the life expectancy of an officer to be “22 years shorter than their civilian counterparts.”⁵

To avert this, we must consider approaches which holistically address the wellbeing of our officers, and Mindfulness Based Resilience Training does exactly that. This training is

effective because it “trains officers to cultivate resiliency while enhancing their performance through training in self-awareness, self-regulation, and compassion.”⁶ The mindfulness component assists officers in bringing their attention, inclusive of their emotions, to the present moment, which ultimately improves actions and response.⁷ The resilience component explores how we recover from trauma, with the hope of remaining a “healthy human” in the process.⁸

One of our greatest challenges will be to change what has become the cultural standards of policing. The detached and hardened persona does not produce a healthy individual and what officers are told they *should* be, starting in the academy, does not align with positive mental health and wellbeing.⁹ Regrettably, the way many officers confront stresses and trauma is with alcohol.¹⁰ MBRT, however, focuses instead on the mind, body, and spirit connection to address those issues, thereby allowing officers to become a superior service to themselves and others.¹¹

Mindfulness training can be as easy as stopping to breathe, which creates a calmer and more focused approach to each situation. A pioneer in mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zin, paired science, medicine, and psychology with Buddhist meditation, thus creating positive pathways towards health and wellness.¹² Studies conducted with officers engaged in MBRT found that they consumed less alcohol, felt less burned-out, and had fewer aggressive feelings.¹³ Additionally, Kami Chavis, the director of criminal justice programs at North Carolina’s Wake Forest University School of Law, found that mindfulness can reduce unnecessary violence through self-regulation.¹⁴ A study led by Central Michigan University in 2016 found that mindfulness also reduced implicit bias by developing compassion for others, and for oneself.¹⁵

A separate study conducted in 2016 further supports the value of MBRT. In this study, 43 law enforcement officers spent eight weeks in a mindfulness training regimen. At the completion of the training, those officers reported less anxiety, lower fatigue, less stress, and

slept better.¹⁶ Richard Goerling, the founder of the “Mindful Badge Initiative,” articulated that if an officer is depressed or struggling to control themselves, it should not be expected that he or she will have the capacity to be empathetic towards another person. Correspondingly, if an officer is unable to self-regulate, then it must be acknowledged that a substantial predictor exists for an undesirable outcome in any situation in which that officer is involved.¹⁷

An additional point to consider is that the mind regularly goes to a negative bias or negative thought pattern, which is referred to as the “Default Mode Network.”¹⁸ Although this is a natural process, it has negative implications. Mindfulness through meditation, however, creates awareness, which interrupts the negative thoughts, thus creating a more positive outlook.

With the safety and wellbeing of our officers being one of our highest priorities, I view MBRT as a vehicle to promote that wellness. MBRT will compliment our tactical training by creating higher levels of awareness, and while under stress, officers will perform decisively, and in an optimal manner.¹⁹ Since mindfulness creates a more compassionate and empathetic mindset, it will improve our officers’ exchanges with all of those with whom they interact.²⁰ Most importantly, it is well-established that the stressors of law enforcement are linked to a myriad of mental and physical health issues. This simple training of breathing and being present can create a way for officers to stay healthy while in-service, and during their retirement years.

To commence our Department’s integration into Mindfulness Based Resilience Training, I will address every platoon at roll-call and discuss the importance of mindfulness, meditation, breathing, and its correlation to resilience. Next, I will recommend that all members download the “Insight Timer” App on their smartphones so they will have a tool to support the practice of mediation.²¹ I also recommend that we cycle all officers through “Blue Courage” or “Valor for Blue” training within the next twelve months to provide a more in-depth understanding of the

factors related to their own wellness. Prior to the year's end, I further suggest that we expand our peer support program to include at least two more officers, and an outside clinician. Lastly, I advocate for our West-End Substation to be designated as an authorized location for brief, mindful meditation for on-duty officers. This space can also be used to host classes in yoga and guided meditation as our program evolves. I am confident that that these strategies will serve as a wise investment towards the health and wellbeing of our officers, now and in the future.

References

¹ President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. 2015. Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Published 2015

² Mindful Policing- A New Approach to Officer Wellness and Safety Training and Education; Tejada, Jennifer and Goerling, Richard; The Police Chief Magazine; Nov. 2017: p. 48-51; Electronic Version p. 3

³ Ibid p. 5

⁴Ibid p. 3

⁵ Mindful Policing: The Future of Force; mindful.org <https://www.mindful.org/mindful-policing-the-future-of-force/> Yeoman, Barry June 14, 2017

⁶ Mindful Policing- A New Approach to Officer Wellness and Safety Training and Education; Tejada, Jennifer and Goerling, Richard; The Police Chief Magazine; Nov. 2017 p. 48-51; Electronic Version p. 4

⁷ Ibid p. 8

⁸ Presentation 6.1 Spotlight Interview- Mindfulness and Policework. LEPSL 500 Critical Issues in Law Enforcement and Public Safety. Fritsvold, Erik Dr. and Tejada, Jennifer 2m35s-3m07s

⁹ Ibid 4m11s-4m40s

¹⁰ Ibid 11m05s-11m25s

¹¹Ibid 17m35s-17m45s

¹² Mindful Leadership- National Police Foundation Tejada, Jennifer

¹³ Mindful Policing: The Future of Force; mindful.org <https://www.mindful.org/mindful-policing-the-future-of-force/> Yeoman, Barry June 14, 2017

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Mindful Policing- A New Approach to Officer Wellness and Safety Training and Education; Tejada, Jennifer and Goerling, Richard; The Police Chief Magazine; Nov. 2017 p. 48-51; Electronic Version p. 8, 9

¹⁶ Presentation 6.1 Spotlight Interview- Mindfulness and Policework. LEPSL 500 Critical Issues in Law Enforcement and Public Safety. Fritsvold, Erik Dr. and Tejada, Jennifer 7m30s-7m55s

¹⁷ Mindful Policing: The Future of Force; mindful.org <https://www.mindful.org/mindful-policing-the-future-of-force/> Yeoman, Barry June 14, 2017

¹⁸ Presentation 6.1 Spotlight Interview- Mindfulness and Policework. LEPSL 500 Critical Issues in Law Enforcement and Public Safety. Fritsvold, Erik Dr. and Tejada, Jennifer 12m28s to 13m35s

¹⁹ Ibid 14m30s-14m52s

²⁰ Mindful Leadership- National Police Foundation Tejada, Jennifer

²¹ Presentation 6.1 Spotlight Interview- Mindfulness and Policework. LEPSL 500 Critical Issues in Law Enforcement and Public Safety. Fritsvold, Erik Dr. and Tejada, Jennifer 19m40s