



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATION

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AGENDA ITEM IV

August 18, 2022

To: Personnel Board Members

From: Anju A. Bennett, Administrator and Staff
Office of Human Resources

Chief Winston, Department of Fire and Rescue

Chief Der, Police Department

Re: Classification Plan Changes for Fire and Police Positions

The Personnel Board is respectfully asked to support requested Classification Plan amendments to address critical employment concerns and ensure classifications reflect up to date knowledge, skills and abilities.

I. We are seeking to amend college credit criteria for:

- Fire and Rescue positions of Battalion Chief, Captain, and Lieutenant.
- Entry level Police positions

The request is being made to address staffing challenges in recruitment, promotion, succession planning, and enhancement of workforce diversity. The County's existing requirements (and some which are scheduled for implementation at the end of this year), notably hamper the County's ability to compete for and attract an already narrowing pool of candidates. The requested changes uphold the County's standing as leader of a highly skilled workforce and recognize the:

- Extensive research conducted by both public safety departments on current skills needed for success in the positions.
- Steps taken by the Governor of Maryland and surrounding public jurisdictions to promote greater opportunities and diverse candidate pools by moving away from college-based qualifiers and placing greater focus on needed occupational proficiencies.
- Robust training programs that the County requires of its positions to gain skill-based proficiencies. The County is recognized as a leader in in-service training requirements.

A. Classification Changes for Fire and Rescue Positions (Lieutenant, Captains, and Battalion Chief).

The County's promotional system for Fire Fighters is based on the development and promotion of internal staff. Lateral transfers from external sources are not utilized for promotional ranks, as the skill based training gained on County specific protocols is critical for our leadership positions.

Ten years ago, in 2012, the Department of Fire and Rescue Services (DFRS) requested the County consider increasing college credit requirements for Lieutenant, Captains, and Battalion Chief. At the time, it was believed these changes could provide a more skilled workforce, but failed to consider in-service training, which has proven to be a more effective indicator of success.

The increased college credit requirement was initially slated for in 2016. However, it was deferred multiple times (to December 31, 2022) due the growing realization that the changes would result in unintended consequences to the County, place too much emphasis on generic college classes vs. needed skill proficiencies, and compound existing challenges in staffing.

With respect to staffing challenges, the County is having greater difficulty recruiting candidates for essential public safety positions. Candidate pools are shrinking for leadership positions.

- Increasing college credit requirements adversely affects the Department by narrowing opportunities for seasoned and highly trained, and diverse pool of applicants to qualify for consideration.
- Furthermore, the department has been facing high levels of attrition due to retirement of seasoned professionals, creating vacancies that are already difficult to fill. The DFRS has lost a vast number of senior leaders due to retirements in recent years.
 - Since 2017, forty-five personnel have retired from the leaderships ranks of Lieutenant and above.
 - In 2023, 23% of the uniformed fire personnel (or 120 out of 527 individuals) will be eligible for retirement.
 - Over the next two years the department estimates it will lose another 10 employees to retirement at the ranks of Lieutenant and above.

Addressing Challenges

Because of the deepening challenges, the County realized that further deferment of the pending increase in college credits is not a suitable long-term solution. As such, the County launched a work group to address these challenges while ensuring the County maintains a high level of competency for its positions.

The workgroup consisted of Fire leadership, Union leaders, affinity professional groups representing diverse fire professionals (St. Florian's, Phoenix Sentinels, Fire Officer's Association) and Human Resources representatives. The group met over the past year on a biweekly basis, to conduct a comprehensive review of national best practices in Fire safety qualifications, identify skills most needed for success at various ranks, find solutions for recruitment/promotional challenges as compared with surrounding jurisdictions, and recommend needed changes for position eligibility.

Through this research it was learned that:

- The County's existing college credit levels (prior to changes planned for December 31, 2022) already exceed requirements of surrounding jurisdictions. (See next page)

County	Battalion Chief	Captain	Lieutenant
Howard (Current Standards)	60	45	30
Montgomery	60	30	15
Prince George's	60	30	15
Anne Arundel	60	30	0
Baltimore County	0	0	0
Fairfax	0	0	0
BWI	N/A	0	0
Changes slated for 12/31/2022 that are no longer recommended for Howard County.	90	75	45

- Nationally, fire departments and fire accreditation institutions have determined that on-the-job occupational proficiency skills are more important indicators of success than college credits. This is especially important in successfully managing crisis-oriented response, ensuring the safety of Firefighters, and employing strategic lifesaving protocols. When the County initially requested an increase in college credits, it had not considered these skill-based educational and certification requirements which must be implemented through on-the-job proficiencies.
- The Department has developed a robust in-service training requirements for Firefighters at all levels through its Leadership, Education, Assessment, & Development (LEAD) program. The trainings/classes supplement current college skills with meaningful emergency response proficiencies, supervisory/leadership instruction, and business administration courses. Training includes state mandated proficiencies as well other instruction developed in conjunction with accredited Fire safety organizations including:
 - University of Maryland College Park, Maryland Fire & Rescue Institute
 - National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)
 - National Fire Academy (NFA)
 - Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

The County’s program serves as model for other fire departments.

- Increasing college credit requirements (as planned for December 31) would preclude current highly experienced/trained and diverse candidates from being considered for leadership positions. The Department is already facing challenges in having a robust and diverse pool of candidates for its positions due to college credit requirements. Increasing the credit requirement will lead to near empty promotional lists.

Recommendation

The County requests maintaining the current qualification/college credit levels for Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief. The County’s college credit requirements already meet or exceed those of surrounding jurisdictions. The college credits required now are valuable, but more beneficial to the operational ranks in the field are the job-specific training and occupational certifications. The County must have the ability to address critical staffing challenges while continuing to develop well-rounded candidates who possess a combination of college and critical occupational proficiencies essential for leadership roles within DFRS.

Attachment 1—Requested Changes to Fire Classification Plan

Requested Changes to Fire Classification Plan (for Battalion Chief, Captain, and Lieutenant)

No.	Class Title	Class Description	Min. Educ.	Min. Exper.	Lics. /Cert.	FLSA
2513	BATTALION CHIEF	Performs senior supervisory and advanced level fire and rescue operations work under general supervision from an administrative or technical superior. Work includes effective and efficient management of the assigned fire district or programs and attainment of established goals and programs.	<p>Sixty (60) semester-based credits (or 90 quarter-based credits) from an accredited post-secondary institution</p> <p>No experience equivalency</p> <p><i>Effective 12/31/2022</i></p> <p><i>Ninety (90) semester-based credits (or 135 quarter-based credits) towards a bachelor's degree program at an accredited post-secondary institution</i></p> <p>No experience equivalency</p>	Two (2) years credible service classified as a HCDFRS Fire Captain	General Order #100.04 Position Requirements - Licenses, Certifications, Experience and Education Prerequisites	E

No.	Class Title	Class Description	Min. Educ.	Min. Exper.	Lic. /Cert.	FLSA
2511	FIRE CAPTAIN	<p>Performs supervisory and advanced level fire and rescue operations work under general supervision from an administrative or technical superior. Work includes serving as a shift supervisor and/or performing responsible staff work. Work also includes responsibility for the skilled and efficient operation of assigned personnel and equipment. May participate in other department programs such as training or inspections.</p>	<p>Forty-five (45) semester-based credits (or 68 quarter-based credits) from an accredited post-secondary institution</p> <p>No experience equivalency</p> <p><i>Effective 12/31/2022</i></p> <p><i>Seventy-five (75) semester-based credits (or 113 quarter-based credits) from an accredited post-secondary institution</i></p> <p><i>No experience equivalency</i></p>	<p>Two (2) years credible service classified as a HCDFRS Firefighter Lieutenant</p>	<p>General Order #100.04</p> <p>Position Requirements - Licenses, Certifications, Experience and Education Prerequisites</p>	E

No.	Class Title	Class Description	Min. Educ.	Min. Exper.	Lics. /Cert.	FLSA
2507 *	FIREFIGHTER LIEUTENANT	Performs senior technical level fire and rescue operations work, which may include supervisory responsibility, under general supervision from an administrative or technical superior. Work includes fire suppression; advanced life support (ALS); emergency medical and rescue service work; operating and maintaining tools, equipment, and apparatus; participating in fire prevention and protection activities as well as departmental training programs; and performing staff work or as a shift supervisor in the absence of a higher-ranking officer. Work also includes skilled tasks in response to fire, rescue, and medical emergencies.	Thirty (30) semester-based credits (or 45 quarter-based credits) from an accredited post-secondary institution No experience equivalency <i>Effective 12/31/2022</i> Forty five (45) semester based credits (or 67 quarter based credits) from an accredited post-secondary institution <i>No experience equivalency</i>	Four (4) years credible service classified as a HCDFRS Firefighter	General Order #100.04 Position Requirements - Licenses, Certifications, Experience and Education Prerequisites	N

B. Classification Changes for Entry-Level Police Officer Positions (Probationary)

Howard County, like law enforcement agencies across the United States, is facing significant challenges in the recruitment of new police officers. The International Association of the Chiefs of Police (IACP), the world's largest professional association dedicated to the advancement of professional standards and the safety of communities, recently issued a study on the state of recruitment, and how it has become a crisis for law enforcement. The aftermath of the pandemic, widespread protests, attitudes toward police, and increased attention has posed unprecedented retention and recruitment concerns. The IACP notes leading factors in recruitment to include:

- Rapid increases in retirements.
- Increase in resignations, as individuals are electing to leave law enforcement or making other career choices due to strong a competing job market for other positions.
- Fewer applicants.
- Portrayals and attitudes toward police.
- Lengthy and difficult job qualification (entrance) requirements.

The County has been working to address these challenges, while also enhancing diversity of the workforce.

The Department is facing sustained recruitment challenges, which are only expected to become more critical in the near future. This is due to the factors identified by the IACP and the County's existing job qualification requirements that must be met before a candidate can even be considered by the County to enter the police academy. With surrounding jurisdictions having more favorable entry standards, the Department must compete for a diminishing pool of potential candidates.

Recruitment and Retention Challenges

- Between July 2021 and July 2022, Howard County has had a 53% reduction in applicants for entry level Police positions.
- The Police Department is currently facing 37 vacancies for sworn officers representing 8% of its workforce.
 - Since 2020, 62 sworn members have left the Police Department.
 - Through August 2022 alone, 21 sworn members have left the Department.
- Even more troubling is that 23% (or 113) of our Police Officers will become eligible for retirement in the next year. Officers can retire at any time, with only a 30-day notice requirement.

Addressing Challenges

In addressing these significant challenges, the County has partnered with the IACP, regional and State law enforcement agencies, and the Maryland Police Training Commission (MPTC). The MPTC was recently charged with evaluating the recruitment standards and practices of law enforcement agencies to increase diversity. The Commission's review and issued guidance identified that weak law enforcement recruitment processes included systems that were designed to screen out, rather than screen in a candidate: "Applicant elimination points should be identified and meticulously scrutinized to ensure that exclusion decisions are based on failure to meet essential selection standards."

- College credit requirements adversely affects the Department by significantly reducing the number of qualified applicants, especially in light of competition posed by neighboring jurisdictions.
- Educational requirements also narrow opportunities for diverse applicants to qualify for consideration. Now, more than ever, it is of vital importance to ensure that a law enforcement agency reflects the population which it polices. Minority populations often faced increased challenges with obtaining higher education.

Howard County’s Current Job Application Requirements for Probationary (Entry) Police

The County presently requires candidates to have at least 60 college credits (or two years of active military, police service, or police cadet experience) before they can be considered for a probationary position.

- These standards were implemented nearly 20 years ago and have become a considerable barrier to entry, especially as nearly all other police departments have stayed away from requiring college credits for entry level trainees.
- The County implemented its college credit requirement for new hires prior to the Police Accountability Act of 2021, which requires specific trainings and evaluations, and before the current design of the more comprehensive Police Academy Program.
- The Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission does not require college education to become a police officer. Police trainees (entry level-probationary) must complete rigorous police academy courses, graduate, and then serve a 12-month on the job training/probationary period.

Research of Current Requirements for Entry Level Police Officer – By Jurisdiction

AGENCY	Min. Education for Entry Level- Probationary Hires for Police Academy	SUBSTITUTIONS
Howard County Police Department	Associate degree or 60 credits	Active-duty military, police, or cadet experience
Anne Arundel Police	High School Diploma or GED	None
Baltimore City Police	High School Diploma or GED	
Baltimore County Police	High School Diploma or appropriate equivalent	None
Frederick City Police	High School Diploma or GED	None
Frederick County Sheriff	High School Diploma or GED	None
Montgomery County Police	Associate Degree or 60 credits	Active-duty military service or police service
Prince George’s County Police	High School Diploma or GED	None
Maryland National Capital Police	High School Diploma or GED	None

The County’s current Police Academy provides a very extensive and comprehensive educational program for its recruits, comprised of 32 weeks of instruction, well above the 750 hours of training required by the State. Topics of instruction include, but are not limited to:

- Criminal Law
- Constitutional Law
- Emergency Vehicle Operations Course
- Basic Spanish
- De-escalation Tactics
- Firearms Training
- Defensive Tactics
- Report Writing
- Bias-based policing
- Community Policing
- Use of Force
- Crime Scene Processing and Evidence Collection
- Interview and Interrogation Tactics
- Court Testimony & Preparation
- Human Trafficking
- Vehicle and Personal Search Procedures
- Active Shooter Training
- Cultural Awareness
- Tactical Communication
- Technology Training for Reporting Software and Databases
- Hostage Negotiations
- Collision Investigation
- Crime Prevention
- Traffic Stops and DUIs including NHTSA Standardized Field Sobriety Testing

After graduation from the Academy, recruits then spend at least 14 weeks in Field Training with a State certified Field Training Officer to provide real-time guidance and instruction in the real world. Entry level recruits serve an 18-month probation, which includes both the Academy and Field Training.

The Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 and other recent police reform laws mandate additional trainings in areas such as implicit bias, additional use of force training to comply with the new Maryland Use of Force Statute, sensitivity to cultural and gender diversity, and interactions with individuals with physical, intellectual, developmental, and psychiatric disabilities. The new laws also require the use of standardized implicit bias testing of officers at hire and on an annual basis (once issued by the MPTC), mental health screening every two years (in addition to the one performed at hire), and an annual physical agility assessment to establish continuing fitness for duties as a police officer. Officers are also required to complete at least 18 hours of Commission-approved in-service training every calendar year.

With our state-of-the-art Howard County James N. Robey Public Safety Training Center, officers have access to the best law enforcement training that the region has to offer, as other agencies, including the Maryland State Police, SWAT teams from neighboring jurisdictions, and the FBI often use the facility for training programs.

Recommendation

1. To address critical recruitment challenges, allow for a diverse pool of candidates, and remain competitive with other recruiting police jurisdictions, the County respectfully requests changing the Classification Plan for entry level Probationary Officers. This request is being made in light of police reforms and comprehensive training and reforms which have been implemented in recent years.
 - We are recommending removing the current minimum eligibility requirement of possessing 60 or more college credits.
 - The County will maintain college credits (or equivalent military/police/cadet experience) as a preferred qualification.

These changes will allow individuals without college education to enter in the process for consideration and for the County to identify a reason to employ, instead of screen out, high value candidates from a more diverse pool.

- The change follows the guidance of MPTC to modernize and streamline the recruitment and selection process to increase diversity in policing.
- State regulations require that a certified police officer be at least 21 years old, so applicants will have accumulated different types of work and life experiences to contribute to their overall knowledge base, including military service, travel, experience in other trades and communities, bringing a broader experience to County policing.
- Further, this change would only impact the qualifications for entry-level Probationary Police Officers. The educational requirement of college credits would remain the same to qualify for promotion to the rank of Corporal or higher.

The Department still benefits from an educated workforce, as evidenced by a 2018 internal survey, which assessed educational levels in its workforce:

- 32 with a Master's degree
- 234 a Bachelor's degree
- 49 an Associate's degree
- 74 had some college credits.

Even though college credit would no longer be required of entry-level candidates, the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 also established the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Police Officers, which would provide state-funded scholarships for current police officers attending a degree program that would further their career in law enforcement. The County also provides a Tuition Reimbursement benefit to employees after six months of employment, with prior course approval, up to \$1500. The Department will continue to support its officers in obtaining higher education to work towards professional development of its workforce, with the aim of equipping future supervisors to better serve the Department and its needs.

Requested Proposed Changes to Howard County Education Requirements

RANK	CURRENT REQUIRMENTS	PROPOSED CHANGES
Probationary Police Office	Possession of 60 college credits from an accredited college or university, preferably with course work in the social sciences, business or public administration, or law enforcement; OR two years actively engaged in military service or police service; OR experience as a Howard County Police Cadet, allowing each year of full-time cadet service to be the equivalent to 30 college credits.	Possession of a High School diploma or GED Preferred Education & Experience Possession of 60 college credits from an accredited college or university, preferably with course work in the social sciences, business or public administration, or law enforcement; OR two years actively engaged in military service or police service; OR experience as a Howard County Police Cadet, allowing each year of full-time cadet service to be the equivalent to 30 college credits.
Police Officer (Promoted into this classification after completing the Academy & 18 mos. probationary period)	Must have met the minimum education and/or experience requirements of the Probationary Police Officer classification.	No Change
Police Officer First Class (Promoted to this classification after 3 years of experience as a Police Officer and passing an exam)	Must have met the minimum education and/or experience requirements of the Probationary Police Officer classification.	No Change
Police Corporal	A minimum of 15 college level credits from an accredited college or university if the experience substitution was used for the Probationary Police Officer classification.	Clarification Only – No Change in College Credits. High School diploma or GED and 15 college level credits from an accredited college or university.
Police Sergeant	High School Diploma or GED + 30 college-level credits from an accredited college or university if the experience substitution was used for the Probationary Police Officer classification	Clarification Only – No Change in College Credits High School Diploma or GED + 30 college-level credits from an accredited college or university

II. Changes to Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

The Personnel Board is asked to approve a few updates to Police Classifications to incorporate current expectations and better reflect position duties. These include:

- General Definition and Required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities sections for the Police Officer Probationary
- Required Knowledge, Skills and Abilities section for the Police Officer and Police Corporal

These changes, which follow, do not impact the requirements to screen applicants. The changes

Attachment 2: Changes to Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities for Police.