

State of New York  
Department of Correctional Services

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**PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING  
PROGRAM FOR CORRECTION OFFICER  
TRAINEE CANDIDATES  
2009**



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Governor**



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Commissioner**

# **PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING PROGRAM FOR CORRECTION OFFICER TRAINEE CANDIDATES 2009**

## **OVERVIEW**

This twenty-fourth report of the Psychological Screening Program for Correction Officer Trainee candidates summarizes the Program's activities for calendar year 2009.

### **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The Psychological Screening Program was originally enacted as Chapter 887 of the Laws of 1983.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 twelve times. The most recent amendment was effective April 7, 2009, when the Psychological Screening Program was renewed until September 1, 2011 as per Chapter 56 (Part U) of the Laws of 2009. The enabling legislation, Section 8 of the New York State Correction Law, sunsets on September 1, 2011, 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 2009**

During June 1999, Law Enforcement Psychological Services, Inc. (LEPS) began to conduct the screenings, evaluate the candidates and prepare the psychological reports for each candidate under a contract with the Department. The initial contract expired in June 2009.

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 was agreed upon between LEPS and the Department. The contract period is July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2014.

#### **2. Candidate Evaluation Process**

Section 8 of the New York State Correction Law sets forth the conditions under which a Correction Officer Trainee candidate may be found psychologically unsuitable and ineligible for 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. (LEPS).

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

<b>Vendor</b>	<b>Psychological Test/Battery</b>	<b>Rating Dimensions</b>	<b>Six Point Scale</b>
<b>LEPS</b> June 1999- Present	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. California Psychological Inventory</li> <li>2. Personality Assessment Inventory</li> <li>3. State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory</li> <li>4. Personal History Questionnaire-LEPS/Roberts</li> </ol>	12 rating dimensions	6 point scale including 4 suitability ratings and 2 unsuitability ratings

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 licensed psychologist.

Since 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 the 2005 annual report.)

The 12 rating dimensions are:

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 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. 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 finding of psychological unsuitability. As part of this notification, the Department informs the candidate of his/her right to appeal. The psychologically unsuitable 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 unsuitability finding marks the final determination of psychological eligibility to be hired from that Civil Service list.

**C. Applicant Processing Data: 2000-2009**

The following table presents applicant psychological processing data for the period from 2000 through 2009. Specifically, information is presented on the number of Correction Officer Trainee candidates psychologically tested on an annual basis, the number psychologically unsuitable, the number who appealed their psychological unsuitability finding and the number of these appeals that resulted in the psychological unsuitability finding being overturned.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>PSYCHOLOGICALLY TESTED</u>	<u>PSYCHOLOGICALLY UNSUITABLE*</u>		<u>PSYCH APPEALS</u>	<u>APPEAL BOARD OVERTURNS</u>
		#	%		
2000	2,516	695	28%	467	52
2001	141	39	28%	18	2
2002	554	141	26%	101	9
2003	1,302	436	34%	288	20
2004	3,868	1,320	34%	876	73
2005	3,967	1,303	33%	787	42
2006	3,299	1,094	33%	601	27
2007	5,730	1,893	33%	1,369	103
2008	984	254	26%	161	11
2009	12	2	17%	1	0

\* Of those candidates who had completed the screening process at the time of the report.  
SOURCE: NYS DOCS Bureau of Personnel

In 2009, 12 Correction Officer Trainee candidates were psychologically tested; 2 of the candidates were found to be psychologically unsuitable. One of these two candidates has appealed the psychological unsuitability finding. The Appeals Board has not reviewed this appeal as of this report.

Due to the Department's staffing needs and consolidation efforts, the 2009 Training Academy classes were filled utilizing an existing pool of already eligible correction officer applicants. This resulted in the low number (12) who were psychologically tested in 2009.

**D. Probationary Termination Study**

During 2008, there were 559 Correction Officer Trainee appointments. These Correction Officer Trainee appointments 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 19 probationary terminations occurred among these appointments, resulting in a 3.3 percent probationary termination rate. Twelve of these terminations were Training Academy terminations; the other 7 terminations occurred while the probationary officers were working in correctional facilities. The reasons for the terminations are as follows:

A. Training Academy Terminations		12
1. Academic Disqualification	7	
2. Weapons Disqualification	1	
3. Engaged in unlawful activity	1	
4. Physical Fitness Failure	1	
5. Failure to Comply with Orders	1	
6. Failure to Disclose During Pre-Employment Background	1	
B. Facility Terminations		7
1. Off-duty issues/arrest	2	
2. Time and Attendance	4	
3. Use of Force	1	
	Total	19

Similarly, the probationary officer termination rate among the 1,811 officer appointments in 2007 was 3.1 percent based on 56 terminations (37 Academy terminations and 19 facility terminations).

## **CONCLUSION**

In accord with the statutory requirement, this report concerns the operation of the Psychological Screening Program in 2009.

As discussed in this 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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