

REMARKS -- AS PREPARED
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL MIKE DEWINE
OPOTA COMMISSION MEETING
LONDON, OH
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Thank you for being here this morning for this special Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission meeting.

Over the past several months, officer-involved shootings and use-of-force situations across Ohio and our Nation have ended in tragedy. Improving the trust between police and the communities they serve is vital to the functioning of our state and the safety of our communities. Equally important is ensuring that officers who encounter dangerous, life-threatening situations have the knowledge, skills, and judgment necessary to react in an appropriate manner.

As we examine all aspects of this issue, it is only appropriate that we look at police training. While there are many facets of the use-of-force issue, training is certainly something that has to be looked at. You, as members of the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission, are in a unique position to do this because developing curriculum for police training comes within your jurisdiction.

Any examination of use-of-force issues must include a thorough review of the quality, availability, and practical application of peace officer training. The questions asked should include:

Is the current basic curriculum and the current advanced curriculum the best it can be?

Is the instruction and delivery of the basic curriculum also the best it can be?

Is the basic training uniform and consistent across the state?

Should there be administrative rule or statute changes to address quality control issues?

Once trained, are officers employing the techniques learned and following the guidelines of their training? Are they putting into practice the skills they have learned? Is there enough continuing education and re-enforcement of tactics already learned in the basic academy? And more specifically regarding police-involved shootings, do officers receive enough of the appropriate training in the use of deadly force?

While there has been an emphasis on what to do when faced with an active shooter, has there been enough focus on helping officers define when an "active shooter" situation exists? Does current training equip officers with the tools necessary to differentiate between an active shooter and someone who is just reported to have a gun?

In examining any of these questions, it is imperative that we also determine if officers are adequately prepared to deal with people with mental health issues. Three years ago, former Supreme Court Justice Eve Stratton and I established the Ohio Attorney General's Task Force on Criminal Justice and Mental Illness. We knew how important it is that law enforcement personnel receive proper training because, candidly, every officer will, at some point in their careers, encounter someone with a mental health condition. My office has funded and promoted programs designed to keep offenders with mental illness from cycling in and out of the criminal justice system, as well as Crisis Intervention Training designed to increase officer safety through use of de-escalation and other skills.

Still, despite efforts to provide advanced training, a more fundamental question remains: Are officers getting appropriate training in the basic curriculum? Is there enough appropriate advanced training? And ultimately, what is the best way to ensure the safety of both the officer and the person in crisis?

To help answer all of these questions, I have put together a working group of law enforcement professionals and community leaders from around the state who will delve deeply into these issues. The group will begin its work next week. I will ask the group to report back to the Commission as soon as possible. I am also asking them to keep the Commission informed as to their progress and to present final recommendations to the Commission.

I would like to take a moment to name the individuals who will serve on this advisory group:

Rev. Dr. David Cobb -- Rev. Dr. Cobb is a pastor at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Cleveland and is a very active member of the community. He studied at the University of Georgia and Luther Rice University.

Sergeant Ramon Diaz -- Sergeant Diaz works for the Delaware Police Department and helps lead the Delaware Tactical Team. He is a Regional Director of the Ohio Tactical Officers Association and has served two tours overseas in the U.S. Army Airborne Special Forces Group.

Detective Regina Dudley -- Detective Dudley has 30 years of law enforcement experience with the Columbus Police Department. She has been assigned as a patrol officer, a community relations officer, and as part of a Terrorism Early Warning Unit with the Department of Homeland Security. Detective Dudley also assists with minority recruiting and is currently assigned to Central Ohio Crime Stoppers.

Bishop Joey Johnson -- Bishop Johnson is the Organizer and Senior Pastor of The House of the Lord church in Akron. He has played a key role in organizing the Fugitive Safe Surrender Program at his church, working with the U.S. Marshals, the court system, and the Attorney General's Office. Bishop Johnson is very active in the community, leading one of Akron's largest churches for nearly 40 years.

Police Chief Joe Morbitzer -- Westerville Chief of Police Morbitzer has more than 32 years of experience as a law enforcement officer. Chief Morbitzer is also the President of the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police.

Tony Ortiz -- Mr. Ortiz is Vice President of Latino Affairs at Wright State University. In 2012, Governor Kasich appointed him to the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs. Mr. Ortiz has a great deal of experience in developing effective education programs.

Vince Peterson -- Mr. Peterson is a probation officer with the Trumbull County Adult Probation Department. He works with high-risk probation offenders and has worked on DEA drug task forces and the U.S. Marshals Violent Fugitive Task Force. Mr. Peterson is a trained hostage negotiator and is assigned to a crisis response team. He was a commissioned peace officer from 1990 to 2012. He is also the Senior Pastor of the Providence Baptist Church in Akron.

Terry Russell -- Mr. Russell is the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness for Ohio. He began his career as the Mental Health Board Director in Springfield and has lent his expertise to law enforcement many times to help improve their ability to effectively deal with persons afflicted with mental health issues.

Officer Sarah Shendy -- Officer Shendy works for the Copley Police Department. She was born and raised in an Egyptian/Muslim household and has instructed police officers on diversity and interacting with minority and Middle Eastern communities. Officer Shendy holds a master's degree in Criminal Justice with a concentration in Global Issues.

Cincinnati City Councilman Chris Smitherman -- Councilman Smitherman has been serving on the Cincinnati City Council since 2011. He is chair of the Law and Public Safety Committee. He earned a post-secondary degree in Criminal Justice from The Ohio State University. He is also a past President of the Cincinnati NAACP.

Dr. Reggie Wilkinson -- Dr. Wilkinson is the former Director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. He is a well-known expert on Mental Health. He also holds a doctorate in education from the University of Cincinnati and is a noted author on numerous criminal justice topics.

Lieutenant Colonel George Williams -- Lieutenant Colonel Williams has more than 25 years of experience with the Ohio State Highway Patrol. He completed training at Northwestern University's School of Police Staff and Command in 2004 and served in the U.S. Army.

Clark County Prosecuting Attorney Andy Wilson -- Prosecutor Wilson has been working in the Clark County Prosecutor's office since 2002 and has served as Prosecutor since 2011. He is also a Captain in the Ohio Army National Guard. Before he started his career as a prosecutor, he served as a Juvenile Court Probation Officer.

Major Daryl Wilson -- Major Wilson works for the Montgomery County Sheriff and has 25 years of experience in law enforcement. Major Wilson has worked in a Community Oriented Policing Unit and is also a Team Commander on the SWAT team.

Meigs County Sheriff Keith Wood -- Sheriff Wood has 35 years of experience as a law enforcement officer. His deputies have recently dealt with multiple situations of armed persons threatening to harm themselves or others.

Again, I want to thank the Commission for coming together today. Regarding training, OPOTA and the Commission have worked hard the past four years doubling the staff of the education & policy section, which was specifically created to address the quality of basic training curriculum. A job task analysis of peace officer basic training was completed in 2011 to validate the curriculum and ensure that it is legally defensible. And, over the last three years, you've been working to incorporate the information gathered from the task analysis results into the curriculum.

And while these efforts are significant, there is always more that can be done. The Commission's task of developing the curriculum for peace officers is of the utmost importance. Law enforcement officers have a sworn duty to protect the public. And at the same time, though, they have the right to return home safely after their shift is done.

Each May, we host a memorial service on the grounds of this Academy to honor those officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty. Every officer deserves the best possible training to minimize the risk that their name will be added to the memorial wall. I believe that this working group will be of great value in helping the Commission address the training needs of peace officers across this state and ultimately the safety of law enforcement and our communities.

Thank you.