

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Citizen's Police Academy**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
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**By  
Rolando I. Belmares**

**State of Texas Board of Pharmacy  
Police Department  
Austin, Texas  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Citizen police academies have been in existence in the United States since 1985 when the Orlando Florida Police Department began its first academy. Shortly after, the State of Texas began its first citizen's police academy at the Missouri City Police Department (TCPAAA, n.d.). Now, there are hundreds of citizen police academies all over the United States. This community oriented police program has proven to be a highly successful program that has done more for policing in bringing law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve closer together in ways that were never imaginable. Citizens participating in the citizen's police academy get a hands-on perspective into law enforcement. Learning and working alongside police officers for the duration of the academy and beyond helps participants understand police policies and procedures. Graduates of the academy have an overwhelming positive attitude of the police department and in most cases support the agency in raising funds to help purchase much needed equipment and sponsor law enforcement training events. The positive outcomes far outweigh any issues some may rise on the costs and liability concerns.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction .....	1
Position .....	4
Counter Arguments .....	7
Recommendation .....	9
References .....	12

## INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement agencies have implemented several programs to educate community on the role of law enforcement. The role and duties of law enforcement has evolved to have a greater impact on the community they served. Citizen's police academies (CPA) are a community police oriented program that provides an in-depth insight and understanding into the inner workings of law enforcement agencies to the general public. Given the recent climate of relationships between police departments and the communities they serve, this program plays a vital role in bridging that gap between law enforcement and the negative perceptions from the community that has plagued the profession of law enforcement today.

Community policing has been a hot topic among police departments for many years. Bobinsky stated, "A community that is more involved with its police agency translates into a community more willing to cooperate with its police" (as cited in Blum, 2003, p. 2). Community policing is defined as "A philosophy of full service personalized policing, where the same officer patrols and works in the same area on a permanent basis, from a decentralized place, working in a proactive partnership with citizens to identify and solve problems" (Bertus, 1996, para. 8)

CPA differ from law enforcement agency to agency, but the purpose remains the same. Law enforcement agencies have a unique culture within its career field. A brotherhood of sorts that we are a part of something much bigger than ourselves and the code of silence. Wetendorf (n.d.) stated "The police uniform, badge and gun are universal symbols of power and authority. When the individual puts on the uniform, he assumes the authority that goes with it. He expects and commands obedience and

respect from the public” (para. 2). The principles of the code of silence goes a step further in the law enforcement culture. The term “thin blue line” is a term that vividly describes the nature of law enforcement. Law enforcement officers believe that they are the keepers of the peace and is the barrier between chaos and control. As a result, there’s a blue line culture that provide the foundation for the many beliefs and principles that seen in law enforcement.

These principles state whenever a fellow officer has conducted themselves in a manner not representative of the police department or even violated the law, that you do not say anything or tell anyone. Other unwritten rules of the code of silence include, as Wetendorf (n.d.) described, do not speak to anyone, do not answer any questions, and if necessary, keep answers to a minimum, be vague in all answers and remember the fifth amendment and say that no details can be remembered. Additionally, answer only the question asked, do not give details, deny all accusations, and say "I don't remember, I didn't see that, or I don't know." These unwritten rules hinder the credibility of all law enforcement. There are many different incidents that occurred in law enforcement that have a negative result in terms of the thin blue line.

A CPA can be traced back to 1977 in Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, England (TCPAAA,n.d.). The academy was originally called the police night school. The reason this night school was started was to allow the general public to familiarize themselves with the police department, their functions and daily activities. The response from the public was overwhelming and this program quickly became an instant success.

It was not until 1985 that the concept of the police night school, which was later renamed the CPA came to the United States. The Orlando, Florida Police department created and developed their own citizen's police academy to model the original night school in England. The objective of the Orlando Police Department's citizen's police academy was to reduce crime with the assistance of the community members. The need for stronger community involvement was the drive behind the implantation of the CPA (TCPAAA, n.d.).

The first recorded CPA was started in Missouri City, Texas in 1986 at the Missouri City Police Department. Chief Ennis, from Missouri City, Texas police department held the first citizen's police academy class which included a class of half males and half females. The youngest participant was a seventeen-year-old student and the oldest participant of the class was a seventy-year-old retiree who wanted to begin a neighborhood watch program in his neighborhood. The citizen's police academy program has been around the state of Texas for 31 years (TCPAAA, n.d.).

Over those years, CPAs have developed into a powerful tool that police departments utilize to assist them in many different aspects. The thesis that is proposed in this paper is that all law enforcement agencies should develop and provide a CPA to their community. The purpose is to provide a direct connection to the positive support that police departments receive from community members once they have attended and graduated their citizen's police academy course. Personal opinions tend to change; media influence tends to diminish once they experience this unique opportunity within the police department.

## POSITION

Citizen's police academies are a great community police-oriented program. Brewster (2005) described most participants and graduates of a citizen's police academy are positive, and they have a great experience and develop and maintain a positive attitude towards the police department. The curriculum of the CPA may vary from department to department to suit the needs of their community and the many aspects and divisions within their police department. Most academies will usually offer the following basic topics, patrol procedures, criminal and traffic law, criminal investigations, specialized weapons and tactics (SWAT), firearms and safety, crime prevention strategies, police communications, use of force, taser, police K-9, report writing, self-defense, civilian response to active shooter events and a certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). These topics are an everyday part of the law enforcement officer's daily duty. This program is not designed to train the participant how to become a police officers, but rather to show them amount of training, stress, critical thinking tactics that police officers have to task themselves with on a daily basis.

In 2000, Stone and Champeny conducted a study at the Austin, Texas police department where CPA graduates established a greater positive opinion of the police department and contributed a lot more in personnel and community crime prevention methods (Breen, 2007). Graduates of the CPA receive a satisfying experience of their police departments and with the police officers that service them. Knowledge that citizens would never have had access to are presented to them and they are not only able to learn about it, but are able to physically experience it. The positive impact this CPA program has instilled on the graduates is more than any graduate can imagine.

Another aspect that is clear about the graduates is they have been grateful for the opportunity to be a part of such a successful program which has helped them to make informed decision instead of a one sided media report.

Citizen's police academies allow community members to experience what and why police officers do what they do. Sir Francis Bacon (1996) stated "Knowledge is power." This philosophy has been tested and withstood the test of times. This comprehensive, hands-on CPA curriculum is like no other. Community members can experience the daily life of the police officer's that serve them. This is also tailored for the needs and current issues that the particular community is experiencing. Larger communities may experience more major crimes like homicide, aggravated assaults and gang activity, while smaller communities engage in more conservative crimes such as thefts, car burglaries and barking dog complaints. Nevertheless, crime is present in all communities in one way, shape, or form. Ideals, strategies, and approaches to detour such crimes will also be different from community to community.

Leadership from those communities, such as elected officials and the police and fire department, play a vital role in those differences to prevent and detour crime. Communication is a key component in bridging that ever-increasing gap between law enforcement and the community. Powers stated, "Educating the public is key to effective crime prevention, residents have to feel that the police are on their side as a partner" (Britt, 2013, para. 3). He continued by saying, "Being dedicated or committed to helping residents and being responsive to their concerns are key to establishing working partnerships" (Britt, 2013, para.3). Although lectures are a part of the program, hands-on activities are also provided. Included is weapon safety and going to a firing range



and being able to shoot the same guns officers' use in the line of duty, such as handguns, shotguns and automatic rifles.

CPA participants are given the opportunity to drive a police car and actually pull a car over in a mock scenario. During the criminal investigations portion of the academy, participants get the opportunity to fingerprint other classmates and are part of a mock crime scene where they are charged with trying to solve the crime at hand with the evidence that is presented in the scenario. Self-defense for personal protection is also a part of the CPA to provide each individual some skills to protect themselves or their families in an event they would find themselves in an unfortunate situation where those skills would prove to be successful.

Civilian response to active shooter events (CRASE) is an important aspect of today's society that all civilians should be accustomed to. This course is designed and built on the avoid, deny, defend (ADD) strategy that provides civilians with strategies, guidance and a proven plan for surviving an active shooter event, whether it be in a school, church, mall, park or a place of employment. All these are instances where the CPA participant learn about the law enforcement profession.

The other side of this equation is the police officers that teach these courses. Community members who participate in the CPA typically spend three to four hours each week for around twelve to thirteen weeks the duration of this academy. This is great opportunity for participants are able to get to know the police officers that serve them. Time to work one-on-one with the officer, build a rapport and a connection on a personal level. Viewing the police officers on a human level, not of authority and power,

but as equals, having a family and children. A perspective that are not easily seen or understood.

## **COUNTER ARGUMENTS**

One counter argument to the success of CPA are that CPAs are too expensive to provide to the community. Police departments across the United States have seen in some cases major budget cuts. Police departments have an ever-increasing call load as the community members call for assistance more often. Even though, across the board, policing is one of the cost of any city, county or state entity, police departments are still looking for ways to reduce costs and balance programs such as citizen police academies and other community oriented policing programs.

Gascon and Foglesong (2010) described one obvious response to escalating police expenditure is to cut costs. Many police departments have become quite skilled at detecting and eliminating unnecessary or redundant costs and unneeded programs and equipment. Calls for service are certainly on the rise including calls for mental health and drug and alcohol violations. Deputy Chief Leingang said “the calls for service have increased about 17 percent from this time last year,” (Berlinger, 2016, para. 6).

Layoffs in law enforcement have always been rare, but due to budget and tax cuts. Crepeau (2017) described how police officers were being placed on leave and laid off after taxes in their community have been cut. Police officers are being laid off, diminishing the police protection service they can provide to their community. Costs of training and equipment have played a large role in the increasing costs.

Another concern is that CPAs use too much of the police departments resources and man power. The Tulalip Office of Neighborhoods (n.d) describes this issues as

community policing programs is a good philosophy and has great value, but because of the cost, that is not something law enforcement can continue to provide given the high cost and enormous amount of resources needed. The expenses that are associated with developing and providing a CPA can add up. For instance, the planning phases alone can take up to several weeks depending on the curriculum intended on. Police officers already work a forty-hour work week so anything over those initial hours most likely will be paid at time and a half. Advertisement and promotion of the CPA can be time consuming and expensive. The application process can be tedious and lengthy. Determining the acceptance criteria is something departments have to establish up front.

Location is usually the simplest to accomplish as these classes are usually held in the police department at no extra costs. Items such as t-shirts, name tags, curriculum work books, are just a few of the additional costs associated with this community oriented police program. Meals, refreshments and drinks are usually offered to the participants. This is due to most participants coming straight from work to attend the class, this can help them not having to stop and eat on such short notice.

The other items that is costly to provide a CPA is the cost of the overtime for the police officers who instruct the courses. On average, an officer can obtain three to five hours of overtime depending on the class they are instructing. Also at times, multiple officers are needed to cover a specific topic. These long hours over the twelve to thirteen-week class period can get extremely expensive.

One avenue that has been able to assist police departments on the growing costs of the CPA, are when graduates of the CPA form a CPA alumni association.

TCPAAA (n.d.) also described the purpose of the State of Texas Alumni Associations as being dedicated in planning and hosting fund-raising events and functions to raise monies to help the police departments in the CPA coast and to purchase much needed equipment for the police department and their SWAT teams. These funds are welcomed by the police departments to help offset the costs of providing the CPA class.

Liability is always in the forefront of anything law enforcement agencies do and provide for the community. Just like any other program there is great liability that need to be considered when providing a CPA class. Braun (2017) describes a severe liability issue where a Police Officer from Punta Gorda Police Department accidentally fired the fatal shot during the firearms portion of their CPA class, participant Mary Knowlton, a seventy three-year-old retired librarian mother of two, died later at the hospital. This tragic accident where a life was taken is an example of the intense liability that is undertaken wen a police department decides to take on and provide a citizen's police academy to their community. Although these tragedies are few and far between, there is always an uncertainty when providing realistic law enforcement experiences.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The recommendation that law enforcement agencies should develop and provide a citizen's police academy to their community is a clear positive program that has real meaning and positive effects on community members and participants. Graduates of the CPA have more understating and knowledge of the inner workings of the police departments and better relationships with the police offices they serve them. As mentioned, knowledge is power and this academy allows the general community to experience hands on activities that police officers encounter on a daily basis. Attitudes

from CPA member are far more supportive of them than when they began. This community-oriented program brings to light the truth about the goals of police departments.

Unfortunately, the media plays a role in the negativity towards law enforcement agencies. Media can be a one-sided report, sometimes unintentionally and other time intentionally. The positives of providing a citizen's police academy far outweighs the issues of expenses and liability. CPA alumni associations can assist with their fundraising efforts to help supplement the costs of the academy. Funds raised have also been a great help to many of the police departments in purchasing much needed equipment for the police officers. Community members want the men and women who serve in the police department that serves them to have the best possible equipment.

Liability issues are always an obstacle to any law enforcement agency and community oriented program. The utmost safety and precautions should always be the minimum standard. The goal is for participants to have fun and enjoy the law enforcement experience. During the process, through knowledge, negative thoughts and perceptions began to change. What participants once thought they knew about police departments, is not truly reality. This has really been a great process for police departments and their police officers. Closer relationships between the police department and community members. Citizens are better informed on the daily activities of their police department. Citizens have developed personal relationship with police officers and know them on a first name basis. Mutual respect is earned from each other and hence a new bond and support is formed.

This is a critical time for law enforcement to build support and bridge the ever-widening gaps that unfortunately exist. Together through community oriented police program and law enforcement agencies on all levels from local, county and federal, a new perspective in community policing has emerged and has become a priority for most police departments and police officers. The success of the citizen's police academies across the United States has been a great tribute to the men and women in uniform and in their accomplishments in the communities they took an oath to protect and serve.

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