

Should There Be a Mandatory Accreditation Program in Florida?

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Abstract

This paper and brief summary was initiated to explore the concepts and history of the Florida accreditation program. The purpose was to explore the question of mandatory or voluntary accreditation programs for Florida law enforcement agencies. A brief survey of state agency accreditation managers was conducted, which provided valuable information for the overall recommendation.

Introduction and Overview

In 1993, the Florida Legislature adopted section 943.125, Florida Statutes which directed the Florida Sheriffs Association and the Florida Police Chiefs Association to establish a voluntary accreditation program. While many of the local and state law enforcement agencies in Florida have stepped up to the challenge of seeking and obtaining law enforcement accreditation, some have not. The results have a direct and indirect influence on how law enforcement services are delivered in Florida, and some agencies may not be providing services in a consistent manner. Additionally, some agencies are not following the professional standards that have been adopted as best practices in Florida.

While most citizens agree law enforcement services are a required entity within state and local governments, many believe services could be performed better and in a more cost efficient way. An accreditation program has long been recognized as a meaningful way of maintaining the highest standards and complying with professionally accepted "best practices."

Accreditation is a certification by an independent board, commission or council acknowledging that the organization has met the standards. In Florida, the accreditation process has 260 adopted professional standards. When determining the applicability of such a program, many people refer to the question of, "would you go to a college or hospital that was not accredited?" Florida agencies are accredited by the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation, Inc., which is an entity of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The Commission is comprised of four Sheriffs, four Chiefs of Police, and one representative each from the Association of Counties, the League of Cities, the State Law Enforcement Chiefs' Association, the Judiciary, and the Inspectors General. The Commission meets three times per year to oversee the accreditation program and to officially review agencies that have gone through the rigorous review process. (CFA, n.d.)

Being that Florida's law enforcement accreditation program is voluntary some have asked the question if the legislature should require that all law enforcement

organizations become accredited. By establishing a mandated accreditation program, the groups that could be potentially affected include; Agencies currently not accredited, Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation, law enforcement bargaining units (i.e., Fraternal Order of Police, Police Benevolent Association, etc.), Florida Legislature, Florida Governor, Florida Sheriff's Association, Florida Police Chiefs' Association, Florida State Law Enforcement Chiefs' Association, citizens and visitors of the state of Florida.

Since the groups that are affected vary greatly both in involvement and structure, so does how a mandated accreditation program would affect these groups. However, in general the groups can be grouped into three (3) primary groups; law enforcement, citizen, and public policy.

Law Enforcement: *the law enforcement groups would vary greatly. Some within this group will embrace the idea, while others will resist this approach and will probably attempt to say that costs associated with the accreditation program would preclude their agency from participating.*

Citizen: *the general citizenry in my estimation would be the group that would benefit most from a mandated accreditation program. The citizens would benefit in having the best possible, most professional law enforcement services delivered.*

Public Policy: *the public policy group would be comprised of the legislature in whole, legislative leaders and the Governor. These groups would need to come together and establish a consensus on the best approach to mandated legislative law(s).*

By having a mandated accreditation program conflicts may occur with law enforcement agencies or local governments which feel that costs may be too much of a burden in these down economic times. Another major aspect of accreditation is to address the overlapping state and federal jurisdictions on the accreditation issue. As of now and like Florida's accreditation program, there is one major recognized accrediting body for law enforcement agencies in the United States; the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA). CALEA, like Florida's accreditation body (Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation, Inc.) is also a voluntary based program.

The significance in accreditation programs is huge in the law enforcement community. Public opinion and in turn support can be influenced by such a program. The influence in the accreditation program has also shifted greatly over the past several years and is becoming more of a "gold standard" for criminal justice agencies.

Literature Review

When exploring the subject of accreditation, it was found that people have a large array of opinions on this subject. Some believe that accreditation is an integral part of the system and maintains a check and balance process for law enforcement organizations. While others feel that it is just another bureaucratic program with no real intrinsic value. With the varying degrees on the accreditation subject, many people have expressed their views. An article titled, "Accreditation; One Department's Experience," (Falzorano, 2010,) discusses how the law enforcement field is not seen as a "profession" and that accreditation has helped shape such opinion through the public eye. The article also reviews the then 25 year history of law enforcement accreditation and what organizations had an impact on the origination of accreditation. The article went through in detail how an accreditation on-site inspection is set up and executed as well as what the average day for an assessor is like. The author posts why accreditation is important and stated that administrators may complain that accreditation is costly or time-consuming. Yet, the cost of accreditation becomes insignificant compared to the expense of civil liability or the ill-will that develops when citizens feel they cannot trust the police to protect and serve them. Agencies who become accredited can foster the professionalism that citizens expect and deserve. (Falzorano, 2010)

Another article explored was titled, "A small police department's success- Focus on Accreditation." (Wilcox, 2004,) The article provides insight into how a small agency addressed the accreditation process and how "this department considered it worthwhile to face the monumental task of becoming one of the smallest forces to receive accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA)."

The article, like others, explained the accreditation process. For this agency, they decided to go with national accreditation. However, one of the most compelling arguments was the financial benefit that outweighs the cost it takes to become accredited. The example provided was that of an analysis that was conducted by a company that handled 16 municipalities risk management, loss control, insurance liability and legal defense and the financial losses incurred by accredited and non-accredited member agencies. The 10-year analysis yielded very persuasive arguments in favor of the accreditation process. The study found that accredited agencies lose \$314 per year, per officer while non-accredited agencies averaged \$543 per year, per officer. (Wilcox, 2004)

Using the above formula, an agency of 150 members would spend the following in losses (broken down by accredited vs. non-accredited) over the term of the accreditation cycle (3 year period):

	Accredited Losses	Non-Accredited Losses	Difference
150 Members	\$141,300	\$244,350	\$103,050

While the budgetary considerations and impact is clear, the above illustration does not account for the citizen respect and confidence in an agency that is riddled in at fault claims or judicial injunctive relief. (Wilcox, 2004)

This article also discusses the correlation of selecting an accreditation manager and the importance of ensuring that the right person is selected to fill this important position. Perhaps one of the most important parts to this process is selecting the right person to this post. This article was very persuasive in its discussion of the accreditation process, not only from a “good management approach” but also to argue on the side of fiscal responsibility and the clear reduction in liability costs. (Wilcox, 2004)

Another article on accreditation that was explored was titled, “Law enforcement accreditation: A national comparison of accredited vs. non accredited agencies.” (McCabe & Fajardo, 2010). This article comes from a new perspective, that perspective being from the education arena as opposed to coming from a law enforcement agency. In the abstract, it is discussed that most previous writings have been about “merely discussion of accreditation or empirical evaluations of officers' perceptions on the accreditation process.” (McCabe & Fajardo, 2010) The study sought out to provide a more in-depth comparison of accredited agencies as opposed to non-accredited agencies.

The study focused on a research approach of data collected from the “Law-Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics, 1993: Data for Individual State and Local Agencies with 100 or More Officers (LEMAS) and CALEA's April 1998 list of accredited agencies.” The five variables reviewed were:

- Field training hours;
- Minimum educational requirements for starting officers;
- Policy for drug-testing-sworn police applicants;
- The operation of a special drug unit; and
- The operation of a special child-abuse unit.

The study concluded that many of the processes required through the accreditation standards develop solid policies which contributes to a large reduction in liability claims and also contributes to a better overall organization for the citizenry it serves and the persons employed. (McCabe & Fajardo, 2010)

In the final study reviewed titled, “City Managers- Most Frequently Asked Questions About Accreditation”, the study is of particular interest as it comes directly from a city manager, who is often times the individual that has to be persuaded to “buy into” the whole accreditation process and associated costs. The study discusses the various questions that may come up during the accreditation process by city managers and demonstrates the benefits not only to the agency and citizens of the community but also the benefits directly to the city manager. (Kirchhoff, 2010)

The study is truly an important component of the accreditation process, because if the accreditation managers do not have the necessary buy in from all components in the process, the end goal will not be reached.

Method

As part of the survey process for this paper, a nine (9) question survey was distributed to all state agency law enforcement accreditation managers. The survey was distributed only to state law enforcement agencies due in part to the differences in the delivery of law enforcement services by local and state agencies. State agencies primarily have a more limited and focused core mission as opposed to local agencies. The survey questioned the participants regarding the potential of a mandated accreditation program in Florida.

The dependent variable is whether or not a mandated accreditation program is appropriate and if so what the best way would be to implement such a program. It was anticipated that the return rate for the surveys would be high due to the small group of participants. However, it is realized that with this small group of participants the survey results itself is being limited.

Results and Discussion

The survey results were received at an outstanding return rate of 73% with only 27% of those surveyed not responding. The results were received, reviewed and analyzed. The participants of the survey varied in experience level in law enforcement from 6 years on the low to 36 years on the high side of experience. Accreditation experience also varied greatly and ranged from 1.5 years to 20 years.

The participants were nearly split on whether or not accreditation should be a mandated program for Florida law enforcement with 60% believing that there should not be a mandated accreditation program and 40% believing that there should be. Samplings of narrative responses to the survey are as follows:

Respondents not in Favor of a Mandated Accreditation Program

Respondent #158.229- "While it is a worthy endeavor by those who choose to establish the program, it should not be an option for a CEO rather than a mandate. Established mandates tend to diminish the prestige of designations. If everyone is required to meet it, rather than establishing the program as a worthy goal, the designation will become periodic check rather than an achievement."

Respondent #158.248- "Regardless of type of accrediting body, the process should remain voluntary. Accreditation seeks to raise the bar of professionalism- an agency that wants to be accredited also wants to improve itself and provide better levels of service and is seeking accreditation in order to achieve that goal."

Respondents in Favor of a Mandated Accreditation Program

Respondent #205.145- “ I believe the consistency of policies and procedures based on a set of professionally developed standards is key to the overall success and credibility of any agency. Accreditation is an outstanding change agent for the better.”

Respondent #207.159- “Law enforcement is a high risk, high liability profession. There should be mandated standards to establish benchmarks and performance measures for any law enforcement profession.”

Recommendations

While the issue of mandating an accreditation program for state law enforcement proved to be nearly split amongst those surveyed, the findings found significant advantages to such a mandate. However, even with the advantages outlined above, the accreditation design and overall philosophy would be greatly diminished when agencies are told that they “must” comply with standards as opposed to “willingly” complying with professional standards. Agencies that are not currently accredited should take a more active role in seeking this standard of excellence if for no other reason than to being accountable to those they serve, the citizens and visitors of Florida. Florida’s law enforcement agencies are among some of the best in the nation. Why not display this level of professionalism by achieving the mark of excellence, accreditation.

Ron Cave currently serves as a Major over Policy and Planning for the Division of Law Enforcement within the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Ron has served in various positions in criminal justice to include; investigator (IA and criminal), deputy sheriff and a captain over field operations. Ron currently serves as the President of the State Law Enforcement Chiefs’ Association, is an appointed member of the Florida Criminal Justice Executive Institute Policy Board, is a board member for Cops for Kids and serves as a member of the File Review Committee for the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation. Ron has also served as chairman of the Law Enforcement Regional Training Trust Fund Board, former chairman of the Jefferson County Domestic Violence Task Force, former member of the Florida Criminal Justice Training Center Directors Association, and served as a board member for Keep Tallahassee-Leon County Beautiful. Ron earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice from Thomas University, a Master’s Degree in American Politics & Public Policy from Florida State University and is currently enrolled in the Master’s program for Criminal Justice from the University of West Florida.

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Appendix A

1. Your Name?

Your Name?

2. What agency are you employed with?

What agency are you employed with?

3. How long have you been employed in the law enforcement profession (sworn and non-sworn members)?

How long have you been employed in the law enforcement profession (sworn and non-sworn members)?

4. Do you have experience working in an accreditation program? If so, what is the accreditation body (i.e., CFA, CALEA, etc.)

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Do you have experience working in an accreditation program? If so, what is the accreditation body (i.e., CFA, CALEA, etc.)

5. How many years of experience do you have working in accreditation?

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How many years of experience do you have working in accreditation?

6. Do you believe a mandated accreditation program is necessary in Florida? Please explain your response.

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Do you believe a mandated accreditation program is necessary in Florida? Please explain your response.