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THE POST DISPATCH

THE LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES FROM
COLORADO POST

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

My WHY

During the height of the protests in the summer of 2020, I seriously considered leaving our noble profession. Even though I am no longer in the trenches, I was extremely disheartened by everything that was happening. The things I heard from the media, community meetings, and even my own family, did not resemble the profession I have dedicated my adult life to. Surely, I could make a decent living doing something other than policing. So I had to ask myself, "WHY am I still serving in law enforcement?" I couldn't help but think that if the public only knew what I know about our profession and our peace officers, how differently they would perceive us. Our peace officers are true public servants dedicated to their communities. They run toward danger to safeguard absolute strangers. Their compassion and caring lead them to carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. But how do we get this message across? How do we get our communities to hear from their peace officers; to hear why they chose to serve in this often underappreciated profession? Around the same time, I saw the #ThankBlue campaign, which consisted of photos of community members and law enforcement agencies thanking Colorado peace officers. I also saw some articles written on the recruitment and retention



topic. All that ultimately inspired the creation of POST's "My Why" campaign. This campaign gives peace officers nationwide a space to tell their stories in their own words by filming 30 to 60-second videos about why they choose to be in law enforcement, and then sharing those videos on social media. Through the "My Why" campaign, we hope to:

- Encourage the law enforcement community to reflect on why they serve, and to rededicate themselves to this internal motivation. Because at the end of the day, we are the ones determining our happiness, not the naysayers.
- This understanding is vital for developing trust. We cannot rely on others to tell our stories, so we need to take the initiative and share the positive side of what we do.
- Increase awareness amongst the incoming work force that there are

ample opportunities within law enforcement. The ability to serve their communities is a much more compelling reason to join the profession than the action-packed (and unrealistic) recruitment videos of the past.

How do we get our communities to hear from their peace officers; to hear why they chose to serve in this often underappreciated profession? - Director Erik Bourgerie

While it's not feasible to completely solve all challenges that face the profession with this one campaign alone, the more stories we are able to tell - the more of positive impact we will make.

I encourage each of you to grab your phone, and a selfie stick if you have one, and just do it - tell your story! Your story is important, and it deserves to be heard. Here are a few examples of the videos made by POST that feature different agencies across the state:

- [Chief Debra Funston, Palisade Police Department](#)
- [Chief Terrence Gordon, Thornton Police Department](#)
- [Agent Kayla Martinez, Lakewood Police Department](#)

- [Sergeant Aaron Trainor, Grand County Sheriff's Office](#)
- [Chief Doreen Jokerst, The University of Colorado Boulder Police Department](#)
- [Officer Sam Kullberg, Durango Police Department](#)
- [Chief Maris Herold, Boulder Police Department](#)
- [Sergeant Matt Breshears, Montrose County Sheriff's Office](#)

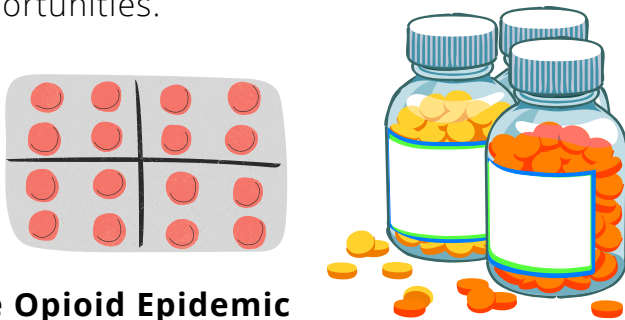
As more videos are being released, they will be published [HERE](#). On the same page you will find additional information about the campaign, details on how to participate, as well as a social media toolkit to help you navigate the online part of it.

Remember that your video doesn't have to be professionally edited. All you need is a phone and the desire to share your story!



Attorney General Phil Weiser at County Sheriffs of Colorado Winter Conference (Jan. 20, 2022)

Thank you all for allowing me to join you today. At the onset, let me express my appreciation for the work all of you do in our communities to protect public safety. Your work is critical to keeping our communities safe. And I recognize that it is not an easy time to be in law enforcement. I appreciate all of your commitment to serve and continue to be inspired by each member of the profession I have the privilege to work with. I am grateful for our continued partnerships and collaboration. As we turn the page to 2022, let's begin by reflecting on the last year and how we move forward. In my talk, I will do so by touching on a few fronts—the level of overdose deaths we are seeing (mostly from opioids), the challenges we see in recruitment and retention, and the opportunity to continue to improve peace officer training opportunities.



The Opioid Epidemic

As peace officers, you see trauma and tragedy up close on a daily basis. In the last reporting year, you saw firsthand the deadly impact of the opioid epidemic.

According to the CDC, more Americans died of drug overdoses over a one-year period than ever before—over 100,000 lives. That exceeds car crash and gun violence deaths combined. That's a crisis. And as you know well, at the heart of this epidemic is the rising menace of fentanyl.

The opioid crisis began in the boardroom, with bad actors like Purdue Pharma pushing out addictive prescriptive pills, such as Oxycontin. The last 25 years saw the United States plunge deeper into this crisis. These companies are now being held to account. As a result of litigation we brought, Colorado will receive over \$400 million from those companies who acted illegally.

As we work our way out of the crisis, we will have to address three critical fronts—(1) the supply side; (2) the demand side; and (3) the criminal justice system. On the supply side, we need to be vigilant on drug interdiction. The good news—litigation like the lawsuit we brought is now cutting back on the availability of prescription pills. So too have programs like “drug take back days” that many of your offices sponsor. The painful news, however, is that this vacuum is now being filled by drug cartels ready and willing to manufacture and supply deadly fentanyl as an alternative. And fentanyl is a killer—60 times more potent than morphine and 30 times stronger than heroin.

We have work to do to track and curtail the distribution of fentanyl. Our office has focused on taking out major cartels. Recently, a case led by our office resulted in 64 charges for trafficking of fentanyl, cocaine, heroin, and meth into our State. That operation alone captured 77,000

counterfeit oxycodone pills that contained deadly fentanyl—removing those pills from the illegal market and undoubtedly saving countless lives. I appreciate the leadership of the Arvada Police Department on this effort as well as the collaboration from the Denver and Aurora Police Departments. But we have more work to do. Our state legislature must relook at our criminal laws as they relate to fentanyl. After all, four grams of fentanyl is not equivalent to four grams of cocaine. The General Assembly must reevaluate and update our laws to account for the heightened lethality of this substance. That should include stiffer penalties for dealers who deliberately sell fentanyl-laced drugs to unsuspecting buyers, leading to their deaths. We cannot focus on the supply side alone. We must also address the demand side, which means tackling addiction and better educating the public so those struggling with addiction do not unwittingly fall victim to fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. And by providing more education about this threat to the public, we can prevent first and one-time users from ever taking a pill in the first place as well as warn those struggling with addiction from risking their lives by taking fentanyl. With the funds obtained from the companies that illegally pushed the opioids into our communities, we are ready to provide funding for such awareness and education campaigns. But we need your engagement on the local levels to complete that work effectively. As we prepare to use the \$400 million in settlement funds to help us rebuild from the opioid epidemic, I'm asking for your help in determining how

best to invest these funds. I would welcome any input or questions you have. Please get in touch with Heidi Williams, our office's Opioid Response Director, to share your suggestions.

To use these settlement funds most effectively, we need law enforcement at the table. The agreement we crafted with local governments creates regional collaboratives that will receive funds that they can use to invest to respond to this crisis. As I have heard from many of you, your communities lack drug treatment and recovery pathways, meaning that your jails are often housing those struggling with substance abuse and you are unable to help them recover. As regional collaboratives are established, I encourage you to get engaged with them—and each board will have a law enforcement member—and work to advance this once-in-a-generation opportunity to build more drug treatment and recovery.

Finally, I mentioned that there are critical connections between the opioid crisis and the criminal justice system. Let me mention a few. First, I believe almost all of your agencies are now equipped with Narcan so that you can save the lives of persons who are overdosing. Second, I know that an increasing number of you are investing in Medication Assisted Treatment for those in jail. For those of you who are interested in this program, please reach out to Heidi. Finally, we recognize that we need to work together on better handoffs for those who do detox in jail and are released. Better coordination will create a path for lasting recovery rather than a revolving door of addiction and incarceration. This work, as

you all appreciate, includes better support for those with mental illness, as such conditions are often co-occurring for those struggling with substance abuse disorder.



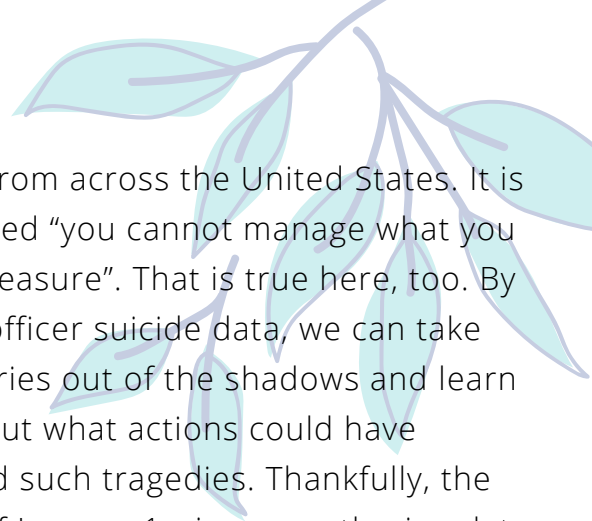
Recruitment and Retention Challenges

I continue to hear from you that the law enforcement profession faces considerable trauma and challenges. And this is exacerbated by not only unfair public criticism, but a lack of understanding of the heroism, resilience, and service that peace officers perform on a regular basis. Related to these dynamics, and the staffing challenges you continue to endure, let me share a few thoughts and explain what we are doing in the Department of Law and with the POST Board to address these challenges.

With respect to the overall narrative around peace officers, I recognize that the stories of your “whys” is one that is not often told. When I joined an academy in Grand Junction recently, I asked “what drives you to want to join the law enforcement profession”? In response, I received inspiring answers—“to help those who are vulnerable,” to “serve my community,” and to “protect public safety.”

I feel strongly the public should know about your dedication to public service and what drives you to each day put on your badge. To do this, POST has released a [“My Why” series](#) that we developed. We’re asking for your help in getting these videos out and supporting this program to increase the public’s appreciation for the law enforcement profession. Each of you should be receiving sample videos and a social media toolkit from POST, if your agency would like to participate. For more information on this effort, please contact our POST Director Bo Bourgerie, who both developed and launched this concept and is with me today. And give you a sense of these videos, let me show you a few now. Officer retention challenges are also on my mind. According to our statistics, law enforcement agencies were only able to fill 73% of the vacancies left by departing peace officers in 2021, resulting in a further reduction in peace officers statewide. That’s a problem and calls for vigilance in both recruiting new peace officers and retaining current ones. And this comes after we rolled out a new scholarship program at POST to support those entering rural law enforcement agencies. Clearly, we need to do more.

Let me share with you a story I heard from one of the chiefs in this room that underscores the importance of supporting the mental health of our peace officers. It involves an officer who responded to an incredibly traumatic scene—I believe it was a case of child abuse—and he went right from that call to another situation, still severely shaken from what he had just



experienced. In that second call, he used excessive force and lost his job. As this story underscores, we must do more to support peace officers when they endure trauma and mental health challenges, in particular, we need to make sure our peace officers know that they can reach out for support immediately after a traumatic call, even if that is just speaking with a supervisor.

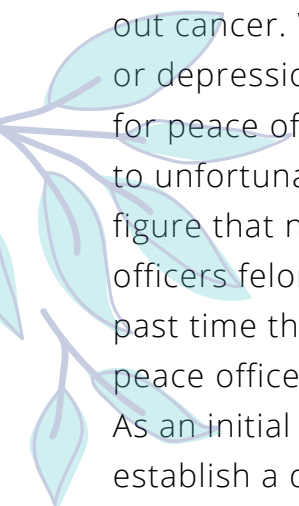
We are getting better in society in acknowledging the effect of trauma on our mental health, but we have a very long way to go. For many peace officers, the message has been, and continues to be, “tough it out.” No one would suggest that we tough out cancer. We should not tough out anxiety or depression either. But the lack of support for peace officer mental health contributes to unfortunate suicides by peace officers—a figure that now exceeds law enforcement officers feloniously killed on the job. It’s well past time that we do more to support our peace officers and their mental health.

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As an initial response, the FBI is finally set to establish a database that tracks all officer

suicides from across the United States. It is often stated “you cannot manage what you cannot measure”. That is true here, too. By tracking officer suicide data, we can take these stories out of the shadows and learn more about what actions could have prevented such tragedies. Thankfully, the FBI—as of January 1—is now gathering data on suicides by law enforcement officers and is set to release, starting this summer, the first in a series of annual reports about peace officer suicides and attempted suicides. I would encourage all of the leaders in this room, and across the state, to participate in this voluntary data reporting. By learning more about law enforcement suicides, including how and why they occur, we can develop better strategies to save the lives of our peace officers.

And on the state level, I know we can and should be doing more to support you and peace officer mental health. That’s why last fall I submitted a request to the General Assembly to dedicate \$10 million in new spending to supporting peace officers. This investment would include needed funds for peace officer access to behavioral health professionals for all law enforcement agencies and their family members—as well as additional dollars to help you recruit and retain peace officers. As Sheriff Steve Nowlin explained to me, providing mental health services to officers and their families is a great investment that will enable them to continue to serve as well as to support them in living better lives. It’s critical that the legislature make this investment—and they’ll be hearing from me throughout this



legislative session to ensure we secure these funds to help your agencies.



Improving Law Enforcement Training

On both the academy level and on the ongoing training front, we are looking to better support peace officers and prepare them for the challenging work they face. Starting this year, our Department is undertaking and leading a much-needed effort to redesign law enforcement training academies' curriculums. We have not, in over forty years, conducted a scientifically based wholesale reexamination of our basic peace officer academy curriculum and asked how it can be better redesigned. Over the last forty years, we have learned a lot about how we can give peace officers the tools necessary to avoid tense situations from escalating—protecting both the public and peace officers. We have begun that process, evaluating what core competencies we need to teach entry-level peace officers. And to assist this work, we put together an advisory board, with a number of leaders in this room supporting the effort. If you are interested in helping with or learning more about this initiative, please reach out to Director Bourgerie. We are also working hard to develop additional training opportunities for existing

peace officers. One will be on tactics for improving decision-making under stress. Another is developing curriculum to teach officers how to more effectively work with and assist people with disabilities. Finally, we are exploring how to provide more effective bystander training. This would include supporting peace officers through greater awareness of their and others' emotional states. Such awareness, for example, could have resulted the case I discussed above—where an officer left one call where he encountered severe trauma and went right to another call where he used excessive force—to turn out differently.



We are at an important moment for law enforcement. Officers, sheriffs, troopers, and marshals all serve the public, often under traumatic and challenging circumstances. You have my continued admiration and gratitude for your service. My office and the POST Board are committed to supporting you in your work and knowing what you need so we can be of service. Thanks for your leadership and your continued partnership.

Back in the Saddle

During the past two years our staff has worked mostly from home except for the occasional journey to help administer test-outs or other special events, like the recent conference. We are looking forward to getting in the field more frequently. On January 25, 2022, Compliance had the opportunity to conduct a site inspection with Sgt. Courtney Jones for Western Colorado Law Enforcement Academy (WCLEA) in Montrose.



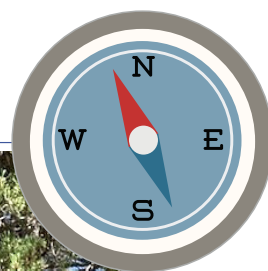
WCLEA will host summer academies beginning this May. It's a collaboration between Colorado Mesa University (CMU) and local law enforcement, including both the Montrose Police Department and Montrose County Sheriff's Office. Though Montrose is a small rural area, the town is growing immensely, because it has an airport and is located near a ski resort. POST will continue assisting this new academy to ensure everyone has their needs met. Compliance has also started working with SME Chairs to coordinate

in-person skills inspections. The team enjoys meeting people and learning about the great work being done statewide to support law enforcement. We can't wait to see you all soon!

POST NEW HIRES

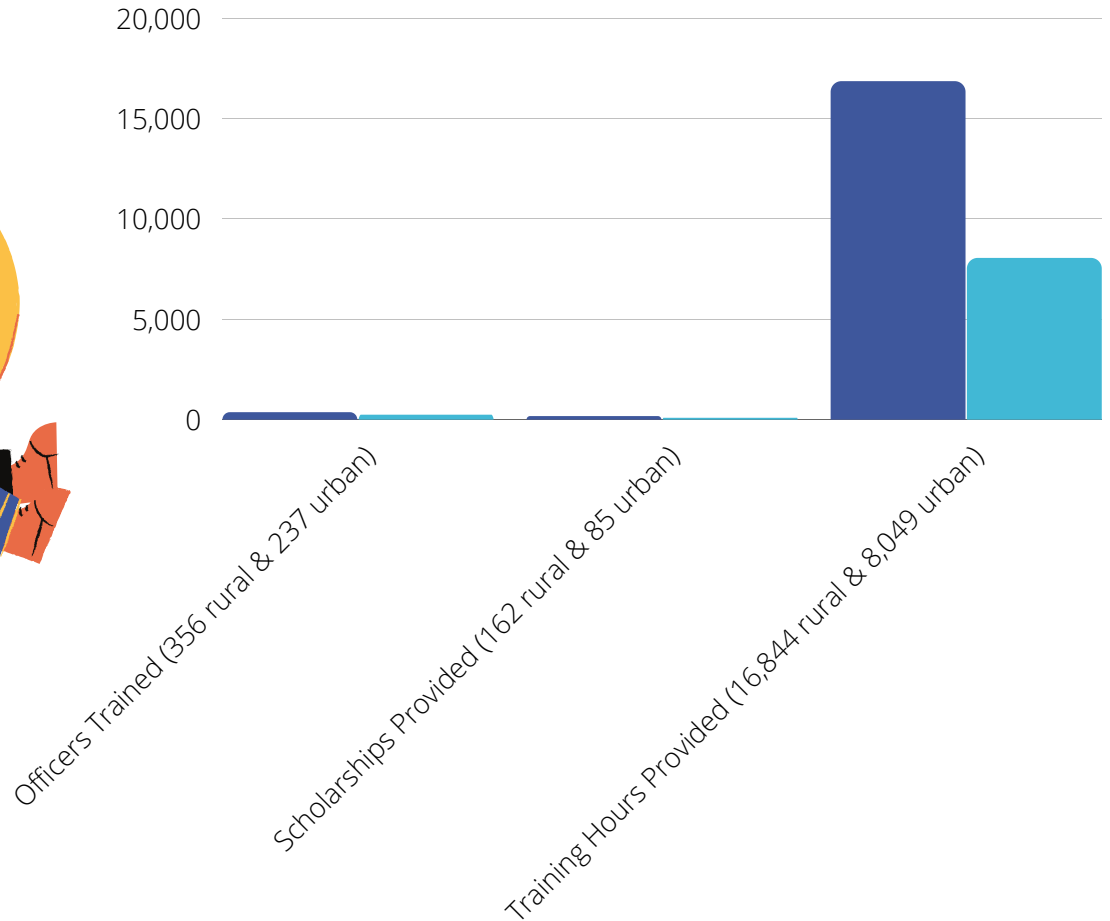
Compliance Specialist & LEAS Mary Vekasy

Mary: After graduating college, I moved from my hometown, Pittsburgh, PA, to Colorado to start a career in law enforcement. Why Colorado? Because I had a Jeep and a snowboard. After 14 years, mostly at CU Boulder Police Department, it was time for a change. I completed my Masters in compliance and ethics and am happy to now be a part of the POST team. I look forward to using my knowledge and experience to support law enforcement across the state. And yes, I still have a Jeep and spend most of my free time in the outdoors.

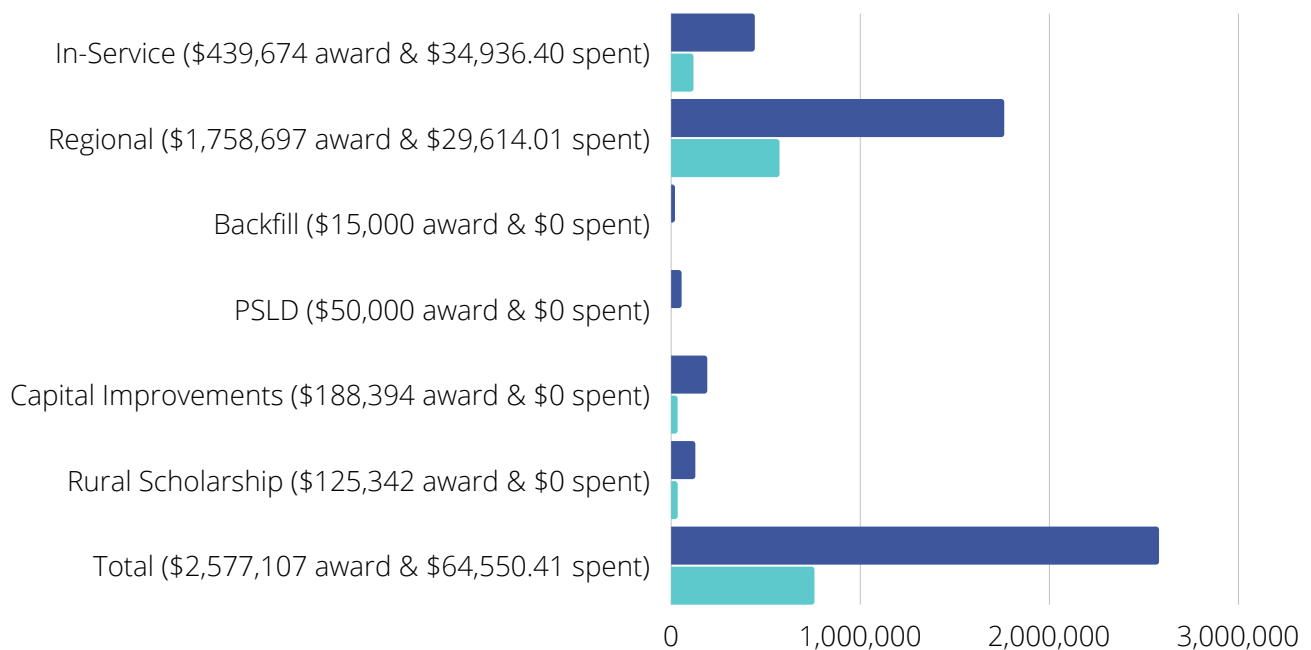


FY22 Grant Funding to Date

A total of 34 classes have been held throughout the state since July 1, 2021, paid for by the POST Training Grant.



Between all the POST grant programs, 29.38% has been expended to date for the FY22 grant year which began July 1, 2021.



PoliceOne Academy:
55,799 officers have
completed the courses to
date, totaling in 70,218 hours.

January 27 Stakeholder's Meeting

Stakeholder's meeting is an opportunity for the grantee regions and their respective board members to learn more about POST and connect with one another.

Some of the discussed topics include: legislative updates, FY22 POST budget, reimbursement reminders, grant timing FY23 and grant guidelines. Other agenda items can be found in the [meeting minutes](#).

REMEMBER

Grant applications are opening soon!

- [In-Service Grant Program](#) - March 1st
- [Capital Improvement Training Grant](#) - March 1st
- [Academy Scholarship Grant Program](#) - March 1st
- [Regional Grant Program](#) - March 1st
- [Very Small Agency Backfill Grant Program](#) - at least 30 days in advance of the training
- [Public Safety Leadership Development Grant Program](#) - at least 30 days in advance of the training

Please note: Grant awards are not provided to individuals.

TRAINING

Helping Those in Crisis

CITAC Training Conference

Registration is now opened for the Annual Crisis Intervention Teams Association of Colorado (CITAC) virtual conference in April. This one-day event will cover new perspectives in policing, advanced de-escalation training, different response techniques and much more. Details can be found on the [CITAC website](#).

Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection

Suicide continues to be one of the top causes of death among law enforcement. To help agencies better understand and prevent suicide among their officers, FBI launches a new data collection project. Learn more about it [here](#).

Benchmark Training Courses

POST offers online courses that can be accessed through [Benchmark](#):

- Log into the system and go to "My Training."
- Once there, click the "Available Training" tab on the left side of the page and a list of all trainings will come up.

Right now POST has 13 courses available, with more coming in the next few weeks. All trainings will automatically be added to your record upon completion.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness Opportunity for Peace Officers

On October 6, 2021, the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) announced a time-limited waiver opportunity to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program rules. This waiver offers a major opportunity for many current and past public servants, including peace officers, to take advantage of the PSLF.

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program was created by Congress in 2007, to provide relief to borrowers who work full-time, for a qualifying public service employer, by forgiving the balance of their federal student loans after 10 years of service. Qualifying employers include all levels of government, school districts, public hospitals, qualifying non-profit organizations, and more. However, the PSLF program has fallen short of expectations due very low approval rates for loan forgiveness.

The PSLF Limited Wavier Opportunity addresses some of the systemic issues that have kept PSLF forgiveness rates low. Under the waiver, federal student loan borrowers (private loans do not qualify), who work for a qualifying employer, may receive credit for past payments that would otherwise not qualify for PSLF. Specifically, any period of repayment will count as a qualifying payment, regardless of loan type, repayment plan, or whether past payments

were made in full or on time. Other changes under the waiver include:

- Waiver of the requirement that one must be working for a qualifying employer when she applies for and receives PSLF forgiveness. This means those no longer working in public service and retirees are eligible for forgiveness.
- For military borrowers, months spent on active duty count toward PSLF, even if the loans were in deferment or forbearance.

However, to participate in the waiver, you may need to complete two steps by October 31, 2022.



First, for borrowers who are not already participating in the PSLF program, or who have not filed an Employment Certification Form (ECF) recently, need to file an ECF. You can generate an ECF using the Department's PSLF Help Tool.

Second, borrowers who had non-qualifying loans such as a Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) program or a federal Perkins loan, must consolidate those loans into a direct consolidation loan with the the Department by October 31, 2022. Learn about the consolidation process here.

For more information on PSLF and this time-limited waiver opportunity:

- visit studentaid.gov/pslf
- contact the Colorado Student Loan Ombudsperson at studentloans@coag.gov
- file a complaint at www.coag.gov/studentloans
- call (720) 508-MySL (6975).

POST BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

December 3 Session

The POST Board held its 416th meeting and welcomed new public members: Donald Addy, Laura Daniels, Sharletta Evans, and Scott Levin, as well as a new POST staff member, Mary Vekasy. We appreciate their time and service in helping POST be a quality resource for our law enforcement communities!

All four of the Subject Matter Expert Committees gave their yearly review, including the updated numbers of members and approved full-skill instructors.

The POST Board revoked two certifications for Felony Convictions, one certification for Misdemeanor Convictions, and five certifications for Untruthfulness.

The Board voted on modifying Rule 1, which went into effect on January 30, 2022.

Attorney General Weiser noted that law enforcement has been experiencing the consequences of “the great resignation,” so now more than ever it is important to evaluate how recruitment and retention is being conducted. He has proposed \$10 million in additional funding to help with staffing shortages and peace officer mental

health.

The Board is also working on lengthening the statutorily required 180 day time limit for disposition of revocation and suspension for certain disqualifying incidences. 180 days is a very short amount of time for these dispositions, given all of the processes that need to happen.

More detailed meeting minutes & other information about the Board is available on our [website](#).



**FOR NEWSLETTER
INQUIRIES**

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