



# **Successful Strategies from Other Jurisdictions to Increase Police Officer Recruitment**

Gabriela Monzon-Reynolds

Office of Legislative Oversight  
Montgomery County, Maryland

## Executive Summary

### Successful Strategies from Other Jurisdictions to Increase Police Officer Recruitment

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For the past few years, law enforcement agencies across the U.S. have been facing significant recruitment challenges, particularly sworn officers. Barriers to recruiting include financial constraints for potential applicants, shifting job expectations among younger generations, negative perceptions of policing, and rigorous qualification and selection processes.

In addition, law enforcement has historically been perceived as a predominantly White and male profession. Structural racism and discriminatory practices have contributed to the underrepresentation of women and Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), creating barriers to equitable access and reinforcing perceptions that policing is unwelcoming or biased.

At the Council's request, this Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report describes successful police recruitment programs in other jurisdictions and identifies recruitment strategies that could be adopted in Montgomery County.

For this study, OLO reviewed the Montgomery County Police Department's (MCPD) hiring initiatives and programs and examined comparable jurisdictions with demonstrated success in recruitment practices that could be adapted locally. The study focuses on sworn personnel, as most recruitment vacancies and challenges occur within these ranks. Consistent with the scope of the request, the analysis is limited to police departments and excludes sheriff's offices and other local law enforcement agencies, such as school district and transit police.

#### Law Enforcement Recruitment Landscape

Law enforcement in the U.S. is comprised of about 18,000 federal, state, and local agencies. The large number of law enforcement agencies, along with population growth, mandated staffing increases, and expanded responsibilities, has increased law enforcement job openings. However, agencies nationwide continue to face significant recruitment challenges.

OLO reviewed and compared law enforcement recruitment incentives, pay, and staffing conditions across seven police departments from large counties and cities in the DC–Maryland–Virginia (DMV) region and found:

- **DMV area agencies, including MCPD, face the same nationwide hiring and staffing challenges**, with strong competition from regional and federal agencies that offer substantially larger hiring bonuses (up to \$50,000–\$70,000+).
- **Hiring bonuses have become commonplace across the region** and increasingly represent the cost of doing business, placing jurisdictions that do not offer such incentives at a competitive disadvantage.

### MCPD's Hiring Initiatives and Programs

MCPD is the largest police department in the County, serving a population of nearly 1.1 million across 507 square miles. MCPD is comprised of both sworn and non-sworn staff and employs about 1,100 sworn officers, and 700 professional staff (non-sworn).

The following findings summarize key trends, challenges, and opportunities related to police recruitment and staffing at MCPD:

- Like other law enforcement agencies across the U.S., **MCPD's sworn staff is predominantly White and male**. In recent years, the percentage of staff that were Black males and Hispanic males have increased modestly.
- **MCPD employs a range of recruiting strategies**, from youth law enforcement experience programs, such as cadet, internship, and leadership programs, to initiatives targeting more experienced personnel and members of the BIPOC community.
- Of MCPD's youth law enforcement experience programs, the Cadet Program serves as one of its primary recruitment pathways. Data shows that **only a small share of cadets ultimately transition into sworn positions**, suggesting opportunities to strengthen the program's effectiveness as a hiring pipeline.
- **On average, MCPD's application process takes between three to four months** from the time a candidate applies to the time they receive a final offer
- **The largest applicant losses occur at the very beginning of the application process**. This highlights opportunities to strengthen communication about minimum qualifications and increase support and follow-through for the written examination.
- **MCPD has implemented several strategies in recent years to address recruitment challenges**. Some of the most recent strategies include allowing candidates to earn the required 60 college credits while attending the academy and updating its cannabis use policy to allow testing of applicants who report cannabis use prior to applying.
- **MCPD has not conducted a formal survey of incoming officers to determine why they chose the department** over other local agencies, nor to assess whether the hiring bonus influenced their decision. Capturing this information would help MCPD better target its recruitment strategies and strengthen its competitiveness in attracting qualified candidates.

### Successful Recruitment Practices from Peer Jurisdictions

OLO selected the following police departments as case studies of successful recruitment practices: Fairfax County, Virginia; Dallas, Texas; and Phoenix, Arizona. These departments were chosen for their comparable population sizes and authorized sworn staffing levels to Montgomery County, as well as their reported hiring success of sworn staffing in 2024 and 2025.

The table below summarizes recruitment practices from reviewed jurisdictions that could be adopted in Montgomery County:

Jurisdiction	Recruitment Strategy
Fairfax County, VA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targets displaced federal employees</li> <li>• Holds women’s hiring symposia led by department leadership</li> <li>• Engages candidates proactively throughout the recruitment process</li> </ul>
City of Dallas, TX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targets lateral transfers with competitive pay and benefits</li> </ul>
Phoenix, AZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducts outreach to local communities through advisory boards representing African American, Arab, Asian, cross-disability, faith-based, Hispanic, Jewish, LGBTQ, Muslim, American Indian, refugee, and Sikh populations</li> <li>• Holds monthly Instagram Live sessions in which background investigations staff and current employees share their experiences and answer questions</li> </ul>

### **Recruitment Practices to Increase Women and BIPOC Representation**

Police agencies are actively increasing the representation of women and BIPOC by identifying barriers in the recruitment process, using personalized communication, identifying recruitment voids, and offering childcare supports. The following practices, used by law enforcement agencies nationwide to boost recruitment of women and BIPOC candidates, could be considered for implementation in Montgomery County.

Strategy	Description
Identify barriers in the recruiting process	In 2020, 70% of candidates for the Philadelphia Police Department in Pennsylvania were BIPOC. Many were denied entry due to poor credit, limited work history, or driving records. In response, the department revised several requirements to reduce barriers and increase representation.
Use personalized communication	The Tacoma Police Department in Washington mailed a postcard with the messaging “You Belong Here” to boost its recruitment efforts. The postcard featured three officers of different races on the front and a personalized message from new or mid-level officers on the back.
Identify recruitment voids	The Los Angeles Police Department mapped potential recruitment areas by demographic profile and overlaid recruitment event locations to identify where additional outreach was needed.
Offer childcare support	In 2022, the Tucson City Council unanimously approved funding for childcare services for public safety employees. Similarly, the San Diego Police Department in California, created the nation’s first agency-run childcare center. In January 2025, the Baltimore Police Department in Maryland launched a pilot program that provides 100 employees with a stipend of up to \$250 per month to help cover child-care expenses.

## **Candidate Retention in Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs**

While research shows how to implement youth law enforcement experience programs, there is limited research on candidate retention and how many participants ultimately enter the police academy. To address this gap, OLO presents a case study of the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) pipeline program.

The LAPD operates a comprehensive youth pipeline program consisting of five interconnected initiatives—Junior Cadets, Cadets, Police Academy Magnet Schools (PAMS), Police Orientation and Preparation Program (POPP), and the Associate Community Officer Program (ACO)—designed to prepare students for careers in law enforcement. Participation is not strictly sequential, but together the programs create a clear pathway from middle school through sworn service. Collectively, these programs create a multi-stage pipeline from youth engagement to sworn service.

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### **Discussion Questions and Recommendations**

Based on the findings above, OLO offers four discussion questions for the Council and one recommendation for MCPD:

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. What recruitment strategies are generating the highest number of qualified applicants (career fairs, digital advertising, social media, cadet programs, word-of-mouth, etc.)?
2. What strategies can MCPD implement to better support and engage candidates to ensure they follow through and complete the written examination?
3. How can MCPD strengthen the effectiveness of the Cadet Program as a hiring pipeline?
4. What additional strategies could MCPD implement to increase recruitment, especially among BIPOC and women?

#### **Recommendation**

1. MCPD could consider surveying officers to identify the factors that influenced their decision to join the department, including the impact of hiring bonuses. The survey could also be extended to cadets to better understand what support or resources would encourage them to pursue a career with MCPD.

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# Introduction

The large number of law enforcement agencies, combined with population growth, mandated increases in police staffing and the expanding scope of responsibilities beyond traditional policing, such as responding to mental health crises and engaging in community policing, has led to a rise in law enforcement job openings.

Yet, despite the rise in law enforcement job openings, law enforcement agencies across the United States have been facing significant recruitment challenges, particularly sworn officers, with many agencies struggling to find and keep qualified candidates.

The difficulty in recruiting sworn officers is not due to one reason. Rather, multiple social, political, and economic forces are all simultaneously at play in shaping the current state of recruitment.<sup>1</sup> Some of these reasons include financial challenges for potential recruits, different job expectations of new generations, negative image of policing, rigorous requirements and intensive selection process.

In addition, law enforcement has historically been perceived as a predominantly White and male profession. Underrepresentation of women and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) applicants can be attributed to longstanding structural racism and discriminatory practices within the profession that have limited equitable access to careers in law enforcement. For decades, systemic barriers in hiring, including limited outreach, disproportionate disqualifications during background checks, and exclusionary workplace cultures, have disproportionately favored White male applicants. Physical fitness standards, testing practices, and promotional systems not regularly assessed for disparate impact may also unintentionally disadvantage otherwise qualified candidates from underrepresented groups.

**Project Scope and Report Structure.** The County Council requested the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) to describe successful police recruitment programs in other jurisdictions and identify recruitment strategies that could be adopted in Montgomery County. To inform this analysis, OLO conducted a review of Montgomery County Police Department's (MCPD) hiring initiatives and programs and subsequently assessed comparable jurisdictions with demonstrated success in recruitment practices that could be adapted locally.

The study focuses on sworn personnel, as most recruitment vacancies and challenges occur within these ranks. Consistent with the scope of the request, the study also focuses solely on police departments and excludes sheriff's offices and other local law enforcement agencies, such as school district and transit police. This report contains the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1. Law Enforcement Recruitment Landscape**, provides an overview of law enforcement agencies in the United States, including their structure, size, and comparative demographic staffing data. It also outlines key staffing challenges facing agencies nationwide,

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<sup>1</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police. 2019. [The State of Recruitment: A Crisis for Law Enforcement](#)

with particular attention to recruitment of women and BIPOC, as well as the hiring and staffing landscape across the DC–Maryland–Virginia (DMV) region.

- **Chapter 2. Montgomery County Police Department Hiring Programs and Initiatives**, offers an overview of MCPD’s, operating budget, sworn staffing, application process, recruitment initiatives and challenges and new initiatives to improve recruitment.
- **Chapter 3. Recommended Practices and Examples from Other Jurisdictions**, summarizes model recruitment practices identified by national law enforcement organizations which have studied law enforcement hiring challenges. This chapter also presents OLO’s review of recruitment practices in several comparable jurisdictions that have demonstrated measurable success and highlights evidence-based recruitment strategies to increase representation of women and BIPOC candidates.
- **Chapter 4. Findings and Best Practice Recommendations**, presents OLO’s findings from its analysis of MCPD’s hiring initiatives and programs. This chapter highlights successful recruitment strategies from other jurisdictions that could be applied in Montgomery County and offers four discussion questions for the Council and one recommendation for MCPD.

**Methodology.** OLO staff member Gabriela Monzon-Reynolds conducted this study with assistance from OLO staff members Natalia Carrizosa and Karen Pecoraro. To prepare this report, OLO gathered information through document review, literature review, and interviews with staff in County departments.

**Applying a Racial Equity and Social Justice Lens to OLO Report 2026-7.** In 2019, the County Council established the Racial Equity and Social Justice Act. This law directs County departments and offices to apply a racial equity and social justice (RESJ) lens to their work. RESJ is a process that focuses on centering the needs, leadership, and power of BIPOC. RESJ is also a goal of eliminating racial and social inequities. To apply a RESJ lens, OLO pays attention to race, ethnicity, and other social constructs when analyzing problems, looking for solutions, and defining success. We recognize this is necessary to fulfill our mission and advance RESJ in Montgomery County. In this report, OLO applies a RESJ lens in the following ways:

- Highlighting the history of racial inequities in police recruiting and hiring, and
- Describing recommended practices for centering racial equity in recruiting and hiring practices.

## **OLO Report 2026-7**

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# Chapter 1. Law Enforcement Recruitment Landscape

This chapter provides an overview of law enforcement agencies in the United States (U.S.), including their structure, size, and comparative demographic staffing data. It also outlines key staffing challenges facing agencies nationwide, with particular attention to the recruitment of women and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), as well as the hiring and staffing landscape across the DC–Maryland–Virginia (DMV) region. The study focuses on sworn personnel, as most recruitment vacancies and challenges occur within these ranks.

This chapter is organized as follows:

- A. Law Enforcement Agencies in the U.S.;
- B. Staffing Challenges Across Law Enforcement Agencies;
- C. Recruitment of Women and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC); and
- D. Hiring and Staffing Landscape Across the DMV Region.

## A. Law Enforcement Agencies in the U.S.

Law enforcement in the U.S. is comprised of about 18,000 federal, state, and local agencies. Each agency has varying legal and geographic jurisdictions, ranging from single-officer police departments to those with more than 30,000 officers.<sup>2</sup>

Federal law enforcement agencies have jurisdiction across all U.S. states, territories, and possessions for the enforcement of federal laws. The Department of Justice (DOJ) is responsible for most law enforcement duties at the federal level. Key agencies under the DOJ include the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), the United States Marshals Service, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP).

State law enforcement agencies are responsible for upholding state laws and providing law enforcement services statewide, including traffic control, criminal investigations across jurisdictional lines, and assisting local police departments. Many states have other specialized state-level law enforcement bodies, such as capitol police, natural resources police, and bureaus of investigation.

Local law enforcement agencies operate at the municipal, county, tribal, or regional level. These include county and municipal police departments, sheriff's offices, school district police, and transit police agencies.

County police typically exist only in metropolitan counties and have jurisdiction across the entire county. Some jurisdictions, such as Montgomery County, have both a police department and a sheriff's department. In this case, the County police handle traditional law enforcement duties, such as patrol

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. October 2016. [National Sources of Law Enforcement Employment Data](#)

and investigations, while the sheriff’s department’s responsibilities include serving legal documents, providing court security, and managing local jails.

## 1. Sworn vs. Unsworn Personnel

Law enforcement personnel are generally divided into two categories: sworn and non-sworn. Sworn personnel are those who, in the performance of their duties, have taken an oath to uphold the law and have powers such as making arrests and carrying firearms. Sworn personnel must also complete a law enforcement academy and undergo extensive training. This group includes police officers, deputy sheriffs, state troopers, and FBI agents.<sup>3</sup>

Non-sworn personnel lack at least one of these attributes and may include criminal analysts, crime scene technicians, and crime lab personnel. While these roles may be filled by sworn personnel, the positions themselves are not classified as sworn.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Law Enforcement by Numbers

The following table presents data from two Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) sources: the 2020 Census of Federal Law Enforcement Officers (CFLEO) and the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey. The 2020 CFLEO collected data on 94 agencies, including 45 Offices of Inspectors General (OIGs), which provide oversight of federal agencies and their activities. The LEMAS survey collects data on general-purpose law enforcement agencies, including municipal, county, regional police departments, most sheriffs’ offices, and primary state police and highway patrol agencies.

**Table 1. Comparative Demographics and Staffing Characteristics of U.S. Federal, State, and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (Sworn Personnel), 2020**

Agency Level	Total Sworn Personnel	% Male	% Female	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	Other Races*
Federal	137,000	85%	15%	61%	10%	21%	7%
State	61,200	93%	7%	80%	6%	10%	2%
Local	473,000	86%	14%	69%	12%	14%	4%

\*Other Races include Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and two or more races.

**Federal law enforcement agencies** employed almost 137,000 full-time federal law enforcement officers who were authorized to make arrests, carry firearms, or both. About 15% of federal law enforcement officers were female while 85% were male.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of race and ethnicity, about 61% of federal law enforcement officers were White, 10% were Black, 21% were Hispanic, 3% were Asian, 1% were American Indian or Alaska Native, and less than 1%

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<sup>3</sup> Go Law Enforcement. [Sworn vs Unsworn Police Jobs: What’s the Difference?](#)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. September 2023. [Federal Law Enforcement Officers, 2020- Statistical Tables](#)

were Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. A little more than 2% of officers identified as being two or more races.<sup>6</sup>

**Primary state law enforcement agencies** employed about 92,900 full-time personnel, including 61,200 (66%) sworn officers and 31,700 (34%) civilian personnel. About 7% of full-time sworn officers in primary state law enforcement agencies were female and 93% were male.<sup>7</sup>

When looking at racial and ethnic demographics, about 80% of full-time sworn primary state law enforcement agencies officers were white, 6% were black, 10% were Hispanic, and 2% were of another race (Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander; American Indian or Alaska Native; or two or more races).<sup>8</sup>

**General-purpose law enforcement agencies**<sup>9</sup> in the U.S. employed about 708,000 full-time sworn officers and 348,000 full-time civilians. Local police departments accounted for about 80% (11,800) of the general-purpose agencies, employing nearly 473,000 (67%) of full-time sworn personnel and 126,000 (36%) of full-time civilian personnel. Among the sworn personnel, roughly 14% female and 86% were male.<sup>10</sup>

Demographically, about 69% of full-time sworn officers in local police departments were White, 12% Black, 14% Hispanic, and 4% of officers were of another race (Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander; American Indian or Alaska Native; or two or more races).<sup>11</sup>

## B. Staffing Challenges Across Law Enforcement Agencies in the U.S.

The large number of law enforcement agencies, combined with population growth, mandated increases in police staffing and the expanding scope of responsibilities beyond traditional policing, such as responding to mental health crises and engaging in community policing, has led to a rise in law enforcement job openings.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, despite the rise in law enforcement job openings, law enforcement agencies across the U.S. have been facing significant recruitment challenges, particularly sworn officers, with many agencies struggling to find and keep qualified candidates.

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. September 2023. [Federal Law Enforcement Officers, 2020- Statistical Tables](#)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. January 2024. [Primary State Law Enforcement Agencies: Personnel 2020](#)

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> Refers to agencies with broad responsibilities of enforcing laws, maintaining public order, and protecting life and property, rather than being focused on a single, specialized type of crime. This includes local law enforcement agencies operate at the municipal, county, tribal, or regional level.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. November 2022. [Local Police Departments Personnel, 2020](#). Bulletin

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

<sup>12</sup> The city of Dallas is required by a voter-approved city charter amendment ([Proposition U](#)) to have a minimum of 4,000 police officers.

According to the 2024 International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) survey on recruitment, 70% of surveyed agencies were struggling to recruit enough officers. The recruitment challenge affected agencies of all types, sizes, and locations across the U.S.<sup>13</sup>

The difficulty in recruiting sworn officers is not due to one reason. Rather, multiple social, political, and economic forces are all simultaneously at play in shaping the current state of recruitment.<sup>14</sup> Some of these reasons include:

### 1. Financial Challenges

**Low salaries.** Low compensation often deters potential recruits, as entry-level police salaries tend to be lower than those of other college-educated professions.

**High debt.** Many potential recruits carry student loans and credit card debt. Law enforcement agencies conduct credit checks as part of the background investigation and may disqualify candidates who are so heavily indebted, they could not meet their financial obligations on a police salary.

**Housing costs.** High housing costs in certain areas can make it difficult for new officers to afford to live in the communities they serve, leading to long commutes or a decision not to accept the job.

### 2. Different Job Expectations

**Desire for work-life balance and flexibility.** Many young people often prioritize work-life balance and flexible work conditions, such as remote or hybrid work options. Others want to limit the amount of time they spend on the job, seeking positions with shorter shifts or minimal overtime.

**Generational differences.** There has also been a change from people being hired, staying, and retiring from a single workplace, or even in the same profession. For younger people, leaving a job after a few years is common, and moving from job to job is often how younger generation U.S. workers move up the career ladder. Staying in the same career long term is no longer appealing to younger generations.<sup>15</sup>

**Increased risks vs. perceived benefits.** For some potential recruits, the physical danger associated with being a police officer are perceived to outweigh the benefits, especially when other jobs offer comparable pay with far less risk.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Negative Public Image of Policing

**Negative public perception.** Many agencies believe negative public perception of law enforcement has reduced interest in the profession. Increased scrutiny of police, widespread cellphone recordings of

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<sup>13</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police. 2024. [The State of Recruitment & Retention: A Continuing Crisis for Policing](#)

<sup>14</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police. 2019. [The State of Recruitment: A Crisis for Law Enforcement](#)

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

police–public interactions, and extensive media coverage have led many young people to view law enforcement differently than previous generations.<sup>17</sup>

**High-profile use-of-force incidents.** These incidents damage the profession’s public image, erode community trust and deter potential applicants. High profile cases, such as the deaths of George Floyd, Eric Garner, and Breonna Taylor, have sparked public outcry, protests, and movements for police reform.

**Increased skepticism toward police, particularly among Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).** Research consistently shows that members of BIPOC communities are more likely than White individuals to view law enforcement with suspicion and distrust.<sup>18</sup> Historical and ongoing tensions, and systemic barriers in recruitment and hiring contribute to fewer people from these communities seeing law enforcement as a desirable career.

#### 4. Rigorous Requirements and Intensive Selection Process

**Rigorous selection requirements.** Police departments typically require candidates to undergo a rigorous selection procedure that includes written exams, physical fitness tests, psychological evaluations, and extensive background checks. These rigorous requirements, while necessary for ensuring the quality and reliability of law enforcement officers, can deter many from pursuing a career in policing.<sup>19</sup>

**High disqualification rates.** Even when individuals apply, a vast majority of candidates do not pass the rigorous screening process. The most common reasons for rejection include:

- Financial instability: Poor credit history can indicate a lack of responsibility or an increased vulnerability to corruption.
- Substance abuse: Many agencies have strict policies regarding prior or current drug use, which can disqualify otherwise suitable candidates.
- Poor employment history: A record of frequent job changes, terminations, or discipline suggests potential issues with reliability and working with others.
- Weak academic skills: Some applicants fail due to weak reading and writing skills.
- Criminal history: Past felony convictions, certain misdemeanors, and domestic violence charges are permanent disqualifiers.
- Physical fitness: Failing physical fitness standards is a frequent cause of rejection.

**Lengthy hiring processes.** While the multistage hiring process helps agencies screen out applicants who do not meet required standards, it is also lengthy. According to the IACP recruitment survey,

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<sup>17</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police. 2019. [The State of Recruitment: A Crisis for Law Enforcement](#)

<sup>18</sup> U.S. National Institute of Justice. January 2023. [Race, Trust and Police Legitimacy](#).

<sup>19</sup> CentralSquare. March 2024. [Why Police Departments are Struggling with Recruitment: Challenges and Solutions](#).

47.5% of agencies reported a hiring process lasting anywhere from four months to over a year. Depending on their circumstances, potential recruits may be unable or unwilling to wait that long.<sup>20</sup>

### C. Recruitment of Women and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC)

Law enforcement personnel have historically been and continue to be disproportionately White and male. Policies such as the Title VII Amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, along with the enactment of the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Act, have helped expand access to careers in law enforcement for women and BIPOC. Although these efforts have contributed to gradual progress, recent data from the U.S. DOJ indicate that agencies nationwide continue to experience declines in the number of these applicants.<sup>21</sup>

The underrepresentation of women and BIPOC can be attributed to longstanding structural racism and discriminatory practices within the profession that have limited equitable access to careers in law enforcement. For decades, systemic barriers in hiring processes, including narrow or ineffective outreach strategies, disproportionate disqualification of applicants during background checks, and workplace cultures that reinforce exclusion, have disproportionately favored White male applicants. Physical fitness requirements, testing practices, and promotional systems not regularly evaluated for disparate impact may also unintentionally disadvantage qualified candidates from underrepresented groups.

These barriers also affect recruitment of women and BIPOC by perpetuating perceptions that law enforcement is unwelcoming or inaccessible. When applicants do not see themselves reflected in agency leadership or view hiring processes as opaque or biased, they may be less likely to apply for careers in policing. Research identifies several additional obstacles to recruiting women and BIPOC individuals:

**Recruitment strategies are often overly broad and fail to effectively target women and minority communities.** Some agencies develop recruitment plans and advertising campaigns without consulting leaders or organizations within the communities they seek to engage, limiting both outreach and credibility.

**Cultural and historical factors may discourage interest in law enforcement careers.** In some communities, policing is not regarded positively, and prior negative interactions or longstanding distrust of law enforcement, whether based on experiences in the U.S. or abroad, can reduce willingness to pursue employment in the profession.

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<sup>20</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police. 2019. [The State of Recruitment: A Crisis for Law Enforcement](#)

<sup>21</sup> Lyles, Lucy. 2020. [Perceived Barriers to Minority Female Recruitment and Retention in Law Enforcement](#). Walden University

**Persistent negative perceptions of police culture and workplace climate can deter applicants.** Many women and BIPOC individuals view law enforcement agencies as environments where they may face discrimination, limited advancement opportunities, or lack of inclusion. Together, these factors contribute to continued challenges in attracting diverse candidates to the profession.

### **D. Hiring and Staffing Landscape Across the DC–Maryland–Virginia (DMV) Region**

Law enforcement agencies across the DMV region are experiencing the same hiring and staffing challenges as other law enforcement agencies nationwide. Competition for qualified candidates is particularly intense, as local departments must compete with federal agencies and regional police departments.

At least 32 distinct federal law enforcement agencies operate in Washington, D.C., including the FBI, ATF, and Secret Service, collectively employing thousands of law enforcement personnel. In addition, four major regional police departments, the Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD), Maryland-National Capital Park Police (M-NCPPC), Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Police (MWAA), and Maryland Transportation Authority Police (MDTA), also recruit from the same candidate pool.

Not only is there a wide range of agencies competing for the same candidates, some, particularly federal agencies, offer substantial hiring incentives. For example, as of December 2025, the U.S. Border Patrol offers hiring bonuses of up to \$60,000. The U.S. Park Police offer bonuses of up to \$70,000, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) offer bonuses of up to \$50,000.

OLO reviewed and compared law enforcement recruitment incentives, pay, and staffing conditions across seven police departments from large counties and cities in the DMV region. Table 2 below shows this comparison.

**Table 2. Law Enforcement Recruitment Incentives, Pay, and Staffing in the DMV Region 2024-2025<sup>22</sup>**

Jurisdiction	Hiring Bonus (Entry level)	Starting Salary (Entry level)	Vacancy Rate (Sworn and unsworn)	Authorized Sworn Compliment
Arlington County, VA	Up to \$25,000	\$90,012	29% <sup>23</sup>	377
Washington DC	\$25,000 + \$6,000 rental housing assistance for lateral transfers	\$75,433	20% <sup>24</sup>	4,000
Montgomery County, MD	\$20,000	\$70,056	15% <sup>25</sup>	1,465
Prince George's County, MD	\$15,000	\$64,641	17% <sup>26</sup>	1,786
Fairfax County, VA	\$15,000	\$71,864	9% <sup>27</sup>	1,492
City of Baltimore, MD	\$10,000	\$65,705	15% <sup>28</sup>	2,605
Baltimore County, MD	\$10,000	\$69,545	13% <sup>29</sup>	1,980

Various sources

**Hiring Bonuses.** As shown in Table 2, hiring bonuses are widely used across the selected jurisdictions but vary significantly in size. Arlington County and Washington, DC offer the largest incentives, providing up to \$25,000 for entry-level officers. Washington, DC further supplements its bonus structure with \$6,000 in rental housing assistance for lateral transfers.

Montgomery County, Prince George’s County, and Fairfax County offer more moderate incentives, with bonuses ranging from \$15,000 to \$20,000. In contrast, the City of Baltimore and Baltimore County offer lower bonuses, capped at \$10,000.

**Starting Salaries.** Starting salaries also differ substantially across jurisdictions. Arlington County offers the highest base pay, with starting salaries of \$90,012 for entry-level officers, well above all other jurisdictions reviewed.

<sup>22</sup> Information on hiring bonuses, starting salaries, and authorized sworn staffing levels was compiled from each county police department’s official website.

<sup>23</sup> Arlington, Virginia Government. [Service Changes and Reallocation of Resources](#)

<sup>24</sup> Metropolitan Police, Washington D.C. [FY26 Staffing Report](#)

<sup>25</sup> Farag, Susan. October 2025. [Staff Briefing - Police Department Staffing](#)

<sup>26</sup> Donovan, Lionel. December 2025. [Prince George’s County Reveals One of its Largest Police Academy Graduate Classes.](#) Wusa9

<sup>27</sup> McCaffrey, Scott. May 2025. [Fairfax County Police say they’re on Track to Meet Staffing Goals by 2030](#)

<sup>28</sup> Belson, Dan. [Baltimore Police Buck Downward Hiring Trend, but 100s of Vacancies Remain.](#) Baltimore Sun

<sup>29</sup> Baltimore County Police Department. January 2024. [Statistical Profile](#)

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Montgomery County, Fairfax County and Washington, DC fall into a mid-range salary category, with entry-level salaries clustering in the low-to-mid \$70,000s. Baltimore City and Prince George's County offer the lowest starting salaries, with entry-level pay in the mid-\$60,000s.

**Vacancy Rates.** In comparing vacancy rates, it is important to note jurisdictions vary widely in the number of authorized sworn officers. In addition, the data does not always indicate whether the reported vacancy rates included both sworn and unsworn positions. However, Arlington County reports the highest vacancy rate at 29%, followed by Washington, DC at 20%, despite both localities offering some of the most competitive bonuses and salaries.

Montgomery County and the City of Baltimore both report vacancy rates of 15%, although the City of Baltimore faces a larger staffing gap due to its larger authorized force. Fairfax County by contrast, has the lowest vacancy rate at 9%, even though its bonuses and salaries are not the highest among peer jurisdictions.

Overall, jurisdictions facing higher competition or higher costs of living appear to rely more heavily on hiring bonuses to attract candidates. Salary levels do not always align with bonus size, suggesting that some jurisdictions offset lower base pay with enhanced recruitment incentives. Across the DMV region, hiring bonuses have become commonplace and increasingly represent the cost of doing business, placing jurisdictions that do not offer such incentives at a competitive disadvantage.

# Chapter 2. Montgomery County Police Department Hiring Programs and Initiatives

This chapter provides an overview of Montgomery County's Police Department (MCPD), operating budget, sworn staffing, application process, recruitment initiatives and challenges and new initiatives to improve recruitment. The chapter is organized as follows:

- A. Overview;
- B. Operating Budget;
- C. Sworn Staff;
- D. Sworn Staff Recruitment;
- E. Initiatives to Recruit Women and BIPOC Candidates;
- F. The Application Process; and
- G. Recruitment Challenges.

## A. Overview

Established in July 1922, the Montgomery County Department (MCPD) is responsible for enforcing the law, preserving peace and protecting the rights of Montgomery County citizens. MCPD serves a population of nearly 1.1 million and oversees 507 square miles including three cities, twelve towns, four villages, and five unincorporated communities.

MCPD is the largest police department in the County, and it works alongside several municipal police departments, including City of Gaithersburg, City of Rockville, Chevy Chase Village, and Takoma Park police departments. While Takoma Park is in the County, MCPD does not typically respond to calls for service in its jurisdiction. MCPD has Mutual Aid Agreements with each municipal police department, delineating how calls for service are handled among the various police departments.<sup>30</sup>

MCPD is structured into the Office of the Chief and four major bureaus: the Special Operations Bureau, the Investigative Services Bureau, the Management Services Bureau, and the Patrol Services Bureau. The Patrol Services Bureau, the most prominent and visible bureau in the police department, oversees most of the department's officers on patrol. The Patrol Services Bureau is divided into six police districts.

## B. Operating Budget

For FY26, MCPD's Operating Budget is \$352,670,765, an increase of 6.84 percent from the FY25 Approved Budget. MCPD has 1,831 full-time positions, 227 part-time positions, and a total of 1,920.60

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<sup>30</sup> Farag, Susan. October 2025. [Central Staff Briefing on Montgomery County Police Department Staffing](#)

FTEs.<sup>31</sup> Personnel Costs comprise 84.43 percent of the budget while Operating Expenses account for the remaining 15.57 percent.<sup>32</sup>

### C. Sworn Staff

Like other law enforcement agencies, MCPD is comprised of both sworn and non-sworn staff. MCPD has about 1100 sworn officers, and 700 professional staff (non-sworn). Patrol accounts for the largest share of sworn personnel and budget. For FY26, the Patrol Services Division accounts for 65% of all sworn personnel and about 40% of the department's total operating budget.

In FY25, the department faced 190 vacant sworn positions out of an authorized complement of 1,275, equating to a 15% vacancy rate. These shortages are felt most acutely in patrol, where only 611 officers are available to work against an authorized strength of 825, leaving the unit operating at just 74% of its staffing level.<sup>33</sup>

For several years, MCPD has experienced high vacancies among sworn personnel. Data from FY16-25 shows that staffing levels were relatively stable and strong from FY2016–2020 with peak in FY19 where there were only 12 vacancies. Beginning in FY21, the situation changes noticeably, with filled positions declining and vacancies rising sharply. This corresponds with the national trend where 2021-2022 were some of the most difficult years for police recruiting.

Staffing pressures deepen between FY22 and FY24, as sworn vacancies climb steadily from 129 to 161 and then to 179, while the number of filled positions falls to a low of 1,101 in FY24. As noted earlier, FY25 records 190 unfilled positions, making it one of the years with the highest sworn vacancy levels.

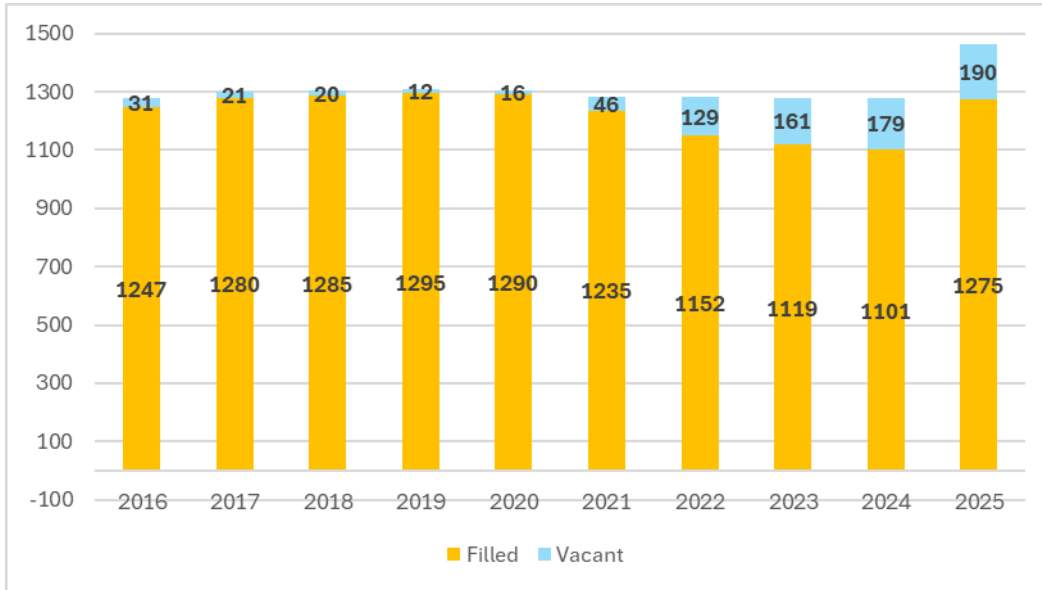
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<sup>31</sup> Total FTEs may include seasonal or temporary positions and may also reflect workforce charged to or from other departments or funds

<sup>32</sup> Office of Management and Budget, Montgomery County. June 2025. [Montgomery County Police Department Operating Budget](#)

<sup>33</sup> Farag, Susan. October 2025. [Central Staff Briefing on Montgomery County Police Department Staffing](#)

**Chart 1. MCPD Sworn, Filled and Vacant Positions Fiscal Year 2016-2025**



Source: Montgomery County Police Department

**1. Sworn Staff Demographics**

Like law-enforcement agencies across the U.S., MCPD’s sworn staff is predominantly White and male. According to FY25 data, 71% of sworn officers were White, 12% were Black, 10% were Hispanic, 6% were Asian, and less than 1% were American Indian or other. Of the total sworn compliment, almost 80% were male and 20% female.

**Table 3. MCPD Sworn Staff Demographics FY25**

Race	Count	Percentage	Percentage of County Population by Race/Ethnicity (2023) <sup>34</sup>
White	784	71%	39%
Black	137	12%	19%
Hispanic	115	10%	21%
Asian	62	6%	15%
American Indian	2	0.2%	0.7%
Other	2	0.2%	12%
<b>Total Sworn Staff</b>	<b>1102</b>		

Source: Montgomery County Police Department

<sup>34</sup> [U.S. Census Bureau](#). 2023 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates

A further analysis of the department’s workforce composition shows that White officers, both male and female, made up the largest share of the sworn complement in FY25, accounting for 57.1% male and 14.1% female. Representation of other racial groups is much smaller, with Black males comprising 9.3% of the sworn complement, followed by Hispanic males at 8.2% and Asian males at 5%. American Indian employees, both male and female combined, make up just 0.2%, and the “Other” category accounts for 0.2%, with data reported only for males.

**Table 4. MCPD Sworn Staff Gender Demographics FY25**

Race	Female %	Male %
<b>Total</b>	<b>20.2%</b>	<b>79.9%</b>
White	14.1%	57.1%
Black	3.1%	9.3%
Hispanic	2.3%	8.2%
Asian	0.6%	5.0%
American Indian	0.1%	0.1%
Other		0.2%

Source: Montgomery County Police Department

Across all racial groups, the percentage of male employees is significantly higher than female employees. This gender imbalance is most noticeable within the White and Asian categories, where male representation substantially exceeds female representation. These patterns highlight both racial and gender disparities within the department’s sworn staff and indicate areas for potential focus in future recruitment efforts.

**Table 5. Trends in MCPD Sworn Staff by Race and Gender, 2021–2025**

Race/Gender	2021	2025
American Indian Female	0.1%	0.1%
American Indian Male	0.1%	0.1%
Asian Female	0.6%	0.6%
Asian Male	4.2%	5.0%
Black Female	3.5%	3.1%
Black Male	8.5%	9.4%
Hispanic Female	1.8%	2.3%
Hispanic Male	7.2%	8.2%
White Female	13.9%	14.1%
White Male	61.0%	57.1%
Other Male		0.2%

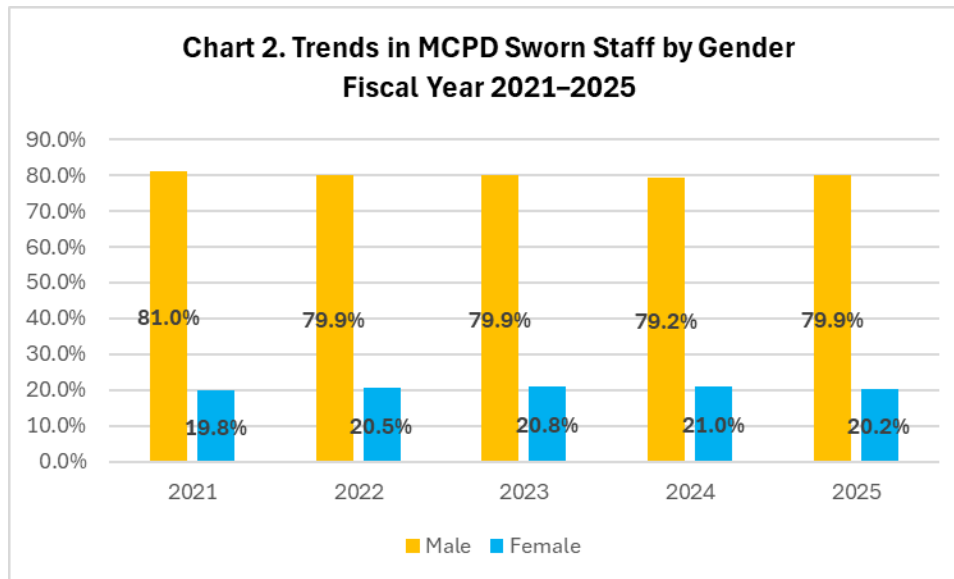
Source: Montgomery County Police Department

Table 3 shows that the racial and gender composition of MCPD’s sworn staff remained relatively stable from 2021 to 2025, with only gradual shifts across the years:

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- The share of White males declined from 61.0% in 2021 to 57.1% in 2025;
- The percentage of Black males increased over this period, from 8.5% to 9.4% in 2025;
- The share of Black females declined modestly from 3.5% to 3.1%.; and
- The share of Hispanic males and females increased from 7.2% to 8.2% (males) and from 1.8% to 2.3% (females), respectively.

Overall, these trends indicate gradual diversification, driven primarily by increases among Hispanic and Black males alongside a continued decline in White male representation.



Source: Montgomery County Police Department

An analysis of sworn staff gender trends from FY 2021 to 2025 indicates that MCPD’s workforce has remained predominantly male with men consistently representing about 79–81% of sworn staff.

## D. Sworn Staff Recruitment

### 1. Staffing

MCPD’s Personnel Division has four full-time recruiters. In addition, the department operates a decentralized recruiter program consisting of approximately one to two dozen officers who have received additional training and are willing to serve as recruiters. These decentralized recruiters may supplement staffing at recruitment events, both locally and outside the area.

### 2. Marketing

Last year, MCPD entered a major partnership with EPIC, a marketing firm, to develop marketing content, including videos and a media campaign. EPIC also distributed these messages across social media platforms, using targeted advertising to generate greater interest in the department. The

department used this contract to help launch its marketing efforts. Since the content has been developed and initial marketing work has been completed, MCPD plans to take over these responsibilities moving forward.

While marketing funding is sometimes requested through recruitment line items, the department also utilizes grants and other partnerships to support its marketing initiatives. Recently, the department entered into an agreement with Capital One Arena in Washington, DC, to display its marketing videos during sporting events.

Regarding its social media presence, MCPD maintains a strong presence on Facebook, X, and Instagram, and continues to explore additional platforms such as TikTok. The department tracks engagement metrics, including video views and Google searches, across various marketing vignettes. MCPD is also in the process of hiring a full-time civilian employee to oversee social media and recruitment strategies. This position will be housed within the Personnel Division and will focus on expanding the department's footprint across social media platforms and the broader digital news environment.

### **3. Recruitment Initiatives**

MCPD employs a range of recruiting strategies, from youth law enforcement experience programs, such as cadet, internship, and leadership programs, to initiatives targeting more experienced personnel and members of the BIPOC community.

The department primarily recruits within the County, as it prefers officers to be members of the communities they serve. While residency is not a requirement, MCPD strongly encourages local recruitment because it believes officers who live in the County are more invested in the community. At the same time, the department recognizes the need to recruit beyond the local area. As a result, MCPD places significant emphasis on recruiting within a 250-mile radius of Montgomery County, particularly at universities and local law enforcement training facilities.

The following are MCPD's recruiting initiatives:

#### **a. Traditional College Recruitment**

MCPD engages in traditional college recruitment by attending college career fairs and working directly with specific schools and academic programs, such as criminology or sociology departments. The department taps into its pool of decentralized recruiters when hosting events at specific institutions. For example, if MCPD holds a recruitment event at West Virginia University, they may invite a decentralized recruiter who is an alumnus to participate, as that individual can better relate to prospective candidates by speaking to their shared experience. MCPD also has decentralized recruiters who are alumni of Pennsylvania State University and other large universities.

Recently, MCPD has begun targeting collegiate athletes, particularly Division III athletes from smaller schools who may not aspire to compete beyond their college careers. As part of this effort, recruiters

have been visiting universities and working directly with athletic departments to encourage athletes to consider careers with the department. According to MCPD, these athletes possess many qualities associated with successful police officers, including teamwork, self-discipline, a strong work ethic, and time-management skills.

MCPD works around athletes' practice and game schedules whenever possible. For example, if a field hockey player is graduating in the winter, recruiters will coordinate oral interviews, written tests, and background checks to fit around that athlete's commitments. Although the initiative is still in its early stages, the department has received positive responses so far.

### **b. Police Explorer Program**

The Police Explorer Program aims to recruit students aged 14 to 20 who are interested in law enforcement careers or who seek to develop leadership and communication skills. It is a volunteer program that meets monthly and assists with various police events, such as community days and traffic safety initiatives. To participate, students must be in good physical and mental health and be enrolled in a high school, college, vocational, or continuing education program in Montgomery County. Participants are also subject to a background investigation. The program offers students an early, hands-on introduction to what it means to serve as a member of the MCPD.

On average, 25 students participate in the program during the school year; however, enrollment increased to 36 students for the 2025–2026 school year.

### **c. Police Cadet Program**

The Police Cadet Program is designed to identify and select qualified students aged 18 or older who are considering a career in law enforcement. The program is a paid, part-time position in which cadets work 20 hours per week performing a variety of hands-on administrative, technical, and other duties that support the department's functions, services, and operations.

To participate, applicants must possess a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) equivalent, hold a valid driver's license, and be a U.S. citizen. Cadets must be enrolled full-time in a college curriculum and maintain a minimum GPA of 2.0. Work schedules are flexible to accommodate academic commitments.

Cadets are assigned two unit rotations per year, providing opportunities to learn about different areas of the department and gain valuable on-the-job training. Participants receive an hourly wage of \$28.03 and are eligible for leave benefits, including paid holiday leave and healthcare benefits. The program may last up to two years, with potential extensions.

The table below shows the number of students who have participated in the Cadet Program over the past three years and how many have gone on to join MCPD as sworn personnel.

**Table 6. Cadet Participation and MCPD Hiring Outcomes**

<b>Class Year</b>	<b>Number of Participating Cadets</b>	<b>Number of Cadets Hired for Sworn Positions</b>
2023-2024	18	1
2024-2025	23	3
2025-2026	19	3

Source: Montgomery County Police Department

The data show that annual student participation in the program has remained relatively stable over the three-year period, ranging from 18 to 23 participants annually. The number of cadets hired into sworn positions increased after the first year and has since remained steady. Despite this consistency, only a small proportion of participants ultimately transition into sworn roles, indicating room to strengthen the program’s effectiveness as a hiring pipeline.

These findings suggest an opportunity to better understand how to retain cadets after they complete the program. MCPD could further examine why many cadets choose not to apply to the academy and use these insights to inform targeted retention strategies.

#### **d. Internship Program**

This program seeks to recruit volunteers and interns to work alongside line officers, command staff, and civilian employees in support of departmental operations. An internship with MCPD provides participants with the opportunity to observe firsthand the organizational and operational aspects of police work. Interns assist with a variety of technical and administrative tasks that enhance departmental functions and support both sworn officers and civilian staff.

Eligibility requirements include U.S. citizenship or possession of a valid permanent resident (Green Card) and being at least 18 years of age. Applicants are subject to a comprehensive background investigation due to potential access to sensitive and confidential information. This investigation may include a review of driving records, criminal history, and reference checks with employers, friends, and acquaintances.

Certain internships have additional requirements. For example, internships within the Forensic Services and Crime Laboratory require applicants to be enrolled in a forensic science, life science, or physical science program at an accredited college, university, or graduate school. Currently, MCPD’s volunteer corps includes approximately 150 participants.

### **e. Law Enforcement and Leadership Program at the Thomas Edison High School of Technology**

The Law Enforcement program exposes students to the fields of law enforcement and criminal justice. This two-year program is for juniors and seniors who will spend their first year at Thomas Edison High School of Technology completing coursework. During the second year at their home school, students will complete additional coursework through an internship, enrollment in a college level course, or advanced coursework in social studies.

### **f. Citizen Academy**

Established in 1994, the Citizen Academy aims to increase resident awareness of MCPD. Participants learn about topics related to the role of police officers in their community. During the 15-week academy, residents receive instruction on criminal law, Maryland traffic law, investigations, and other relevant subjects. Participants must attend at least 12 of the 15 classes to be eligible for graduation. The Citizen Academy is open to anyone 18 years of age or older who lives or works in Montgomery County. All applicants are subject to a background check.

### **g. Lateral Transfer and Veteran Recruitment**

MCPD offers lateral transfer opportunities for experienced, previously certified police officers from both in-state and out-of-state agencies. Lateral hires attend an abbreviated academy and are eligible for a \$20,000 hiring bonus.

According to MCPD, there are two pathways for lateral transfer. The first applies to officers who are certified by the State of Maryland, such as those from the Charles County Sheriff's Office, Baltimore City Police Department, or Maryland State Police. These officers are eligible to transfer laterally through a streamlined process.

The second pathway is the comparative compliance process, which applies to officers certified outside of Maryland. These officers have completed a full police academy and hold certification in another state but are not Maryland-certified. This pathway is more complex and requires a formal equivalency review to determine eligibility for lateral transfer.

In the past, MCPD has made concerted efforts to recruit lateral transfers by advertising specifically for experienced officers. Over the last 20 years, MCPD has conducted approximately six lateral transfer classes. Because MCPD operates its own academy, it has the capacity to integrate lateral classes alongside ongoing academy sessions.

MCPD also has a veteran hiring preference, and applicants can substitute three years of active-duty military service, with an honorable discharge, for the required 60 college credits. In addition to other generally accepted military benefits, an officer can purchase up to four years military service toward

MCPD retirement, and the starting salary is increased based on years of military service, including military police experience.<sup>35</sup>

### **E. Initiatives to Recruit Women and BIPOC Candidates**

MCPD relies on the following initiatives to recruit women and BIPOC candidates:

#### **1. The 30×30 Initiative**

In 2023, MCPD joined the 30×30 Initiative to increase the representation of women in policing. The initiative sets a goal of having 30% women recruits in policing by 2030. By taking the pledge, MCPD commits to a series of low- and no-cost actions that law enforcement agencies can implement to improve the representation and experiences of women in policing.

These activities help agencies assess the current state of gender equity within the department, identify factors contributing to disparities, and develop and implement strategies to eliminate barriers and advance women in law enforcement. The actions address recruitment, assessment, hiring, retention, promotion, and agency culture.

As part of its recruitment efforts, MCPD highlights female officers who have built successful careers in its advertising campaigns. The department also offers a mentorship program during the recruitment process, assigning each female applicant a mentor. Currently, over 30% of participants in MCPD's mentorship program are women. Additionally, the MCPD's Women's Leadership Group is actively exploring strategies to increase the number of female applicants to the department.

Compared with other agencies in the region, MCPD could benefit from organizing or participating in targeted recruitment events for women, such as women's hiring symposiums, women-focused job fairs, and expos. The next chapter provides examples of peer jurisdictions that have successfully implemented these recruitment initiatives.

#### **2. Visits to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)**

As part of their college recruitment, MCPD places particular emphasis on visiting HBCUs in this area.

#### **3. Latino Community Academy**

In 2016, the MCPD launched the Latino Community Academy to educate the Hispanic community about local laws and police operations in Montgomery County, while also addressing issues related to cultural differences and historical perceptions of law enforcement in other countries.

The Latino Community Academy is a 13-week informational program conducted in Spanish. Participants receive instruction on topics such as the penal code, Maryland traffic laws, investigations,

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<sup>35</sup> Effective Law Enforcement for All. July 2022. [Review of Montgomery County, MD Police Department](#)

simulations, and resources for victims of abuse or mistreatment. The academy is open to individuals 18 years of age or older who live or work in Montgomery County. Immigration status is not a factor in participation. The class is limited to 40 students, with enrollment offered on a first-come, first-served basis.

### **F. The Application Process**

On average, MCPD's application process takes between three to four months from the time a candidate applies to the time they receive a final offer. To maintain applicant interest without interruption, the department accepts applications year-round. MCPD's application process consists of the following steps:

1. Online application
2. Written exam
3. Scored interview
4. Background (can be interchangeable with oral board depending on staffing)
5. Polygraph examination
6. Director of Personnel extends conditional offer
7. Psychological examination
8. Medical examination
9. Assistant Chief extends final offer
10. Complete 27 ½ week academy

The application process begins with an online application submitted through the Montgomery County employment website. After the application is submitted, MCPD reviews it to ensure the applicant meets the minimum qualifications based on the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) which is applicable to new police officer hires.

There are two sets of disqualifiers in Maryland: those established by the County and those established by the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission (MPTSC). Montgomery County does not make its disqualifiers public to ensure that applicants provide truthful information on their applications. The following are automatic background disqualifiers for police officer applicants set by MPTSC:

- No felony convictions;
- No serious misdemeanor convictions; defined as any crime that would carry more than a 1-year incarceration;
- Can not ever have illegally sold, produced, cultivated, distributed, or transported a controlled dangerous substance, narcotic drug, or marijuana;
- Can not ever have illegally used a controlled dangerous substance, narcotic drug, or marijuana while employed to enforce federal, state, or local law by any government entity;
- No use of heroin, phencyclidine (PCP), or lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD);

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- No controlled dangerous substance use within three years of application;
- No marijuana use within one year of application; and
- No more than four (4) uses of controlled dangerous substances in a lifetime and no use after the age of twenty-one (21) (not including marijuana).

MCPD sets minimal qualifications, which include:

- High School Diploma;
- Not less than 21 years old at the time of graduation from the academy;
- United States Citizenship –OR– permanent legal resident of the United States who is an honorably discharged veteran of the United States Armed Forces and who has applied to obtain United States Citizenship, and the application is still pending approval; and
- Valid driver’s license.

After the application is reviewed, MCPD recruiters send the applicant a link to complete a written examination. The exam assesses reading comprehension and problem-solving skills. Applicants who receive a passing score of 60% are then scheduled for a scored interview.

The scored interview is one hour long and is conducted by three officers. Applicants answer six standardized questions that are the same for all candidates. Applicants are rated as either “Well Qualified” or “Qualified.” Only those rated “Well Qualified” move on to the background check phase.

For the background check, a recruiter sends an application link and gives applicants approximately four weeks to submit all required forms and documents, including a driver’s license or passport, college transcripts, and other materials as needed. Applicants can submit all required background information online, which has been especially helpful for those who are still in college or live out of state.

MCPD has 16 background investigators who are responsible for conducting comprehensive background investigations. The process includes an in-depth interview with the applicant, as well as interviews with references, neighbors, co-workers, and family members. Investigators also review the applicant’s employment history, criminal and traffic records, credit reports, academic records, and, when applicable, military records.

Applicants are then scheduled for a polygraph test which is used to confirm information obtained through the selection process. The exam covers areas such as employment, crimes, falsification of information and drug use.

Once the applicant has passed the background investigation, the Director of Personnel extends a conditional offer, and the applicant moves forward to the next stage of the process. This stage includes psychological and medical examinations. After this stage is completed, the Police Chief extends a final offer, and the candidate proceeds to attend the 27½-week academy.

Recruiters are in contact with applicants on a daily or weekly basis throughout the process. Their role is to guide applicants through the initial application, written and oral boards, and then transition them to

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the background investigation phase, where investigators work with applicants through the next stage of the process.

MCPD has not conducted a formal survey of incoming officers to understand why they chose MCPD over other local agencies. Anecdotally, candidates frequently mention the department’s size, its location, and the compensation as key factors in their decision. Similarly, MCPD has not surveyed new hires to determine whether the hiring bonus played a role in attracting them.

MCPD could implement a formal survey process for incoming officers to capture the factors that influence their decision to join the department, including the role of hiring bonuses, location, department size, and compensation. Collecting and analyzing this data will enable MCPD to better understand recruitment motivations, refine its outreach strategies, and target resources effectively to attract and retain qualified candidates.

## 1. Application Process Statistics

OLO requested data for Academy Session 79, the most recent session at the time of this study, to analyze the stages and reasons for applicant elimination. The table below shows where candidates were removed during the application process.

**Table 7. Applicant Eliminations by Stage and Reason - Academy Class 79**

<b>Reason for Elimination</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Failed to meet minimum standards	292	34.8%
Did not take the written examination	246	29.4%
Failed written examination	49	5.8%
Did not complete background profile	100	11.9%
Removed after background check	96	11.5%
Removed after polygraph	8	1.0%
Removed after oral board examination	2	0.2%
Removed after psychological/medical examination or director review	7	0.8%
Applied hours prior to application window closing and were moved to session 80	6	0.7%
Applicants joined the department as non-competitive reappointments	2	0.2%

Source: Montgomery County Police

Academy Class 79 received a total of 838 applicants; however, only 30 accepted final offers of employment and joined the academy. As shown in Table 5, the largest losses occur very early in the process. Nearly two-thirds of applicants either did not meet minimum standards (34.8%) or did not take the written examination (29.4%). This suggests that initial eligibility screening and early engagement are the biggest drop-off points.

The next stage of attrition occurred during the background phase, with 11.9% of candidates not completing the background profile and 11.5% being removed after background investigation. Combined, background-related attrition accounts for 23.4%.

The data also shows that very few applicants are removed at later stages, suggesting that once applicants reach these phases, they are highly likely to succeed.

Overall, applicant attrition is driven primarily by early eligibility screening, exam participation, and the background process rather than by later assessments. This highlights potential opportunities to improve upfront communication about minimum qualifications and increase support and follow-through for the written examination.

### **G. Recruitment Challenges**

According to MCPD, one of the most significant challenges in the hiring process is the high number of candidates who are ultimately disqualified due to minimum requirements and state and local disqualifiers. It is not uncommon for applicants who appear to be strong candidates to fail a background check or divulge disqualifying information later in the hiring process. This statement is supported by the data presented in Table 5 of the previous section: nearly 35% of applicants were eliminated during the initial application stage for failing to meet these standards, more than one-third of all individuals who applied.

MCPD also identifies public attitudes toward law enforcement as an ongoing challenge. Sentiment toward law enforcement tends to ebb and flow at the local, state, and national levels. During periods of positive sentiment, MCPD can capitalize on increased interest; however, during periods of negative sentiment, application numbers decline. Much of this fluctuation is outside the department's control, as it is influenced by events occurring across the state or the country.

Finally, MCPD cites generational shifts in career expectations as another recruitment challenge. Many applicants see policing as a short-term opportunity rather than a long-term career. While previous generations often entered law enforcement with the intention of settling into a single department for decades, newer applicants may plan to serve for a few years before transitioning to federal agencies, the private sector, or other career paths. Although MCPD also attracts candidates from the private sector seeking greater job stability, long-term retention has become more difficult. The traditional appeal of a pension has diminished. Officers are now more likely to leave after six or seven years, a trend that law enforcement personnel sections rarely encountered a decade ago.

#### **1. Addressing Recruitment Challenges**

MCPD has implemented several strategies in recent years to address recruitment challenges, including streamlining recruitment and background investigation processes, increasing salaries to remain competitive in the DMV region and instituting a recruitment bonus comparable to those offered by

other jurisdictions. The following outlines some of the most recent strategies that MCPD has implemented or looking to implement.

### **a. Changes to Qualification Requirements**

MCPD recently made changes to its applicant requirements to encourage more people to join its ranks. Previously, applicants were required to have a minimum of 60 college credits, the equivalent of an associate degree, before being eligible to enter the training academy. Through a new partnership with the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC), prospective police officers can now earn those credits at no cost while completing the academy.

Officers who complete the 28-week academy, finish the Field Training Officer (FTO) program, and obtain Maryland certification, may earn up to 63 college credits through an online assessment, which can be applied toward an associate or bachelor's degree. Additional credits—up to 30—may be awarded for military service, professional certifications, or vocational education, leaving officers just 30 credits short of a bachelor's degree.<sup>36</sup>

As a result, MCPD has seen a record number of applicants, as college credits are no longer a prerequisite for applying. In addition, current officers who entered under military or prior law enforcement pathways are now pursuing those credits to apply toward a degree. In this way, the initiative is also supporting existing officers' professional development by providing continuing education and career advancement.

Montgomery County is among several jurisdictions nationwide that have lowered their educational requirements for new recruits in recent months, including the New York Police Department and the Dallas Police Department. The changes align with the majority, or 82%, of law enforcement agencies in the nation that only require a high school diploma, according to a 2017 nationwide survey of police departments.<sup>37</sup>

Although some have criticized the lowered requirements, MCPD views the change to remove barriers to entry while rewarding officers who complete academy training with college credit. According to MCPD, most officers in the department already have at least 60 college credits. This remains true for Academy Class 81, where most recruits will also meet the 60-credit threshold.

### **b. Revision to Cannabis Restriction Testing**

Cannabis became a recreational substance in the State of Maryland on July 1, 2023. However, the state allows two pathways for applicants who have previously used cannabis to be eligible for hire. The first requires a three-year period of abstention from cannabis use prior to applying. The second allows for a

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<sup>36</sup> WTOP News. August 2025. [College Credits for Cops: Montgomery Co. police tackle recruitment challenges with education benefits](#)

<sup>37</sup> Bethesda Magazine. October 2025. [County Police Remove College Credit Requirement for Officer Applicants](#)

one-year period of abstention, but if the applicant is hired, they are subject to testing for up to two years.

Previously, MCPD required a three-year period of cannabis abstention, which created a significant recruitment barrier. The department frequently encountered otherwise qualified applicants who had used cannabis recreationally following legalization but were required to wait at least three years from their most recent use to become eligible. This requirement also placed MCPD at a competitive disadvantage relative to neighboring jurisdictions. For example, Washington, D.C., requires only three months of abstinence, while Virginia imposes no restrictions on prior cannabis use.<sup>38</sup>

In late November 2025, Montgomery County Government and FOP Lodge 35 signed a memorandum of agreement allowing the testing of applicants who report cannabis use more than one year but less than three years prior to applying. This agreement will take effect for Session 81, the next scheduled academy class.

### **c. Revamping the Advertising Approach**

As employment expectations have evolved with new generations, MCPD has adapted its advertising approach to better appeal to younger candidates. Rather than promoting law enforcement solely as a long-term career, the department frames it as an opportunity to join an organization where individuals can grow and specialize across a variety of units.

MCPD offers officers a wide range of career paths and professional development opportunities. Officers may focus on patrol, specialized investigative units, tactical operations, canine units, school programs, or training at the academy. The department emphasizes both career advancement and career enhancement, allowing officers to rotate through different roles over a 25-year career to gain diverse experiences and pursue their individual interests within law enforcement.

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<sup>38</sup> NBC Washington. January 2024. [Maryland Rules on Past Marijuana use may Hurt Police Recruiting](#)

### Chapter 3. Recommended Practices and Examples from Other Jurisdictions

This chapter summarizes model recruitment practices identified by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), all of which have conducted research on law enforcement hiring challenges. It also highlights evidence-based strategies to improve hiring outcomes and broaden applicant pools, drawing on OLO’s review of recruitment practices in several comparable jurisdictions that have demonstrated measurable success.

In addition, this chapter examines approaches used by agencies across the U. S. to increase representation of women and BIPOC. Finally, it describes a comprehensive pipeline program that supports and guides prospective applicants from middle school through college and into careers in law enforcement. This chapter is organized as follows:

- A. Model Recruitment Practices;
- B. Recruitment Practices from Peer Jurisdictions;
- C. Recruitment Practices to Increase Women and BIPOC Candidates; and
- D. Candidate Retention in Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs.

#### A. Model Recruitment Practices

In the past, police departments had little difficulty attracting eligible candidates. Law enforcement offered stable, well-paying employment, and applicants readily lined up to become police officers. Today, the recruitment landscape is very different. Police departments must invest in recruitment strategies, actively engage potential applicants, and continually work to reach their target audiences to meet staffing goals. As a result, recruitment efforts have shifted from a passive application process to a more active approach.

In response to these challenges, a substantial body of literature has emerged on strategies to improve recruitment and overcome hiring difficulties in law enforcement. For this study, OLO reviewed recruitment research from IACP, U.S. Department of Justice’s BJA, and PERF, and summarized the most common strategies identified. Based on this review, the following strategies were most frequently cited as model practices to improve recruitment:

##### 1. Shift from “Screening Out” to Intentionally Selecting for Values and skills

While agencies must continue screening out unqualified candidates, the hiring process should not function solely as a disqualifying tool. Instead, agencies should use the process to proactively identify and bring on board candidates who possess the values, character traits, and capabilities they seek. The following are suggestions for achieving this goal:

- **Actively identify candidates with desired character traits.** Such traits could include integrity, judgment, empathy, communication skills, and alignment with community values, not just minimum qualifications. To better assess the full range of candidates’ characteristics and capabilities, agencies should invest in face-to-face interviews that include scenario-based questions, role-playing exercises, and scenario-based testing to identify the desired traits.<sup>39</sup>
- **Reconsider traditional disqualifiers.** Traditionally, certain behaviors identified during background investigations—such as past drug use or financial problems—have been almost automatic disqualifiers for many agencies. As the candidate pool has changed and social norms and some drug laws have evolved, agencies have reconsidered aspects of their traditional thinking about candidates’ histories and prior activities.<sup>40</sup>  
Agencies should also assess whether applicants are being disqualified due to minor arrests or prior contacts stemming from past indiscriminate “zero-tolerance” policing practices. When this occurs, agencies should consider innovative solutions, such as helping residents expunge minor incidents from their criminal records.<sup>41</sup>
- **Rethink entrance requirements.** For most agencies, entrance requirements have changed little in the last half century and should be assessed in connection with success in the profession. For example, large private companies are recognizing the importance of hiring based on skills rather than college degrees. Entrance requirements for law enforcement agencies have not been reassessed considering current needs for greater communication and public engagement and would benefit by a fresh assessment of skills required for the job and the best way to determine how those skills should be demonstrated.<sup>42</sup>
- **Hire “guardians” rather than “warriors”.** While the traditional approach to police hiring has skewed heavily toward the “warrior” aspects of the profession, agencies today need to focus attention on recruiting and hiring for the “guardian” role that police officers must be prepared to play. Agencies should concentrate most of their attention on ensuring that applicants coming into the system have the necessary qualities of the guardian, because the warrior elements of the job can be taught.<sup>43</sup>

## 2. Emphasize Community Alignment and Legitimacy

It is essential to understand and act on the community’s expectations for police officers. Without strong community relationships and officers who model the behaviors the community values, agencies

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<sup>39</sup> Police Executive Research Forum. 2017. [Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer. Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success](#)

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*

<sup>42</sup> Wiseman, Jane. October 2021. [Law Enforcement Recruitment: Research-based Recommendations](#). Policymaker Summary

<sup>43</sup> Police Executive Research Forum. 2017. [Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer. Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success](#)

will struggle to serve their communities and build a sense of trust and legitimacy. The following are suggestions for achieving this goal:

- **Understand the community.** Assessing the community an agency serves will help understand the population's diversity and the community's expectations for the police department.
- **Seek community input in defining desired traits.** Identifying key traits applicants should possess should go beyond internal discussions. Agencies must also seek input from community members. What do residents, business owners, civic leaders, and others expect from the officers who serve their communities? These stakeholders are the primary recipients of police services and offer a unique perspective on what constitutes effective policing. Without incorporating community feedback into the hiring process, agencies risk missing a complete and accurate understanding of the workforce they need to build.<sup>44</sup>
- **Make hiring process transparent.** Agencies should clearly communicate their recruiting criteria, procedures, and evaluation methods. They are encouraged to use interactive websites with video and audio to tell the agency's story and explain the purpose and responsibilities of the job. Agencies can also make organizational charts, policies, and hiring metrics (such as demographics and outcomes) publicly available to promote transparency and demonstrate fairness.
- **Hire officers who reflect the values and demographics of the communities they serve.** To hire officers reflecting community values and demographics, agencies should use proactive, targeted recruitment (outreach to diverse groups, college programs, social media), build strong community partnerships, implement bias-reducing hiring practices (diverse panels, clear standards, cultural training), and focus on cultural competency and transparency throughout the process.

### 3. Make Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) a Central Hiring Goal

DEI recruitment efforts should not be treated as optional. DEI practices should be embedded throughout recruitment, screening, and retention. Suggestions for achieving this goal include:

- **Actively recruit women and BIPOC candidates.** As discussed in the previous section, agencies should use proactive, targeted recruitment strategies, including partnerships with women's colleges, HBCUs, and other institutions that serve BIPOC students. Many law enforcement agencies already collaborate with HBCUs or other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Expanding partnerships with institutions that serve women and BIPOC students is an effective way to reach more diverse applicant pools.

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<sup>44</sup> Police Executive Research Forum. 2017. [Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer. Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success](#)

- **Create targeted outreach programs to reach diverse audiences.** National data shows that agencies with specific outreach programs to recruit both female and BIPOC officers are more successful in hiring a diverse force than agencies without such outreach programs. These programs should intentionally focus on building connections, trust, and interest in law enforcement among a broad and diverse pool of candidates.<sup>45</sup>
- **Standardize background checks criteria and train investigators in racial equity and social justice.** Implicit bias refers to bias in judgment or behavior that results from subtle attitudes and stereotypes that usually exist below the level of conscious awareness and which the individual does not intentionally control. Agencies should regularly review background investigation practices and procedures to ensure that traditions or implicit biases on the part of investigators are not disqualifying candidates who might bring fresh ideas to the agency and help achieve diversity goals. This can be done by:
  - **Standardizing background checks criteria:** Develop a structured set of guidelines for evaluating background checks, ensuring they are consistently applied to all candidates.
  - **Training all background investigators in racial equity and social justice:** This training helps investigators recognize and mitigate subconscious and implicit biases that may unfairly influence the hiring or screening of women and BIPOC candidates. It also addresses historical and systemic inequities, prevents discriminatory or unfair screening practices, improves communication, and promotes fair, objective assessments.
- **Review hiring practices, procedures, and language for implicit bias.** As with background checks, implicit bias in hiring practices and procedures more generally can result in inequities in hiring. Agencies can mitigate the impact of implicit bias in hiring by:
  - **Performing data audits:** Regularly audit hiring data to check patterns in rejection rates among different demographic groups.
  - **Standardizing testing conditions:** Ensure all candidates take the tests under similar conditions to maintain a level playing field.
  - **Reviewing language on job descriptions:** Remove gender-coded terms: Avoid masculine-coded words like "assertive," or "competitive." Replace them with neutral language that describes the skills needed, such as "collaborative" or "cooperative".
  - **Using diverse interview panels:** Involve people from different backgrounds, departments, and levels of seniority to minimize the impact of any single individual's bias.
- **Consider modifying physical fitness requirements.** Research has found fitness standards that overemphasize upper body strength not only discriminate against female candidates, but these standards also discourage women from even applying. To address this, some departments are

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<sup>45</sup> Wiseman, Jane. October 2021. [Law Enforcement Recruitment: Research-based Recommendations](#)

altering fitness tests to measure upper body strength using rowing, which tends to have gender neutral success rates compared to pushups.<sup>46</sup>

- **Ensure prospective candidates can see themselves in the role.** Women and BIPOC candidates may be discouraged by recruiting messages that predominantly feature White male officers, as this can signal, they may not fit in or be welcomed within the organization. As a result, some candidates may self-select out of the process before even applying. To foster a more inclusive image, some law enforcement agencies highlight recruiters from diverse backgrounds on their websites, creating a welcoming and representative “face” of the agency.<sup>47</sup>
- **Use targeted digital marketing.** Digital marketing allows agencies to deliver customized messages to specific audiences at a fraction of the cost of traditional advertising. For example, one state police agency used geofencing to send recruitment ads directly to attendees at a graduation ceremony at a local Historically Black College to attract more Black troopers. These low-cost digital tools make it possible to target women, BIPOC, or any other groups underrepresented within a department.<sup>48</sup>
- **Provide one-on-one support to applicants from diverse backgrounds.** Personal connection with a recruiter can increase retention in the recruitment pipeline. Mentoring may be especially beneficial for BIPOC candidates, whose families may be more likely to discourage a law enforcement career. Scholars recommend recasting the recruiter in a “football coach” model - meeting with the family, exercising with the candidate, building rapport, and opening lines of communication.<sup>49</sup>
- **Assess organization culture for any barriers to belonging.** A lack of diversity can create a workplace culture that feels unwelcoming to women and BIPOC. Organizations improve their effectiveness when they promote inquiry, equity, and continuous learning, and when they ensure that historically underrepresented groups have a genuine voice and meaningful influence over how work is done. DEI specialists can help identify barriers, develop solutions, and document a clear path forward to building a more inclusive organizational culture.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4. Expand Talent Pipelines

Agencies should adopt broad recruitment strategies to attract candidates from a wider pool of talent. This can include developing early outreach programs to cultivate interest in policing, recruiting experienced professionals who bring transferable expertise, and forming partnerships with academic and nontraditional disciplines that align with evolving workforce needs. Suggestions for achieving this goal include:

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<sup>46</sup> Wiseman, Jane. October 2021. [Law Enforcement Recruitment: Research-based Recommendations](#)

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*

- **Establish cadet programs, internships, mentoring, and early outreach initiatives.** Most recruiting programs focus on individuals who are already old enough to apply, with few targeting those who are still exploring career options. Research shows many people join law enforcement to fulfill a childhood dream and make that decision before finishing high school. Agencies should therefore build relationships with elementary schools to provide career exposure and with middle schools, high schools, and community colleges to support career exploration through cadet programs, ride-alongs, job shadowing, etcetera.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, many law enforcement agencies already have partnerships with universities, particularly those with criminal justice programs. Research shows that exposure to the policing profession via internships and criminal justice coursework increases interest in policing among college students.<sup>52</sup>

- **Recruit experienced professionals from other fields.** Experienced hires are not common in law enforcement but are a reliable source of talent in other fields where their maturity and judgement are valued. In specialized areas of law enforcement, this approach can be particularly beneficial, allowing agencies to hire individuals who already possess the necessary expertise for specialized roles (e.g., cybersecurity, aviation, or forensics). Individuals already working in government also represent an untapped talent pool.<sup>53</sup>
- **Develop partnerships in nontraditional disciplines.** Agencies can work with foreign language programs to identify bilingual officers. Similarly, partnerships with sociology or social work programs may identify recruits with a strong understanding of community relations who would excel on patrol. Technology and other specialized schools can serve as feeders for analytics and technical roles, while hospitality and management programs may produce candidates with strong customer service, problem-solving, and administrative skills.<sup>54</sup>

### 5. Modernize and Streamline the Hiring Process

Long, opaque hiring processes are identified as a major recruitment barrier. Agencies can improve recruitment outcomes by carefully selecting and training recruiters, streamlining timelines, offering flexible testing and continuous hiring, providing clear visibility into application status, and delivering targeted, high-touch support. By identifying bottlenecks and points where candidates are most likely to drop out, agencies can implement proactive strategies to maintain momentum, and ensure a smoother, more transparent path from application to onboarding. The following are suggestions for achieving this goal:

- **Carefully select and train recruiters.** Agencies should invest in recruiting high-quality recruitment officers, as they are the backbone of the hiring process. These officers select

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<sup>51</sup> Wiseman, Jane. October 2021. [Law Enforcement Recruitment: Research-based Recommendations](#)

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*

candidates who will become future police officers and, ideally, succeed throughout their careers. Recruiters should have strong communication and customer service skills to guide candidates through what is often a rigorous and overwhelming selection process. Agencies should choose individuals who can effectively engage with diverse populations and represent the communities they serve.

Agencies should also invest in training recruiters to ensure they have the skills needed to identify candidates with strong ethics, reduce bias, and improve workforce diversity. Properly trained recruiters serve as the first line of defense, screening out unsuitable applicants while attracting high-quality, community-oriented officers.

- **Streamline hiring timelines without sacrificing quality.** Agencies can reduce hiring time by leveraging technology and allowing steps in the process to occur simultaneously. They can also map out each stage of the hiring process to identify opportunities for greater efficiency, such as automating clerical and repetitive tasks, reducing waiting times between steps, and collecting background investigation information electronically.
- **Offer continuous testing and flexible scheduling.** Agencies should consider offering entry-level testing on a regular and frequent basis. Rather than follow a rigid schedule of exams, agencies should consider more flexible scheduling of the different component parts of their hiring process.
- **Give candidates visibility into their status to reduce drop-off during hiring process.** One of the common complaints among candidates for law enforcement positions is that it is hard to know where they are in the process and how much longer it will take. Using an applicant tracking system allows a candidate to see where they are in the hiring process and lets recruiters see where bottlenecks are. One easy way to stay in touch with candidates is via text message.<sup>55</sup>
- **Create a high-touch support process.** Providing one-on-one support via mentors, navigators, or advisors can help applicants maintain momentum and stay on track with all steps in the process and can make them feel more connected before they join. In a survey of college students in criminal justice programs, 70% agreed that having a mentor would make a difference in their choosing a career in policing.<sup>56</sup>
- **Identify when applicants are most likely to drop out of the process and target support accordingly.** By identifying the stages in the process where candidates are most likely to drop out, agencies can turn a hidden problem into actionable, data-driven insights that enhance both recruitment efficiency and the candidate experience. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) found that one-third of those who dropped out did so when it was time to write their personal statement. Working with the Behavioral Insights Team, the LAPD used text messages

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<sup>55</sup> Wiseman, Jane. October 2021. [Law Enforcement Recruitment: Research-based Recommendations](#)

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*

to encourage applicants to continue and achieved a 15% increase in the number completing the process.<sup>57</sup>

- **Offer “continuous hiring”.** To attract and keep high-quality applicants, agencies should consider programs in which candidates can be hired in a civilian capacity while the department waits for full academy classes to form or slots to open in state or regional academies.

### B. Recruitment Practices from Other Jurisdictions

OLO selected the following police departments as case studies of successful recruitment practices: Fairfax County, Virginia; Dallas, Texas; and Phoenix, Arizona. These departments were chosen for their comparable population sizes and authorized sworn staffing levels to Montgomery County, as well as their reported hiring success of sworn staffing in 2024 and 2025.

OLO contacted both the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) and Dallas Police Department (DPD) multiple times to request interviews but did not receive a response. As a result, the information presented in this section is based on council and news briefings, as well as other publicly available sources.

Although each jurisdiction used different strategies to address staff vacancies and tailored its recruitment efforts to local needs, several common themes emerged: shortening the hiring timeline, increasing recruitment of women and BIPOC candidates, targeting lateral transfers, and expanding outreach.

Each department also implemented unique initiatives. For example, the FCPD focused on recruiting displaced federal employees, while the Phoenix Police Department (PPD) partnered with advisory boards to increase recruitment of women and BIPOC candidates and hosted live Instagram Q&A sessions featuring current employees discussing their roles.

#### 1. Fairfax County, Virginia

Vacancy Rate	Authorized Sworn Compliment	Population (2020)
9%	1,492	1,150,309

The FCPD has been grappling with staff shortfalls since the pandemic. In October 2021, FCPD reported 144 vacancies in its 1,484 authorized sworn positions—a vacancy rate of nearly 10%. To address this issue, the department increased its national advertising in 2022 to bolster recruitment efforts, among other strategies. These strategies include:

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<sup>57</sup> Wiseman, Jane. October 2021. [Law Enforcement Recruitment: Research-based Recommendations](#)

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- **Increased the pace of police academy classes.** Historically, the department holds three police academy classes per year. As it moves into 2026 and 2027, the department will expand to four back-to-back academy classes per year to boost staffing.
- **Reduced hiring timeline from 11.1 months to 5.7 months.** In 2020, it took an average of 11.1 months to hire a police officer from the moment they expressed interest to their official hire date. Today, that timeline has been reduced to 5.7 months by improving efficiency and conducting background investigations, polygraphs, medical exams, and neighborhood canvasses simultaneously rather than sequentially.
- **Targeted displaced federal employees.** FCPD is among those across the region making a pitch for displaced federal employees to consider options at the local level.
- **Increased women’s recruiting.** Fairfax County is a founding partner of the 30x30 Initiative, which aims to increase women’s representation in policing. As part of this commitment, the department continues targeted recruitment efforts, including women’s hiring symposiums led by department leadership, which have proven extremely effective. These strategies are showing results, with one recent academy class composed of 37% women.
- **Hired lateral officers.** In 2024, 21 officers from other agencies applied to become police officers with FCPD, and nine were ultimately hired.<sup>58</sup>
- **Engaged candidates proactively throughout the recruitment process.** According to FCPD, applicants often apply to multiple agencies at the local, state, and federal levels. Data shows applicants are more likely to choose the department that interacts with them most frequently and provides the most supportive, personalized experience. To achieve this, FCPD uses proactive engagement strategies, including detectives and background investigators sending text messages to maintain contact and build rapport throughout the process.

FCPD projects staffing levels to reach 95% by calendar year 2028 and 100% by calendar year 2030, assuming current trends continue. The number of sworn officers required to exit the draft this year is seven, which is relatively low. However, that number is expected to increase to 16 in 2026, 12 in 2027, and 22 in 2028. The department is closely monitoring these projected increases.

FCPD is also focusing in retaining women in the 5- to 7-year mark, when many disproportionately leave due to family obligations. The department is exploring creative strategies to retain women once they are hired, graduate from the academy, and begin active duty. Data shows that, percentage-wise, men are more likely to spend their entire careers in policing than women, highlighting the importance of retention efforts for female officers.

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<sup>58</sup> McCaffrey, Scott. May 2025. [Fairfax County police say they’re on track to meet staffing goals by 2030](#). FFXNOW

### 2. Dallas Police Department, Texas

Vacancy Rate	Authorized Sworn Compliment	Population (2020)
17%	3,286	1,304,345

Like other agencies across the U.S., the DPD has struggled to hire and retain officers due to low pay, pension issues, and competition from suburbs. From 2016 to 2018, uncertainty about the pension system contributed to a wave of departures. During that period, the department hired 531 officers but lost 993.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, voters approved Proposition U in November 2024, requiring DPD to maintain a minimum of 4,000 officers and increase police-related funding. This mandate placed additional pressure on the department to revamp its hiring strategies, prompting more aggressive, national-level recruitment efforts, including the following initiatives:

- **Modified education requirements.** To boost numbers, approved changes to police hiring standards allowing applicants without prior college experience to join the force. Graduates of the police academy will still receive 43 to 45 college credit hours through a partnership with the University of North Texas at Dallas. The new requirements will be evaluated at 12, 18 and 24 months.
- **Increased starting salaries.** DPD offers one of the highest starting salaries in North Texas, at \$75,397 per year for police officers.
- **Introduced referral bonuses.** The department also launched a referral program last year. Officers who refer a candidate are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 in phased bonuses as the referred candidate achieves milestones. If a candidate remains on the force for three years, the referrer receives a \$3,000 bonus. There is no limit to the number of candidates that an officer can refer.
- **Targeted lateral transfers.** DPD is actively recruiting experienced, certified officers for its Lateral Entry Program, offering competitive pay starting around \$85,000 for qualified applicants, along with specialized unit access and benefits. Recently, DPD advertised lateral transfer opportunities in Houston through social media and in Fort Worth through billboards.
- **Expanded marketing and outreach efforts.** The department has significantly expanded its marketing and outreach efforts to strengthen recruitment. Its current marketing budget of \$250,000 is expected to increase to \$500,000 to support a broad media campaign. Advertising includes grocery cart ads, mall displays, billboards in Dallas and neighboring jurisdictions, placements on DART buses, movie theaters, and Love Field Airport, as well as online ads on ESPN and streaming platforms. Advertising efforts also include different social media platforms.

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<sup>59</sup> Rosenbaum, Steven. June 2025. [Dallas Eases Requirements to Boost Police Hiring Amid Officer Shortage](#). CBS News

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In addition, the recruiting team continues to focus heavily on colleges and universities to build early interest in law enforcement careers. In 2024, recruiters traveled to 38 states, engaged with 94 schools and colleges, and participated in 247 community and career events, including off-site hiring events at Sam Houston State University and in Puerto Rico. Outreach efforts extend to college campuses, military transition centers, community events, parades and gyms.<sup>60</sup>

- **Implemented retention incentives.** The department implemented a 30-Year Incentive Program where officers with 28 years of service can receive a one-time payment of \$40K for staying an additional two years.

According to DPD, these initiatives helped the department hire 329 officers in 2025, surpassing the 300-officer goal established by Proposition U. It also marked the first time since 2020 that the department hired more officers than it lost. Recruit class sizes rebounded as well, ranging from 26 to 62 recruits, with May’s class totaling 43. This represents a notable improvement over 2023, when some classes included as few as 14 recruits. The department also achieved record BIPOC representation in recent classes, including 26 Hispanic and 19 African American recruits.<sup>61</sup>

### 3. Phoenix Police Department, Arizona

Vacancy Rate	Authorized Sworn Compliment	Population (2020)
15%	3,125	1,608,139

Over the past 5–6 years, the PPD, like many departments around the country, has struggled to recruit and retain officers. The dip in hiring can be tied directly to 2020, when high-profile deadly use-of-force incidents, like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, shifted the public perception of police. However, after years of staffing challenges, the PPD is showing measurable improvement in recruitment and hiring. Monthly application totals ranged from 393 to 518 applications through October, compared with 175 to 428 per month during the same period last year. Police officials attributed the increase to the following strategies:

- **Increased women’s recruiting.** As part of efforts connected to the national 30x30 Initiative, PPD leaders met with the director of gender equity at NYU’s Policing Project, who recommended increasing visibility at women-focused job fairs and expos. Following this guidance, PPD partnered with the Mayor’s Women’s Commission and participated in the Fresh Start Women’s Foundation Career Fair. The event facilitated meaningful conversations with 30 women exploring law enforcement careers, and department officials reported that five of these

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<sup>60</sup> Carson-Habeeb, Claudia. December 2025. [Dallas Police Department Surpasses Recruiting Goal](#). People Newspapers

<sup>61</sup> Dallas Police Department. February 2025. [Dallas Police Department Budget & Hiring Plan](#). City Council Briefing

individuals remain in active contact with recruiters and have expressed strong interest in joining the department.<sup>62</sup>

- **Targeted lateral transfers and retired law enforcement officers.** The department sought to hire both in-state and out-of-state lateral transfers, as well as retired law enforcement officers to serve as School Resource Officers. According to PPD, 70 retirees and officers from other law enforcement agencies applied for Phoenix Police positions in 2025.<sup>63</sup>
- **Expanded outreach to BIPOC communities.** PPD’s Employment Services Unit (ESU) partnered with various Police Chief’s advisory boards organized by the Community Response Squad. ESU attends advisory board meetings and works collaboratively with board members to encourage individuals in their respective communities to consider careers in law enforcement. The advisory boards represent a diverse range of communities, including African American, Arab, Asian, cross-disability, faith-based, Hispanic, Jewish, LGBTQ, Muslim, American Indian, Refugee, and Sikh communities.
- **Conducted live Q&A sessions on Instagram as part of marketing strategy.** The recruiting team began conducting monthly Instagram Live video sessions where background investigations staff and current employees share their experiences with the public audience. Live video question and answer sessions last approximately 45 minutes and each month an employee from a different department within the police department makes themselves available to answer the public’s questions about what makes their job unique.
- **Analyzed improvements in the hiring pipeline.** ESU continues to examine each step of the applicant hiring process to ensure the department operates with equity and efficiency. The department is also enhancing these processes by implementing new technology, including a communications platform that enables recruiters to connect with applicants via instant messaging and text.<sup>64</sup>

Through October 31, the department hired 223 sworn officers in 2025, far surpassing 2024’s total. Women made up 23 of those hires, compared with 22 women hired during all of 2024 – a small but notable improvement in a department where female representation has long lagged national goals.<sup>65</sup>

Despite improvements in hiring, attrition continues to offset overall staffing gains—a challenge PPD has faced for years amid changing labor markets, heightened public scrutiny, and an aging workforce. To better understand why officers leave, PPD’s Organizational Integrity Bureau will conduct exit interviews and analyze early warning indicators, such as excessive overtime, sick leave usage, and other stressors linked to burnout or early retirement. In 2025, monthly separations ranged from 17 to

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<sup>62</sup> Ahwatukee Foothills News. January 2026. [Phoenix Police Report some Staffing Headway](#)

<sup>63</sup> Maryniak, Paul. May 2025. [Phoenix PD Sees Recruit Ranks Soar](#). Police 1

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*

<sup>65</sup> Ahwatukee Foothills News. January 2026. [Phoenix Police Report some Staffing Headway](#)

53 officers, peaking in August. The data revealed two critical pressure points: officers leaving within their first year of service and those departing upon reaching retirement eligibility.<sup>66</sup>

### C. Recruitment Practices to Increase Women and BIPOC Representation

Police agencies are actively increasing women and BIPOC representation by adopting the 30x30 Initiative, revising hiring standards to remove unnecessary barriers, and using targeted, inclusive marketing. The following detail practices used by law enforcement agencies across the U.S. to improve women and BIPOC recruitment.

#### 1. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Identifying barriers in the recruiting process.** In 2020, an NBC Philadelphia report found that 70% of academy applicants to the Philadelphia Police Department were BIPOC candidates, yet they comprised only 29% of academy recruits at that time. Many BIPOC candidates were denied entry due to poor credit, limited work history, or driving records.<sup>67</sup>

In response, the department revised several requirements to reduce barriers and increase representation. Recruits are now permitted to enter the academy with some debt, and individuals with nontraditional or lengthy work histories are given greater consideration. While drug use remains prohibited, prior marijuana use is no longer disqualifying.

The department also lowered the initial physical fitness requirements for entry. Recruits may begin the academy at a lower fitness level, provided they meet the required physical standard by graduation. As a result of these changes, 64% of academy class 406 were people of color.

#### 2. Maryland State Police

**Targeted social media advertising.** In Fiscal Year 2024, the Maryland State Police partnered with the Maryland State Ad Agency (MSAA) on a multi-year, \$350,000 recruitment advertising campaign. The campaign combined traditional marketing strategies with online and social media approaches designed to reach both prospective applicants and influencers. Marketing content was distributed using geofencing, particularly across social media platforms such as Google, LinkedIn, Instagram, and X. Geofencing enabled the department to deliver the right content to target audiences including women and BIPOC candidates.<sup>68</sup>

#### 3. Tacoma, Washington

**Personalized postcard.** The Tacoma Police Department mailed a postcard with the messaging “You Belong Here” to boost its recruitment efforts. The postcard featured three officers of different races on

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<sup>66</sup> Maryniak, Paul. September 2025. [Phoenix Police face 30% Recruit Dropout Rate](#). Ahwatukee Foothills News

<sup>67</sup> NBC Philadelphia. April 2024. [More Diversity Among Recruits in PPD Academy Following Changes to the Recruitment Policy](#)

<sup>68</sup> Maryland State Police. March 2023. [2024 Operating Budget. Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis](#).

the front and a personalized message from new or mid-level officers on the back. The message and design, which suggested that individuals from diverse backgrounds could find a place in the law enforcement community, proved to be an effective strategy and increased applications fourfold.<sup>69</sup>

### 4. Los Angeles, California

**Identifying recruitment voids.** LAPD, in collaboration with the RAND Corporation, identified potential recruitment “voids” or promising neighborhoods that had been underutilized in prior recruitment efforts. These gaps were visualized through maps that color-coded zip codes based on whether they produced more, fewer, or approximately the expected number of target-group applicants given their demographic profiles. The locations of recruitment events across Los Angeles County were then overlaid on these maps, allowing the LAPD to pinpoint areas where additional recruitment efforts were needed.<sup>70</sup>

### 5. Tucson, Arizona and San Diego, California

**Employee childcare for law enforcement agencies.** In 2022, the Tucson City Council voted unanimously to fund childcare services for their public safety employees, including police officers, firefighters and dispatchers, to recruit and retain long-term staff, particularly women.

Childcare services are provided in partnership with the Erik Hite Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization that operates The Erik Hite Foundation Child Development Center. The center offers steeply discounted rates for the families of first responders and provides extended hours to help accommodate the schedules of the families it serves.

In September 2024, the City of Tucson broke ground on its Southside Public Safety Complex, a facility that will house both the Tucson Police Department and the Tucson Fire Department. While the Erik Hite Foundation had hoped to include a dedicated childcare center in the new complex, that was not feasible. Instead, the organization is working with city leaders to secure a nearby location so parents will not have to travel far to drop off and pick up their children.

Similarly, the San Diego Police Department made headlines in 2024, by creating the nation’s first agency-run child-care center. This facility offers flexible hours, affordable rates and competitive pay for child-care workers. Parents pay up to 50% less than the market rate for childcare, and staff earn 15% more than the local average for child-care workers.

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<sup>69</sup> U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. 2023. [Recruitment and Retention for the Modern Law Enforcement Agency](#)

<sup>70</sup> Matthies, Carl, et. Al. 2012. [Identifying Barriers to Diversity in Law Enforcement Agencies](#). RAND Corporation Occasional Paper.

### 6. Baltimore, Maryland

**Childcare stipends.** In January 2025, the Baltimore Police Department launched a pilot program that provides 100 employees with a stipend of up to \$250 per month to help cover child-care expenses for children up to 12 years old, including those with special needs. The project aims to support both sworn and professional members and serve as an important retention and recruitment tool.

### D. Candidate Retention in Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs

Youth experience programs introduce participants to law enforcement, build a diverse and qualified workforce, and foster community trust. While research shows how to implement these programs, there is limited research on candidate retention and the extent to which participants ultimately enter the police academy. Most available information is anecdotal rather than data driven.

To address this gap, OLO presents a case study of the LAPD's pipeline program. This program offers a comprehensive approach, showing how youth programs can build sequentially to prepare participants for the academy. The case study highlights how different youth experience programs can be integrated and coordinated to maintain a pipeline of viable recruits.

#### 1. Los Angeles, California

The LAPD pipeline program has five unique youth law enforcement experience programs: Junior Cadets, Cadets, Police Academy Magnet Schools (PAMS), Police Orientation and Preparation Program (POPP), and Associate Community Officer Program (ACOP). These programs which include both school career and non-school programs are connected in sequence. While participants do not have to follow the sequence, or participate in all five, together these programs provide a pathway into a public safety career.

**Junior Cadet Program.** The program targets youth ages 8 through 12 enrolled in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) who maintain a 2.0 grade point average. Junior Cadets are required to take classes in the core academic areas (English, math, science, history), a physical training program and grade-specific electives such as environmental forensics, investigative communication or crime scene investigation. There is also a community service requirement, and the students wear a uniform.<sup>71</sup>

The program is operated in partnership with two educational institutions: the Mulholland Junior Police Academy (MJPA) at Mulholland Middle School and the Burbank Junior Police Academy (BJPA) at Burbank Middle School. Both parents and students apply to MJPA and BJPD the fall prior to the beginning of 6th grade and participate in orientation. The MJPA enrolls an average of 300 students annually, compared to approximately 100 students served each year by the BJPD.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Schultz, Dana, et al. 2024. [Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs as a Potential Recruitment Pipeline](#)

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*

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Program leadership tracks participants' achievement, awards for conduct, community service and academic progress. Leadership also tracks the percentage of participants who graduate from a police academy high school. Funding for the program comes mainly from LAUSD, the magnet school office and police-related foundations. Teacher and officer salaries represent the largest expense.

**Cadet Program.** LAPD operates a cadet program at each of its 21 community police stations, as well as at several specialized divisions, including the Metropolitan and Communications Divisions, University of Southern California, Los Angeles Airport Police, and Gateway YMCA. The program serves youth ages 13 to 20 and is designed to promote leadership development, academic achievement, and interest in law enforcement careers.<sup>73</sup>

All new participants attend an 18-week Leadership Academy. Upon successful completion, they become cadets and meet weekly for two to three hours to participate in academic instruction, communication skills training, law enforcement–related education, physical fitness activities, and community service.

Recruitment is primarily conducted through district stations and specialized divisions. Eligibility requirements include maintaining a minimum 2.5 grade point average, having no serious criminal record, completing a medical examination, and graduating from the Leadership Academy. In 2022, 341 youths participated in the Cadet Leadership Academy, contributing to a total of approximately 2,000 candidates engaged across related youth programs.<sup>74</sup>

Commanding officers at each district or division oversee all aspects of the program, supported by Youth Services advisors. These advisors, sworn or civilian department members, are responsible for directing and supervising department-sponsored youth initiatives. The cadet program partners with PAMS and the Junior Police cadet programs to reinforce learning provided to the participants.

Cadets are evaluated every six months through a formal rating report, and advisors meet individually with participants to review performance and recommend areas for improvement. The program tracks key outcomes, including the percentage of program graduates who enter the police academy.

Funding is provided primarily through the LAPD budget, with personnel salaries representing the largest expense. Additional support comes from grants and donations to supplement program resources.<sup>75</sup>

**Police Academy Magnet Schools.** PAMS program operates across six LAUSD high schools and offers a program focused on law enforcement careers. The 9th through 12th grade curriculum includes specialized electives, college-level coursework, physical fitness training, and a minimum of 30 hours of community service annually. Core academic classes connect instruction to concepts of public safety and government.

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<sup>73</sup> Schultz, Dana, et al. 2024. [Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs as a Potential Recruitment Pipeline](#)

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*

Recruitment efforts are concentrated in the fall and continue throughout the year through school visits and magnet fairs, with the two middle school Junior Cadet programs serving as the primary pipeline into the program. Students apply through the LAUSD Office of Integration, which manages magnet applications and placement, and any LAUSD student is eligible to apply. School placement is typically determined by geographic location, and transportation is provided for students who live six miles or more from their selected PAMS. Total enrollment across the six PAMS sites is approximately 1,200 students.<sup>76</sup>

The program tracks key metrics including attendance, exam scores, graduation rates, and the percentage of graduates who pursue careers in law enforcement.

Funding for the program is shared across agencies, with LAUSD covering teacher salaries, the LAPD funding officer positions, and supplemental resources provided through a federal career pathways grant.

**Police Orientation and Preparation Program.** POPP serves as the capstone program for the PAMS network. POPP recruits current 12th-grade students and recent high school graduates aged 17 to 21 into a two-year associate degree program offered at two locations: the LAPD's Ahmanson Recruit Training Center and Los Angeles Valley College.

The program combines academic coursework with structured physical training led by an LAPD drill instructor to prepare participants for careers in law enforcement. Recruitment primarily targets students who previously participated in the PAMS high school program or the LAPD cadet program, although any candidate who meets the basic eligibility requirements may apply. Approximately 100 students enroll each year.<sup>77</sup>

POPP is overseen by a program coordinator based at the Ahmanson Recruit Training Center. Academic instruction is delivered by professors from West Los Angeles College and Los Angeles Valley College, many of whom have prior law enforcement experience. The program operates in partnership with the LAPD, LAUSD, and the Los Angeles Community College District.

Program outcomes are tracked through key performance metrics, including the percentage of students who graduate with an associate degree, enter the LAPD Academy, or transfer to a four-year college or university.

The California Promise Program provides free tuition for POPP students with the LA PAMS foundation and LA Police foundation providing additional funding.

**Associate Community Officer Program.** ACO Program provides a paid apprenticeship opportunity for high school graduates who have been accepted into POPP, are enrolled in college, and intend to pursue careers as sworn LAPD officers. Participants work at local police stations, where they gain hands-on experience and begin the formal pathway toward becoming police officers.

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<sup>76</sup> Schultz, Dana, et al. 2024. [Youth Law Enforcement Experience Programs as a Potential Recruitment Pipeline](#)

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*

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Most ACO participants are recruited from PAMS or the LAPD cadet program, creating a direct pipeline from youth engagement programs into sworn service. The program is managed by LAPD personnel and staffed by officers and civilian employees across various divisions.

Program performance is monitored through key metrics, including total participation, demographic representation, and the percentage of participants who ultimately enter the police academy. The LAPD fully funds the program, with total annual costs varying based on the number of participants.

### Chapter 4. Findings and Best Practice Recommendations

The County Council requested this Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report to describe successful police recruitment programs in other jurisdictions and identify recruitment strategies that could be adopted in Montgomery County. To inform this analysis, OLO conducted a review of MCPD’s hiring initiatives and programs and subsequently assessed comparable jurisdictions with demonstrated success in recruitment practices that could be adapted locally. **Section A** of this chapter presents OLO’s findings from its analysis of MCPD’s hiring initiatives and programs and strategies from other jurisdictions. **Section B** offers four discussion questions for the Council and one recommendation for MCPD.

#### A. OLO Findings

**Finding #1. Like other law enforcement agencies nationwide, law enforcement agencies across the DMV Region, including MCPD, are experiencing hiring and staffing challenges.**

According to the 2024 International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) survey on recruitment, 70% of surveyed agencies were struggling to recruit enough officers. The recruitment challenge affected agencies of all types, sizes, and locations across the U.S.<sup>78</sup>

Across the DMV region, competition for qualified candidates is particularly intense, as local departments must compete with federal agencies that often offer substantial hiring incentives. For example, as of December 2025, the U.S. Border Patrol offer hiring bonuses of up to \$60,000. The U.S. Park Police offer bonuses of up to \$70,000, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) offer bonuses of up to \$50,000.

For several years, MCPD has experienced high vacancies among sworn personnel. Data from Fiscal Years 16-25 shows that staffing levels were relatively stable and strong from FY2016–2020 with peak in FY19 where there were only 12 vacancies. Beginning in FY21, the situation changes noticeably, with filled positions declining and vacancies rising sharply. Staffing pressures deepen between FY22 and FY24, as sworn vacancies climb steadily from 129 to 161 and then to 179, while the number of filled positions falls to a low of 1,101 in FY24. In FY25, there were 190 unfilled positions, making it one of the years with the highest levels of sworn vacancies.

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<sup>78</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police. 2024. [The State of Recruitment & Retention: A Continuing Crisis for Policing](#)

**Finding #2. Hiring bonuses have become commonplace across the region and increasingly represents the cost of doing business, placing jurisdictions that do not offer such incentives at a competitive disadvantage.**

In a comparative analysis of law enforcement recruitment incentives, pay, and staffing conditions across several large counties and cities in the DC–Baltimore region, Arlington County and Washington, DC offer the largest incentives, providing up to \$25,000 for entry-level officers.

Montgomery County, Prince George’s County, and Fairfax County offer more moderate incentives, with bonuses ranging from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

**Finding #3. Like other law enforcement agencies across the U.S., MCPD’s sworn staff is predominantly White and male. In recent years, the percentages of staff that were Black males and Hispanic males have increased modestly.**

According to FY25 data, 71% of sworn officers were White, 12% were Black, 10% were Hispanic, 6% were Asian, and less than 1% were American Indian or other. Of the total sworn compliment, almost 80% were male and 20% female. The data highlights both racial and gender disparities within the department’s sworn staff compared with population percentages and indicates areas for potential focus in future recruitment efforts.

The proportion of staff that were White male declined somewhat from FY21 to FY25. Overall, the trend indicates gradual diversification, driven primarily by modest increases among Hispanic and Black males. An analysis of sworn staff gender trends from calendar years 2021 to 2025 shows no significant change in the percentage of staff that were female.

**Finding #4. MCPD employs a range of recruiting strategies, from youth law enforcement experience programs, such as cadet, internship, and leadership programs, to initiatives targeting more experienced personnel and members of the BIPOC community.**

The department primarily recruits within the County, as it prefers officers to be members of the communities they serve. While residency is not a requirement, MCPD strongly encourages local recruitment because it believes officers who live in the County are more invested in the community.

At the same time, the department recognizes the need to recruit beyond the local area. As a result, MCPD places significant emphasis on recruiting within a 250-mile radius of Montgomery County, particularly at universities and local law enforcement training facilities.

**Finding #5. Of MCPD's youth law enforcement experience programs, the Cadet Program serves as one of its primary recruitment pathways. Data shows that only a small share of cadets ultimately transition into sworn positions.**

According to data provided by MCPD, annual student participation has remained relatively stable from 2023-2026, ranging from 18 to 23 participants annually. The number of cadets hired into sworn ranges shows that only a small proportion of participants ultimately transition into sworn roles, indicating room to strengthen the program's effectiveness as a hiring pipeline.

**Finding #6. On average, MCPD's application process takes between three to four months from the time a candidate applies to the time they receive a final offer. An analysis of applicant data shows the largest losses occur very early in the application process.**

To maintain applicant interest without interruption, the department accepts applications year-round. MCPD's application process consists of the following steps:

1. Online application
2. Written exam
3. Scored interview
4. Background (can be interchangeable with oral board depending on staffing)
5. Polygraph examination
6. Director of Personnel extends conditional offer
7. Psychological examination
8. Medical examination
9. Assistant Chief extends final offer
10. Complete 27 ½ week academy

An analysis of applicant data shows the largest losses occur very early in the application process. Nearly two-thirds of applicants for Session 79 either did not meet the minimum standards or did not take the written examination. This suggests that initial eligibility screening and early engagement are the biggest drop-off points. It also highlights opportunities to strengthen upfront communication about minimum qualifications and increase support and follow-through for the written examination.

**Finding #7. MCPD has not conducted a formal survey of incoming officers to determine why they chose department over other local agencies, nor to assess whether the hiring bonus influenced their decision.**

Implementing a formal survey process would allow MCPD to capture the factors that drive candidates' decisions, including hiring incentives, location, department size, and compensation. This, in turn, would help MCPD better target its recruitment strategies, allocate resources more effectively, and strengthen its competitiveness in attracting qualified candidates.

**Finding #8. MCPD has implemented several strategies in recent years to address recruitment challenges.**

MCPD has implemented strategies including streamlining recruitment and background investigation processes, increasing salaries to remain competitive in the DMV region and instituting a recruitment bonus comparable to those offered by other jurisdictions.

Most recently, MCPD has revised its applicant requirements to reduce barriers to entry. Candidates may now earn 60 college credits at no cost while completing the academy, rather than being required to meet the college credit requirement at the time of application. In addition, MCPD updated its cannabis use policy to allow testing of applicants who report cannabis use more than one year but less than three years prior to applying. Previously, the department required a three-year period of abstinence, creating a significant recruitment barrier.

**Finding #9. Other jurisdictions have successfully increased recruitment using a variety of strategies that could be considered in Montgomery County.**

OLO selected the following police departments as case studies of successful recruitment practices: Fairfax County, Virginia; Dallas, Texas; and Phoenix, Arizona. These departments were chosen for their comparable population sizes and authorized sworn staffing levels to Montgomery County, as well as their reported hiring success of sworn staffing in 2024 and 2025.

The table below summarizes recruitment practices from the reviewed jurisdictions that could be adopted in Montgomery County.

Jurisdiction	Recruitment Strategy
Fairfax County, VA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targets displaced federal employees</li> <li>• Holds women’s hiring symposia led by department leadership</li> <li>• Engages candidates proactively throughout the recruitment process</li> </ul>
City of Dallas, TX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targets lateral transfers with competitive pay and benefits</li> </ul>
Phoenix, AZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducts outreach to local communities through advisory boards representing African American, Arab, Asian, cross-disability, faith-based, Hispanic, Jewish, LGBTQ, Muslim, American Indian, refugee, and Sikh populations</li> <li>• Holds monthly Instagram Live sessions in which background investigations staff and current employees share their experiences and answer questions</li> </ul>

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**Finding #10. Police agencies are actively increasing the representation of women and BIPOC by identifying barriers in the recruitment process, using personalized communication, identifying recruitment voids, and offering childcare supports.**

The following practices, used by law enforcement agencies nationwide to boost recruitment of women and BIPOC candidates, could be considered for implementation in Montgomery County.

Strategy	Description
Identify barriers in the recruiting process	In 2020, 70% of candidates for the Philadelphia Police Department were BIPOC. Many were denied entry due to poor credit, limited work history, or driving records. In response, the department revised several requirements to reduce barriers and increase representation.
Use personalized communication	The Tacoma Police Department in Washington mailed a postcard with the messaging “You Belong Here” to boost its recruitment efforts. The postcard featured three officers of different races on the front and a personalized message from new or mid-level officers on the back.
Identify recruitment voids	The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), in collaboration with the RAND Corporation mapped potential recruitment areas by demographic profile and overlaid recruitment event locations to identify where additional outreach was needed.
Offer childcare support	In 2022, the Tucson City Council unanimously approved funding for childcare services for public safety employees. Similarly, the San Diego Police Department created the nation’s first agency-run childcare center. In January 2025, the Baltimore Police Department launched a pilot program that provides 100 employees with a stipend of up to \$250 per month to help cover child-care expenses

**Finding #11. There is limited research on candidate retention in youth law experience programs and on the extent to which participants ultimately enter the police academy. Most available information is anecdotal rather than data driven.**

Youth law experience programs introduce participants to law enforcement, build a diverse and qualified workforce, and foster community trust. While research shows how to implement these programs, there is limited research on candidate retention and the extent to which participants ultimately enter the police academy. Most available information is anecdotal rather than data driven.

### **B. Discussion Questions and Recommendations**

Based on these findings, OLO offers four discussion questions for the Council and one recommendation for MCPD.

#### Discussion Questions

- 1. What recruitment strategies are generating the highest number of qualified applicants (career fairs, digital advertising, social media, cadet programs, word-of-mouth, etc.)?**
- 2. What strategies can MCPD implement to better support and engage candidates to ensure they follow through and complete the written examination?**
- 3. What additional strategies could MCPD implement to increase recruitment, especially among BIPOC and women?**
- 4. How can MCPD strengthen the effectiveness of the Cadet Program as a hiring pipeline?**

#### Recommendation

- 1. MCPD could consider surveying officers to identify the factors that influenced their decision to join the department, including the impact of hiring bonuses. The survey could also be extended to cadets to better understand what support or resources would encourage them to pursue a career with MCPD.**