

Questions for DESPP Commissioner

By: Veronica Rose, Chief Analyst
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Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP)

DESPP is the state's emergency management and homeland security agency. It consists of six divisions: Connecticut State Police, Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, Division of Scientific Services, Division of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications, Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, and Police Officer Standards and Training Council.

DESPP was created by merging two departments: the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS).

The department is headed by a commissioner (currently Dora B. Schriro) appointed by the governor. The commissioner is required to appoint up to two deputy commissioners ([CGS § 29-1r](#)). One heads the State Police; the other heads DEMHS.

The legislature created DESPP in 2011. The act that created the department ([PA 11-51](#)) also transferred the regulation of amusements and exhibitions from DPS to the Department of Consumer Protection and the regulation of the following to the Department of Construction Services (now the Division of Construction Services within the Department of Administrative Services): films; elevators, escalators, and lifts; cranes and hoisting equipment; boilers and water heaters; fire, emergency, and building services, including the state fire safety and prevention codes; state building and demolition codes; and paintball facilities.

Questions

Department Merger

1. Some reports had suggested that the merger of DPS with DEMHS could result in the loss or temporary halt in federal homeland security funds. Did DESPP lose any federal funds as a result of the merger?
2. What have been the pros and cons of the merger?
3. What percentage of the emergency management budget comes from federal funding? Does the federal government stipulate how the agency must spend any allocated funds?
4. On average, how many major emergencies does DESPP manage or respond to annually? What is the biggest emergency it responded to in the last five years?
5. In what areas is the state most prepared for a catastrophic event and why? In what areas is it least prepared and why?

Diversity in the State Police Force

President Obama [established a Task Force on 21st Century Policing](#) to identify “the best means to provide an effective partnership between law enforcement and local communities that reduces crime and increases trust.” In one of its key recommendations for “building trust and legitimacy” in community-police relations, the task force focused on the need to ensure that law enforcement agencies better reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

In 2015, the legislature passed legislation ([PA 15-4, June Special Session](#)) requiring police departments to implement guidelines to recruit, retain, and promote minority police officers.

1. What steps has the department taken to comply with this law? What has been accomplished?
2. What do you consider to be the measure of a diverse force, and how does the State Police stack up?
3. How many minority officers are on your management team?
4. How do you respond to the sometimes-expressed view that standards may suffer in an attempt to bring more minorities into police departments?
5. What challenges does the department face in recruiting minority officers? In what areas are minorities having the biggest problem?

6. The current literature suggests that factors, such as poor credit ratings, failure to meet certain physical fitness standards, or prior drug use, disproportionately eliminate certain minority candidates. Does the department evaluate the reasons why more minority applicants are not hired?
7. In your opinion, what impact does a diverse police force have on law enforcement?

The “Ferguson Effect”

The FBI crime data for 2015, which was released in September 2016, showed an uptick in violent crimes (see [Crime in the United States, 2015](#)). Some commentators have suggested a link between protests over police killings and the increase in violent crimes. According to their reasoning, the increased tensions between police and African Americans following the Ferguson shooting and other high profile incidents have left many police officers reluctant to fully carry out their duties. This dynamic is commonly referred to as the “Ferguson effect.” A new Pew Research Center survey concludes that the Ferguson effect is real (see also this [Pew Research study](#)). Overall, 86% of officers in a national poll of 8,000 officers say police work is harder today as a result of these high-profile incidents. About nine-in-ten say their colleagues are more concerned about their safety, while 72% say they have become more reluctant to stop and question people acting suspiciously.

1. Is there any evidence to suggest that the Ferguson effect is impacting the way state police officers are enforcing the law? If yes, do you believe this is fueling violent crimes in Connecticut? If yes, how is the department addressing this?

Police Recruitment and Retention

1. How many police officers are currently on staff? How many more would be needed to bring the division up to full strength?
2. What is the attrition rate for state police officers? Is turnover a big problem for the State Police?
3. Would you say the pool of available candidates for State Police positions has been shrinking, growing, or has remained steady over the last few years?
4. Has recruitment been hindered by the media coverage of unrest in response to the Ferguson and New York police shootings of unarmed African American men?

Police Behavior

The State Police is facing a [lawsuit](#), filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), stemming from two officers allegedly, accidentally recording themselves conspiring to fabricate evidence against a man charged with protesting at a DUI checkpoint. Such checkpoints, the man contends,

are contrary to the 4th Amendment (which prohibits unreasonable search and seizure) and waste public money.

1. Is this typical of the type of complaints filed against state police officers? If not, what are the typical complaints?
2. According to a recent ACLU report, police agencies in Connecticut make it difficult for members of the public to file complaints against the police. Is there a known and readily accessible mechanism available to citizens who wish to register a complaint about a state police officer's conduct?
3. Does the agency monitor complaints so as to identify patterns that may indicate whether certain strategies or tactics disproportionately affect specific demographic groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities?
4. How effective are DUI checkpoints? How many drunk drivers do they identify? Do they deter drunk driving? Are they an efficient use of resources? Are there other more efficient ways to prevent drunk driving?
5. Are there internal quality controls to detect when an officer fabricates evidence or testimony? How does the department discipline officers who fabricate evidence or testimony?

Internet and Cyber Issues

To be effective, law enforcement agencies must constantly adapt to respond to the changing nature of crime and the way criminals behave. Some types of crimes are fostered by new and evolving technology, such as the internet.

1. How has the internet become a tool for criminal behavior? What special problems, if any, has the growth in internet use presented for the State Police?
2. How well equipped is the State Police to deal with cybercrimes?
3. Does the division have the necessary funding and other resources to help its officers acquire the skills to deal with cybercrimes?

Drones

The proliferation of drones and their potential uses have raised safety, privacy, legal, and policy concerns. The pace of regulation has lagged behind the technology.

1. Research and anecdotal evidence suggest that the law enforcement community has not universally embraced the use of drones. Where does the State Police stand on this issue?

2. What special problems, if any, do you anticipate the increase in the use of drones by (a) law enforcement and (b) civilians will cause? What do you see as the legal, policy, and privacy implications of launching civilian drones?
3. What limitations are reasonable and appropriate on where, when, and for what purposes drones are used by civilians and the police?
4. How do we weigh the risks versus the benefits of this technology?
5. Where do we draw the line in balancing freedom of information with a citizen's right to be protected from an invasion of privacy?

Budget Issues

1. Is DESPP getting adequate funding to meet state, local, and federal public safety needs and threats? What would you consider an optimum level of funding?
2. Given the current budget forecast, on what tasks and activities do you think the State Police and other law enforcement entities can save money without compromising public safety?

State Police Overtime

The revised FY 17 state budget appropriation to DESPP included a policy decision to reduce overtime expenditures by \$2 million.

1. What specific efforts has your agency made to attain these savings?
2. What percentage of overtime does the \$2 million represent?
3. Approximately how much was spent on overtime last fiscal year?
4. What drives overtime?
5. Does the department have an overtime policy? What is the policy?
6. What mechanism does the department have in place to ensure that overtime is responsibly managed and not being abused?
7. Can you say what percentage of overtime, if any, is attributable to abuse?

Crime and Law Enforcement

Just as businesses must compete against other businesses that exploit new technologies and business practices, law enforcement agencies must constantly compete against criminals who devise new types of crimes or new ways to commit crimes.

1. What is the best way to prevent or combat new crimes—educational programs, more police officers, stiffer prison sentences, youth diversion programs? All of the above? Some of the above? None of the above?
2. Some people argue that legalizing recreational drugs is one way to reduce drug-related crimes. Do you believe such a policy change would reduce drug-related crimes or would it present a new set of challenges?
3. What would you say is the most significant factor driving crime? Poverty? Drugs? Other?
4. In your opinion, what is the biggest issue facing law enforcement today?

Terrorism

As events around the world have shown, traditional methods of policing are no match for attackers using high-powered weaponry, explosives, and guerilla warfare tactics. The challenge for law enforcement is to balance the need for sophisticated military-type equipment and the public concerns about the “militarization of the police.”

1. Are there protocols delineating the roles of federal, state, and law enforcement units in combating terrorism? Do these protocols address information sharing?
2. To what extent is terrorism a threat in Connecticut? How prepared is the state to deal with such a threat?
3. How big is the State Police Office of Counterterrorism? Typically, to what kinds of threats does it respond?

Consolidation of State Police Dispatch Centers

According to a 2013 [New England Public Policy Center research report](#) “technological change is creating opportunities and incentives for consolidating 9-1-1 call centers. . . . Efficient dispatch once depended on detailed knowledge of the service area, providing a rationale for decentralized call handling. Increasingly, however, GPS and cellular location services can help locate callers and dispatch the appropriate responders (police, fire, or EMS) quickly and effectively.” The same report concludes that reducing the number of public safety answering points in Connecticut to eight would cut expenses by 60 percent.

Citing cost, staffing, and safety concerns, some states have been aggressively consolidating their call-taking and dispatch operations. But one of your first actions as commissioner was to halt the dispatch consolidation process started by the department. You decided not to consolidate the central region dispatch operations.

1. Can you describe the dispatch center consolidation issue? Do you believe the decision to halt the process was the right decision?
2. Some people contend that the decision to consolidate has more to do with politics than policy. How would you respond to this?
3. Is the consolidation of state police dispatch centers a dead issue?

Social Protests

Anti-police protests and demonstrations will likely continue in 2017 if police shootings similar to those that triggered demonstrations in the last few years continue.

1. What lessons—positive and negative—has the State Police learned from the unrest seen in Baltimore, Chicago, Ferguson, and elsewhere in response to police shootings?
2. How prepared is the State Police to deal with this type of unrest? What approach would it take?
3. What strategies does the division have to deal with violent confrontations with protesters?

Social Media

Social media plays a major role in the national debate on police shootings. Some law enforcement agencies are using social media to defend the actions of officers under scrutiny. The State Police has established a [YouTube channel](#) and has a presence on Facebook, [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

1. What are the department's goals with regard to these platforms?
2. How are you using them?
3. How will you evaluate their effectiveness?
4. What has been the public response to them?
5. In your opinion, how has social media affected policing?

New Gun Range

The present State Police range in Simsbury has had issues with flooding from the Farmington River for decades, according to the State Police. And although site improvements have been made over the years to prevent or at least mitigate the impact of the flooding, they have not been sufficient in preventing significant damage (see [here](#) for questions about the range). The State Police is trying to build a new gun range, but many towns have said they do not want to host the facility.

1. Has the State Police identified a site for the gun range and a landowner willing to sell?
2. Is the State Police or the Department of Administrative Services currently negotiating with the landowner? If yes, what is the status of the negotiations?
3. In what town is the site?
4. Have there been discussions with the town where the range is proposed? Is the town willing to host the facility?
5. Is the site being considered different from previous sites in terms of its location, size, and other characteristics? Based on these factors, what are the prospects that the outcome for this site will be any different from previous sites?
6. How much is the new gun range expected to cost? Approximately how much has the agency expended to date? What are the major cost factors?
7. What is the source of funding for the new range?
8. Given the ongoing budget crisis and the fierce opposition to a new gun range from several towns, is there any possibility that if this site does not work out the agency will drop its plan to build a new gun range?
9. Is there a viable alternative to building a new gun range? If yes, what is it? If no, why not?
10. Several agencies, including the Connecticut National Guard currently operate gun ranges. Is there any reason why the State Police cannot enter into a cooperative agreement with one of them to use its gun ranges?
11. Towns opposed to hosting a new State Police gun range have voiced concerns about the noise, decreasing property values, environmental damage, and traffic congestion, among other concerns. How will the new gun range benefit the host town?
12. How would a decision not to build a new range impact the State Police? How long would it take before the effects of such a decision are felt?

Body Cameras and Other Technology

Some commentators and law enforcement officials predict that body cameras will soon become a normal part of law enforcement officers' equipment. The Obama administration proposed a three-year \$263 million package on community policing, including a 50 percent match for state and local police departments that purchase body cameras, for a total of \$75 million to buy 50,000 cameras.

1. Has the State Police taken advantage of this program?
2. How many officers are equipped with body cameras?
3. How does the agency decide which officers to equip?
4. What has the agency learned from the use of body cameras by its officers?
5. Do all police cars have dashboard-mounted cameras? How effective are they?

Resident Trooper Program

Under the resident trooper program, the DESPP commissioner assigns state police officers, under contract, to provide law enforcement duties in towns that do not have an organized police department. Participating towns pay (1) 85% of the regular cost and expenses of employing two troopers and 100% of the cost and expenses for any additional troopers and (2) 100% of the overtime costs and portion of fringe benefits directly associated with overtime costs.

The cost of the resident state trooper program continues to be a major issue for municipalities.

1. How many resident troopers are in the state?
2. How does the resident trooper program benefit the State Police?
3. Does the State Police evaluate the program from time to time to determine its effectiveness?
4. Do you think the program has outlived its usefulness?
5. Would law enforcement and the state be better served if towns that currently have resident troopers establish their own departments?

Firearms

In 2013, the legislature passed two major gun bills ([PA 13-3](#) and [PA 13-220](#)) that significantly expanded DESPP's responsibilities with regard to firearm regulation. Initially, the media and advocacy groups, among others, cited many problems with how the agency was implementing the legislation.

1. How is the agency now coping with the demands placed on it by the above-mentioned public acts?

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