

(Approved)

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION OF WYOMING

The Transportation Commission of Wyoming toured the Wyoming Highway Patrol Training Facility on the Laramie County Community College Campus in Cheyenne, Wyoming on August 19, 2021. Chairman Schmidt convened the education session at 1:30 p.m. The following members were present:

Chairman Phil Schmidt, Casper
Commissioner Jim Espy, Savery
Commissioner Mark Hughes, Sundance
Interim Commission Secretary Kimberly Chapman
Incoming Commission Secretary Caitlin Casner
WYDOT Director K. Luke Reiner

Others participating in the meeting: Captain David Wagener, Lieutenant Kyle McKay, Sergeant Momen Elazizi, and Sergeant Leo Ferguson of the Wyoming Highway Patrol.

Other meeting attendees: Tom DeHoff, Assistant Chief Engineer for Operations; Keith Fulton, Assistant Chief Engineer for Engineering and Planning; Colonel Kebin Haller, Wyoming Highway Patrol (WHP) Administrator; Troy Babbitt, Chief Technology Officer; Doug McGee, Public Affairs Program Manager; Rick Carpenter, Senior Photographer; and Representative Mark Baker.

Commissioner Lee Filer of Cheyenne, Commissioner Susan Holmes of Sheridan, Vice Chairman Greg Venable of Worland, and Commissioner Jon Dolezal of Evanston were absent.

1. Wyoming Highway Patrol Public Demonstration Equipment: Sergeant Elazizi explained the training equipment that is taken to public events for demonstration and training purposes. Currently, there are vehicles on display that were involved in traffic accidents, a rollover simulator that mimics a 40 mph rollover crash, pedal cars that can be driven through obstacle courses by school aged children, and driving simulators. Sergeant Elazizi also explained that the demonstration equipment is used during the “Alive at 25” class, which is an awareness course directed at young drivers across Wyoming. In response to a question by Director Reiner, Lieutenant McKay advised that the demonstration equipment is well received at events across Wyoming and is very informative.

2. Cadet Training: Colonel Haller advised that at the training facility there are currently six cadets proceeding through the program, which lasts 21 weeks. When the cadets complete training, they will be Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) certified.

Captain Wagener stated that there are currently seven permanent staff members at the training facility. These staff members are responsible for several areas, including public relations, recruiting, safety education, impaired driving program, incumbent agency member training, media engagement, and grant management. Sergeant Ferguson also explained that training is more efficient as a result of being located in Cheyenne. Materials are readily accessible and any issues are able to be addressed faster.

Sergeant Leo Ferguson advised that Wyoming Highway Patrol (WHP) cadets receive 21 college credit hours upon completion of training and graduate with two credit diplomas. Cadets also have the option to work towards a Patrol Peace Office Associates Degree at Laramie County Community College

The current cadets were introduced to all present and provided personal background information. Two of the cadets are Armed Forces veterans. Director Reiner introduced himself to the cadets and welcomed them to WYDOT.

Colonel Haller and Captain Wagener welcomed all attendees to browse the equipment display as well as the current recruitment vehicle and a prior Patrol vehicle. Items displayed included boxing equipment, simulation firearms, and first aid equipment.

Lieutenant McKay led a tour of the training facility offices and classrooms and explained the technology available in each classroom.

3. Recruitment, Testing, and Training Process: Sergeant Ferguson stated that it is a priority that all WHP troopers are highly trained, highly competent, confident, and able to handle themselves in any situation. It takes approximately one year from the beginning of the requirement process to the end of training to put a trooper on the road with basic knowledge. Sergeant Ferguson explained that it often takes three to five years for a trooper to have enough experience to make sound decisions and be considered seasoned.

The recruitment process is typically a two to four month process. Sergeant Ferguson explained that when interested parties complete their applications, an online background information system completes a psychological screening of the applicant. Once the screening is complete, the applicant will move forward to the public safety test. Roughly 3% of applicants are disqualified after the psychological test and a 70% score is required on the public safety test to proceed. Colonel Haller explained previously used tests. However, these tests were often not suitable for those with prior law enforcement experience. With the current processes, expenses for the WHP have dramatically decreased.

Sergeant Ferguson explained that once the testing is complete, applicants are invited to complete a physical test that includes an obstacle course, running 6 laps, and utilizing a push/pull machine. Applicants proceed to an oral board, which is an interview with two WHP employees, typically a lieutenant and field trooper. After the oral board, applicants complete an eye detection test that scans pupil size while questions are posed, which replaced polygraph testing. The eye detection test is 90% accurate and lasts 30 minutes. The eye detection test is also considered to provide better, more objective results.

The next step in the recruitment process is having recruits meet with physicians to conduct a full psychological screening, which is mandated by the Legislature.

If a recruit passes all of the tests, a background check begins. During this process, a trooper is assigned to investigate the applicant including conducting discussions with family members, friends, community members, references, and past co-workers.

Sergeant Ferguson presented a video to those present depicting the first day of training for cadets and physical fitness challenges they complete.

Commissioner Hughes asked if cadets are able to have contact with their families. Sergeant Ferguson explained that cadets check in to the facility on Sunday evenings and are released on Friday evenings, and are then able to travel home to see their families. Cadets are also able to speak with their families after training has been completed for the day.

In past years, cadets spent the first 15 weeks of their training at the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy in Douglas, followed by another 15 weeks of training at the Highway Patrol Academy. Beginning in 2020, training was condensed to 21 weeks, all completed at the Highway Patrol Academy.

Sergeant Ferguson stated that much of the training that cadets receive comes from federal case law on what agencies are required to teach and train. Sergeant Ferguson also explained that cadets go through stress exposure training, which teaches coping mechanisms and how to handle stress in a controlled environment. Breathing training and control is highlighted during this training.

Training takes place through three main methods: in class, scenario based training and evaluations, and academic testing. Hours of training are centered on case and criminal law and policies and procedures, professional orientation and skills, patrol procedures and practical evaluations, enforcement skills, firearms, physical fitness, health, and safety. When cadets graduate, they are certified peace officers and have received over 900 hours of POST certified training.

Sergeant Ferguson explained that once the 21 week training program is completed, graduates are required to complete 50 training shifts with a field training officer. At the end of the 50 shifts, the cadets are evaluated for fitness by their supervisor and released to work on their own.

4. Cadet Attrition Rates: Sergeant Ferguson reported that there were 128 applications received for the current cadet class, 28 of which were invited to test. Of those 28, 14 moved in to the background investigation process. Seven of the 14 applicants that passed the background investigation process were offered positions with the WHP. Six applicants accepted and are now in the current cadet class. It is normal to experience a 20-30% attrition rate while cadets are in the academy. Sergeant Ferguson stated that a high attrition rate is acceptable and even encouraged in order to make sure the best candidates attend the program and become troopers.

5. Recruitment Costs: Approximately \$115,000 is invested in each successful cadet at the end of their training. This amount does not include salary and benefits for the cadet. Over the last six

years, 141 individuals have completed the training, 83 of which are still employed as troopers for the State of Wyoming.

Chairman Schmidt questioned whether the WHP has had to change procedures at all given recent high profile legal cases involving law enforcement. Sergeant Ferguson stated that he didn't believe procedures had to be changed due to the fact that Wyoming trains to a higher standard. Sergeant Ferguson explained that recently the Department of Justice had released information on the use of chokeholds. WHP only uses chokeholds in a situation where deadly force criteria is met. Colonel Haller advised that any time an event happens, WHP reviews current policies and procedures and training to ensure best practices. Captain Wagener reported that under the Trump Administration, through the Department of Justice, two mandates were sent out to all law enforcement agencies across the United States. As a result, Wyoming POST required all agencies to submit agency policy regarding chokeholds. The policy WHP submitted was deemed a model for all other agencies.

6. Chairman Schmidt recessed the education session at 3:55 p.m., on Thursday, August 19, 2021.