

State of New York
Department of Correctional Services

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**PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING PROGRAM
FOR CORRECTION OFFICER TRAINEE
CANDIDATES**

2006



**Eliot Spitzer
Governor**



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PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING PROGRAM FOR CORRECTION OFFICER TRAINEE CANDIDATES 2006

OVERVIEW

This twenty-first report of the Psychological Screening Program for Correction Officer Trainee candidates summarizes the Program's activities for calendar year 2006.

A. Legislative Overview

The objective of psychologically screening Correction Officer Trainee candidates is to identify those individuals displaying psychotic disorders, serious character disorders, or other disorders which could hinder performance on the job.

The Psychological Screening Program was originally enacted as Chapter 887 of the Laws of 1983. Chapter 887 has subsequently been amended ten times. The most recent amendment was effective September 2, 2005, when the Psychological Screening Program was renewed until September 1, 2007 as per Chapter 56 (Part D) of the Laws of 2005. The enabling legislation, Section 8 of the New York State Correction Law, sunsets on September 1, 2007, unless extended. Annual reports of the activities of the Psychological Screening Unit have been generated since 1986.

B. Program Overview

1. Consultant Contract and Project Staffing Through 2006

In late 1997, the Department hired a state-licensed, Ph.D. psychologist to provide program oversight, including oversight of the contractor.

During June 1999, Law Enforcement Psychological Services, Inc. (LEPS) began preparing psychological reports under a contract with the Department. The initial contract expired in June 2005.

Proposals were then solicited and evaluated for a multi-year contract to prepare psychological reports. The bid from LEPS was deemed to be the best proposal. A new contract between LEPS and DOCS is currently operational from July 1, 2005 until June 30, 2009.

2. Candidate Evaluation Process

Section Eight of the New York State Correction Law sets forth the conditions under which a Correction Officer Trainee candidate may be disqualified from further consideration for appointment. Paragraph three, in part, states:

“Persons who have been determined by a psychologist licensed under the laws of this state as suffering from psychotic disorders, serious character disorders, or other disorders which could hinder performance on the job may be deemed ineligible for appointment; provided, that other components of the employee selection process may be taken into consideration in reaching the determination as to whether a candidate is deemed eligible or ineligible for certification to a list of eligible candidates.”

The following discussion specifies the various aspects of the assessment program under the screening contract with Law Enforcement Psychological Services, Inc.

The following table outlines these aspects as follows:

**ASPECTS OF CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT
UNDER LAW ENFORCEMENT PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES, INC.**

Vendor	Psychological Test/Battery	Rating Dimensions	Six Point Scale
LEPS June 1999- Present	1. California Psychological Inventory 2. Personality Assessment Inventory 3. State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory 4. Personal History Questionnaire-LEPS/Roberts	Currently 12 rating dimensions	6 point scale including 4 qualification ratings and 2 disqualification ratings

As noted in the earlier staffing discussion, during late 1997, the Department hired a Ph.D. psychologist, as a Licensed Psychologist, to provide program oversight including oversight of the contractor.

Since June 1999, the candidate assessment has consisted of a two day procedure.

On Day One, each candidate appears at the Albany Training Academy to be given a psychological test battery consisting of:

1. California Psychological Inventory (CPI)
2. Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI)
3. State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI)
4. Personal History Questionnaire-LEPS/Roberts

The tests are scored by the vendor.

On Day Two, the candidate has a face-to-face structured clinical interview with a contract licensed psychologist.

As of October 15, 2005, candidates are evaluated by their interviewing psychologists on 12 different rating dimensions, which are reflective of overall psychological functioning and adjustment. (For the procedures used prior to this date, refer to last year's report.) This change was implemented since the California-based vendor, LEPS, became aware of a revision of "Patrol Officer Psychological Screening Dimensions" by the State of California POST (Peace Officer Standards and Training) Commission. These areas include:

1. Social Competence
2. Teamwork
3. Adaptability/Flexibility
4. Conscientiousness/Dependability
5. Impulse Control/Attention to Safety
6. Integrity/Ethics
7. Emotional Regulation and Stress Tolerance
8. Decision-Making and Judgment
9. Assertiveness/Persuasiveness
10. Avoiding Substance Abuse and Other Risk-Taking Behavior
11. Problem Solving/Learning
12. Communication Skills

These 12 dimensions are termed "Anticipated Performance Problems on Essential Job Elements for Public Safety Officer Positions." This job element list is derived from the State of California POST (Peace Officer Standards and Training) Commission job task analysis.

At the conclusion of the structured interview, the interviewer then integrates findings from the interview, psychological tests, and personal history questionnaire to determine the level of anticipated performance problems for the candidates on each of the 12 rating dimensions, determines whether the candidate is psychologically suitable for the position, and arrives at a final overall psychological rating for the candidate.

The vendor uses a 6-point rating scale. The first four categories each constitute a “recommend” of the candidate for hire while the fifth and sixth categories each constitute “do not recommend for hire.” These first four categories include the following:

A. Well Suited: The applicant’s psychological traits are expected to contribute to above standard performance of essential job functions.

B. Suitable: The applicant’s psychological traits are not expected to interfere with the performance of essential job functions.

C. Suitable: There are mild concerns that psychological traits could interfere with the optimal performance of essential job functions.

C - Marginally Suitable: There are moderate concerns that psychological traits could interfere with the optimal performance of essential job functions.

The fifth and sixth categories each constitute a “do not recommend” of the candidate for hire, as follows:

D. Poorly Suited: Psychological traits have been identified that are expected to significantly interfere with the performance of essential job functions.

F. Not Psychologically Suited: for public safety employment.

Based on a recommendation against hiring, a notification letter is subsequently sent to the Correction Officer Trainee candidate as a Department psychological disqualification. As part of this notification, the Department informs the candidate of his/her right of appeal. The disqualified candidate may appeal the Department’s decision to a three member Appeal Board selected by the President of the Civil Service Commission.

This Board is composed of a licensed psychologist, a board-certified psychiatrist, and a representative of the NYS Department of Civil Service. This Board’s recommendation to continue or overturn a psychological disqualification marks the final determination of psychological eligibility to be hired from that Civil Service list.

C. Applicant Processing Data: 2000-2006

The following table presents applicant processing data for the period from 2000 through 2006. Specifically, information is presented on the number of Correction Officer Trainee candidates tested on an annual basis, the number disqualified, the number who appealed their disqualifications and the number of these appeals that resulted in the disqualification being overturned.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u># TESTED</u>	<u>#DISQUALIFIED</u>	<u>APPEALS</u>	<u>OVERTURNS</u>
2000	2,516	695	467	52
2001	141	39	18	2
2002	554	141	101	9
2003	1,302	436	288	20
2004	3,868	1,320	876	73
2005	3,967	1,303	787	42
2006	3,299	1,094	601 (144 pending)	27*

* Of those appeals reviewed.

SOURCE: NYS DOCS Bureau of Personnel

Appeals Disqualifications

In 2006, 3,299 Correction Officer Trainee candidates were psychologically tested; 1,094 of them were disqualified. Of these, 601 appealed the disqualification. The Independent Advisory Board has reviewed 457 appeals as of this writing, recommending continued disqualification in 430 cases and overturn in 27 cases.

D. Probationary Termination Study

During 2005, 1,257 individuals were appointed as Correction Officer Trainees. These 1,257 Correction Officer Trainee candidates were tracked during their one-year probationary periods by matching them against a list of Correction Officer Trainee probationary terminations at the Training Academy and in the facilities. This one year probationary period may be extended based on absences.

A total of 62 probationary terminations occurred among these 1,257 appointments, resulting in a 4.9 percent probationary termination rate. Forty-five (45) of these terminations were Training Academy terminations; the other 17 terminations occurred while the probationary officers were working in correctional facilities.

A. Training Academy Terminations (45)

These 45 terminations were for the following reasons:

1. Academic disqualification (8)
2. Weapons (27)
3. Engaged in unlawful activity (threat to staff, arrest off-duty, unlawful receipt of unemployment benefits, etc.) (5)
4. Failure to report to work (2)
5. Absence/Failure to respond to messages (1)
6. Failure to report inmate/parolee contact (1)
7. Failure to report prior correction agency termination from employment (1)

B. Facility Terminations (17)

These 17 terminations were for the following reasons:

1. On-duty issues (6)
2. Off-duty issues (no arrest) (0)
3. Off-duty issues (arrest) (1)
4. Time and Attendance (4)
5. Absence Without Leave (3)
6. Fraudulent receipt of Workers' Compensation while employed (1)
7. Failure to provide information on association with inmate (1)
8. Failure to disclose suspension of handgun permit (1)

The probationary officer terminations rate in 2005 was 4.2 percent based on 58 terminations (27 facility terminations and 31 Academy terminations) among the 1,383 officers appointed in 2004.

CONCLUSION

In accord with the statutory requirement, this report concerns the operation of the Psychological Screening Program in 2006.

As discussed in this brief report, the program has operated in compliance with the governing statute during this time period and successfully reviewed the pool of Correction Officer Trainee candidates required to meet the Department's personnel needs.

Based on this year's very low rate of probationary terminations, the Department's Bureau of Personnel continues to believe that the Psychological Screening Program represents a very effective means of identifying suitable candidates for employment as Correction Officers in New York State.

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