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New Registry Will Identify Decertified Police Officers

By Kevin Johnson

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A national registry of more than 7,000 police officers who have been stripped of their law enforcement licenses is being readied for use by police agencies throughout the USA to identify officers with troubled histories.

The registry, which for the first time would give police agencies direct access to a list of decertified officers, is designed to help avoid hiring officers ousted from jobs elsewhere.

So far, 20 states are contributing to a computer database being assembled by the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST). The database could be ready this fall.

Although there have been no national studies on how often disciplined or decertified officers have found work at other departments, the database reflects rising concerns about the quality of police recruits.

In Florida, the Broward County Sheriff's Department faces questions about its hiring practices in a lawsuit involving Sheriff's Deputy Lewis Perry. Perry had left two police jobs in Connecticut after conduct complaints were filed against him, court documents show.

He was fired from a third Connecticut agency while under investigation for allegedly stalking a girlfriend, court papers say. In Broward, Perry has been suspended without pay because he faces allegations of misconduct and perjury. A grand jury also is reviewing his conduct in a 2004 shooting. Perry's attorney, Eric Schwartzreich, says he has not reviewed the Connecticut evidence, but he notes that Perry's certification hasn't been revoked.

The new database will flag only officers who have been decertified by state accreditation agencies. While more states may sign on, records for thousands more ousted officers are under the control of state accreditation agencies that have chosen not to share the information or are prohibited by law from sharing it. Police agencies in all states would be permitted to use the database.

Project director Ray Franklin says incidents of misconduct that don't result in decertification could be added as the database expands.

Police officers typically are licensed by state agencies when the officers graduate from law enforcement academies. Officers remain accredited as long as they meet job standards. When they violate such standards, the loss of their law enforcement accreditation is supposed to prevent them from working as officers elsewhere. However, police departments — particularly those in different states — historically have not shared such information.

In the past three decades, more than 19,000 officers have been stripped of licenses for misconduct, according to a 2005 IADLEST survey.

“Some people view this as kind of like a blacklist,” Franklin says. “It’s really not. It’s more like a pointer system, a reference for public safety agencies.”

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