

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS

WORKFORCE NEEDS
ASSESSMENT

Submitted by Seattle Jobs Initiative
to the Washington State Board for
Community and Technical Colleges

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Law Enforcement and Corrections Workforce Needs Assessment

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	
AAS	Associate of Applied Science
AAS-T	Associate of Applied Science - Transfer
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color
BLEA	Basic Law Enforcement Academy
BLEEA	Basic Law Enforcement Equivalency Academy
COA	Corrections Officer Academy
CTCs	Community and Technical Colleges
CTE	Career and Technical Education
CWC	Correctional Worker Core
DOC	Department of Corrections
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
KSAs	Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
PERF	Police Executive Research Forum
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corp
SBCTC	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
SJI	Seattle Jobs Initiative
TAC	Training, Advising, and Counseling
WSP	Washington State Patrol

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Introduction

Law enforcement and corrections sectors are grappling with nationwide recruitment shortfalls and decreased retention rates. The reasons for these deficits are many: population growth has increased public safety needs; generational shifts have altered career preferences; the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed potential recruitment opportunities, including the ability to offer work experience, internships, and other types of work exposure; and high-profile events have affected public sentiment about these sectors.

A 2023 Washington state budgetary provision directed the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to contract research to assess the workforce development needs of law enforcement and corrections agencies across Washington and determine how the state’s community and technical colleges (CTCs) can help meet those needs.^{1(sec605.44)} Through a competitive procurement process, SBCTC engaged Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) to conduct this research.

This three-part project includes a review of the literature, labor market and workforce landscape analysis, and qualitative fact-finding with various stakeholders. Among the stakeholders were representatives from law enforcement, correctional agencies and the Criminal Justice Training Center (CJTC); community and technical college faculty and administrators; college students (both criminal justice majors and others); and police recruits and new officers. Per the 2023 Legislature’s directive, this project has the following objectives:

1. Assess the recruitment and retention challenges of law enforcement and corrections agencies in Washington state.
2. Make recommendations on how CTCs can help agencies meet their workforce needs.
3. Design an outreach strategy for criminal justice programs targeting nontraditional college students.^{1(sec605.44)}

Scope and Limitations

The scope and methodology of the research project were stipulated in the contract and included three general components (see Appendix A for details). First, a literature review was requested to identify previous workforce-related research on law enforcement and corrections and to highlight longer-term themes and trends. Second, a labor market analysis was requested to provide insights into the current relationships between educational attainment and career advancement across the law enforcement and corrections industry in Washington state.

Lastly, a series of interviews and focus groups were requested to better understand the subjective, lived experiences and perspectives held by a diverse range of stakeholders to provide insights as to why the industry is facing recruitment and retention challenges and how the community and technical college system can help address them.

This mixed methodological approach is exploratory. One of the aims is to reveal potential perception gaps between and across stakeholder groups and provide a range of strategies to translate these gaps into relationship-building outreach opportunities.

It is important to note that this research study was not intended or designed to present a statistically valid, representative survey of stakeholder perceptions. Rather, the mix of qualitative and quantitative methods used in this study was used to identify general themes that emerged across the subjective perceptions held by a diverse range of stakeholders while also presenting robust labor market data, giving a more objective overview of the industry's current state.

This mixed methodology often reveals differences in the perceptions held across stakeholder groups in ways that may contravene statistical labor market data. These discrepancies are not errors in the findings; these are the findings. They reveal a perception gap that may be bridged through informed outreach and relationship-building. These perception gaps open several potential avenues for further research where statistical methods may be useful.

Context

Washington state has long had the fewest law enforcement officers per capita in the US.² In recent years, difficulty in recruiting and increased exits from the field have increased the deficit. These departures are due to demographic changes and generational shifts in career preferences. In addition, more recent high-profile police brutality incidents and the so-called Ferguson effect^{1,3,4} have contributed to the sector's reputational challenges, particularly among minoritized communities.^{7,8} The shortfall has a cascading impact on public safety and community relationships with the police.

¹ Ferguson effect in this context is a *hypothetical* causal chain wherein (1) hostile media coverage of the police has (2) caused civilians to distrust, resent, and disrespect police and (3) officers to fear being falsely accused of wrongdoing. This, in turn, (4) reduces officers' morale and impacts performance, leading to de-policing, and (5) increases turnover and difficulty recruiting. This culminates in (6) higher crime and reduced public safety.^{3,4}

The research into the impact of the Ferguson effect indicates there is no widespread de-policing or increase in homicides as a result of the media coverage and public response to high-profile events.⁵ However, there is evidence that it has impacted officers' perceptions of civilians, crime, and their self-legitimacy,⁶ which in turn may result in burnout and attrition.

While most entry-level law enforcement and corrections positions in Washington state do not require a postsecondary degree, CTCs help meet the needs of the law enforcement workforce for several reasons.

First, CTCs have a mission to support workforce education and training needs within local communities. Second, education programs provide exposure opportunities for students who are still exploring career options. Third, the public believes that police officers should have more than a high school diploma,⁹ a belief that exemplifies public advocacy since the 1920s for higher law enforcement educational standards.¹⁰ Finally, though the research is not conclusive, there is substantial evidence that better-educated law enforcement officers save departments money and are “better report writers, have few complaints and disciplinary actions, are more innovative, [are] less resistant to change, and are more likely to embrace new methods of policing.”¹⁰

More than 90% of law enforcement and corrections agencies nationwide, including 84% of rural agencies, have easy access to a CTC.¹¹ While staffing deficits in law enforcement and corrections are more nuanced than a gap in education and training pathways,¹² CTCs can still assist in meeting this sector’s challenges.

Literature Review

Academic and policy research, specialized literature, and the media have documented the nationwide recruitment and retention challenges in law enforcement and corrections. Staffing issues include high vacancy rates,¹³ high turnover rates,¹⁴ and occupation-specific labor shortages.¹⁵ Factors explaining these challenges also vary by sector.

Law Enforcement

Recent high-profile events have eroded public trust in law enforcement agencies and interest in related careers.^{3,6-8} This is known as the Ferguson effect, so named following the 2014 police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. This effect expanded following the 2020 police killing of George Floyd.⁶

Recruiting and Retention Factors

However, the Ferguson effect’s impact on recruiting and retention is unclear and intersects with established organizational factors, including pay satisfaction, social cohesion, work-life balance, trust in leadership, perception of agency procedural justice,^{12,16,17} and other long-anticipated challenges.⁶ Wilson identified three categories of obstacles that leaders more than two decades ago expected to impact their staffing: increasing attrition, the changing role of the police, and fewer recruits.¹⁸

Increasing Attrition

A growing number of officers leave the field for two primary reasons. The first is generational change (specifically, the retirement of Baby Boomers). The second is that changing expectations of the police and policing may decrease job satisfaction or make policing a poor career fit.

Changing Roles of Police

Police roles and responsibilities have expanded significantly in the past two decades, including new standards in community policing; crimes emerging from technological advancement and ideological shifts (e.g., cybersecurity crimes, cyber-harassment, new definitions of crimes like marital rape, and an increase in human trafficking); and the emergence of homeland security. These increased skills and organizational changes could make a career in law enforcement more appealing or, conversely, could contribute to attrition.^{8, 13, 14}

Shrinking Pool of Recruits

As previously noted, researchers in the early 2000s predicted agencies would face smaller pools of qualified applicants for three reasons: generational changes in career preferences, competition from other sectors, and disqualification due to debt and drug use.¹⁹ The COVID-19 pandemic likely amplified each of these factors.

Changing Career Preferences

Changing career preferences may be related to changes in college attendance over the past three decades. Before 1960, 16% of the population aged 25 and older had some postsecondary education. By comparison, in 2020, 63% of the population 25 and older had received higher education.²⁰⁻²² Although police training expanded in the 20th century in response to public dissatisfaction with policing, 80% of agencies nationwide still require only a high school diploma or equivalent to join the force.¹⁰ The statistics are even more pronounced in the US Census Pacific Region states (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington), where 97% of agencies require only a high school diploma (*Figure 1*).¹⁰ The low bar to entry may make law enforcement careers less appealing to those most likely to be qualified, particularly if they have pursued a college degree immediately after high school.

However, more recent data points to a significant decline in college attendance since the COVID-19 pandemic, with CTC enrollments decreasing by 25% between fall 2019 and fall 2022.²³ This decrease can be attributed to high barriers to education and shrinking buying power.²⁴ A survey from the Washington Roundtable found that a third of respondents with no college experience thought that education beyond high school was not necessary to earn a living wage, even though they valued postsecondary credentials.²⁵

Education Requirement for Entry-Level Officers

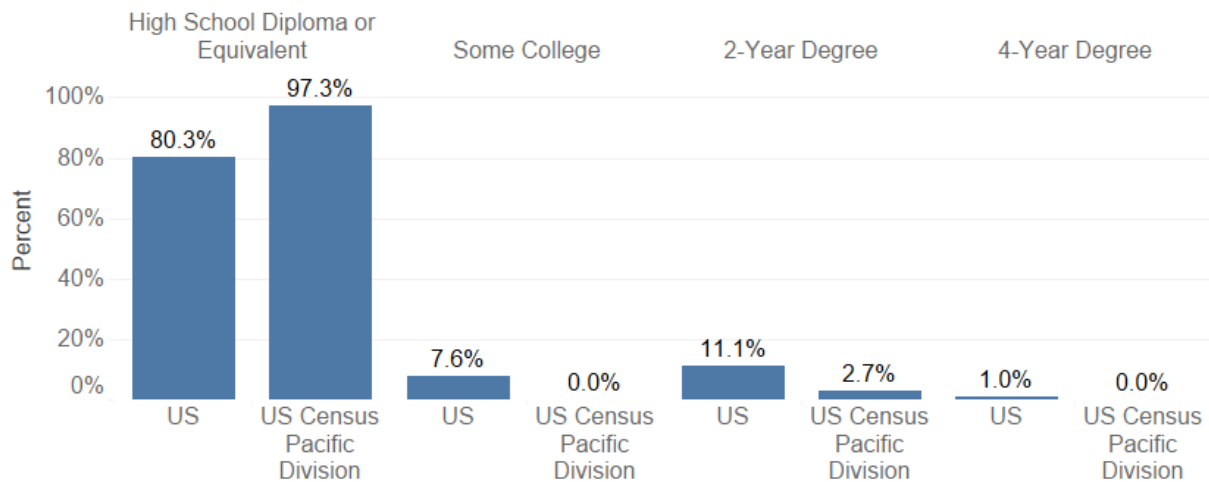


Figure 1. Minimum Education Requirements for Entry-Level Officers
Source: Policing around the Nation: Education, Philosophy, and Practice (2017), US Census Pacific Division includes Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington

Addressing the Challenges

Despite consistent reporting on staffing challenges in law enforcement, there is a lack of clarity about what exactly “short-staffed” means¹² and what efforts are in place to resolve these deficits.²⁶ Research indicates that specific agency characteristics and contexts (e.g., compensation, city size, and crime rate) impact recruiting and retention most.¹⁹ Trust in leadership and reduced burnout, associated with good relationships with supervisors and better work-life balance, have the strongest impact on retention. Specifically for operational managers (i.e., sergeants), post-collegiate education (some masters-level coursework or more) contributes to lower burnout and intention to leave the profession.²⁷ In contrast, advertising and recruitment incentives had little effect.¹⁹

This research notably did not investigate the effect of relationships between law enforcement agencies and their communities, a significant focus of intervention in recent years. Based on post-meeting reports and a survey of police and sheriff department officials, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) concludes that building strong relationships with community groups could help agencies reconnect with constituents and establish local recruitment pipelines. The PERF also stresses the increasing need for applicants with strong soft skills who can effectively build those relationships.²⁸ However, reliable data and research about effective interventions to improve police-community relations is lacking.²⁹

Diversifying the Workforce

Diversifying the officers' ranks has long been identified as a means to improve the legitimacy of police and police-community relationships.³⁰ In addition to the cultural valence of representation, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) and female officers are perceived as more trustworthy and to more effectively use soft skills on the job.²⁹

Following the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) launched Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement, an interagency research effort into how law enforcement agencies can recruit, retain, and promote officers that reflect their communities.³² In addition, the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives and NYU School of Law's Policing Project launched a 30x30 initiative to increase the representation of women in law enforcement to 30% by 2030.³³

The research indicates many other structural and workplace culture barriers stand in the way of effectively achieving representation throughout all levels of law enforcement.³⁴⁻³⁶ These barriers are not addressed, let alone resolved, by targeting recruitment to BIPOC and women candidates.

Corrections Agencies, Courts, and Legislative Officers

Like sworn law enforcement officers, correctional officers have suffered from one of the largest labor shortages in the law enforcement and criminal justice sectors.³⁷ Correctional officers and correctional treatment specialists often suffer from dangerous conditions, stressful exposure to secondary trauma, and difficult work environments,³⁸ including isolation and limited access to natural sunlight. These jobs are demanding and bear a high degree of responsibility, factors that have been shown to negatively affect recruitment in correctional agencies.¹³

Addressing the Challenges

There is even less research on recruiting and retention efforts in the corrections sector than in law enforcement. Recommendations fall into two categories: working conditions and compensation.

Working Conditions and Compensation

Though outside the scope of this research, increasing compensation is a crucial strategy for improving recruitment and retention. A second strategy is to shift from a punitive to a human-services work model. This could improve social perspectives about these jobs and the sector overall and attract more and better-qualified candidates.¹³

The Washington Department of Corrections launched Person-Centered Services to incorporate the voices of incarcerated individuals into its practices and orient the agency to this new model.³⁹

Some correctional agency executives advocate for labor practice reforms to increase staff training funds, improve work conditions by setting up national workload standards, and enable recruits early in their careers to participate in decision-making.¹³

Bridging the Gap Through Education and Training

College education requirements are typically seen as a barrier to employment, as the expense of postsecondary tuition can discourage otherwise highly capable candidates from enrolling and completing a degree. The opportunity cost of attending college is another discouraging factor, as students enrolled in a postsecondary education program forgo the wages they would have earned if they instead entered the workforce. Those interested in law enforcement or corrections careers are even more likely to be faced with these considerations, as entry-level positions do not require a college degree.

However, law enforcement and corrections may face something of an educational paradox. Occupational prestige is often defined in the literature as an indicator of the social status derived from a person's occupation.^{40,41} Educational requirements and attainment of workers are regularly used as one of the determinants for an occupation status^{41,42} as occupations with high statuses tend to be those with higher education requirements.⁴³

Thus, the low education requirements of law enforcement and corrections occupations could contribute to a perceived lack of occupational status or prestige, making these roles less attractive to potential recruits, particularly those who are best equipped and prepared for the evolving role of the police.¹⁰ This is compounded by the extent to which members of law enforcement and corrections sectors devalue criminal justice degrees.^{20,44}

Though increasing education requirements may be interpreted as creating additional barriers to entry, advocates hope to bring higher education requirements in line with the responsibilities and complexities of the job. Improving staff professionalization will improve the perception of these occupations, ultimately increasing the number of job applicants, particularly those who will succeed at the academy and perform well on the job.

Programs that prepare graduates for occupations that already require postsecondary education, like community corrections, should place greater emphasis on the desired competencies required for the job. Graduates with criminal justice degrees often lack knowledge of evidence-based practices, programming, and treatment practices for correctional clients. This lack of knowledge contributes to attrition, as new officers feel underprepared for job stressors.⁴⁵

Connecting Community Policing to Liberal Arts

Increasing educational requirements for sworn officers^{28,29} could also mitigate the factors negatively impacting recruitment, including changing demographics and perceived systemic bias in the sector. Some argue that shifting from punitive to more community-focused policing will increase the value of a liberal arts education, with its focus on communication, critical thinking, practical learning, and lived experience. Colleges support this effort by building criminal justice programs that include liberal arts courses. These courses expose students to content-specific knowledge (like sociology and psychology) that helps graduates value helping over punishing and helps students build strong problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication skills critical to community-oriented policing practices.^{46,48,49}

Attracting Students in Nontraditional Pathways

Officials surveyed also encouraged recruitment from nontraditional majors, such as sociology and behavioral health.²⁸ Highlighting the similarities between nontraditional pathways and the law enforcement and corrections sectors can help attract students in adjacent education pathways to law enforcement.⁵⁰

Additionally, credits for prior learning and past relevant work experience should not be limited to public safety, military, or corrections experience. Hummer and Byrne specifically cite child and family services and mental health work as examples of experience suitable for prior learning assessment for those wishing to move into law enforcement or corrections.⁴⁷

Policing-Centered Curriculum

Cordner cites key curriculum elements that are needed for criminal justice programs to prepare students to enter law enforcement and corrections occupations.^{44,51} First, programs that aim to prepare officers should prioritize policing and police science.

There is value in expanding criminal justice courses, including crime studies and topics driven by societal and technological shifts (e.g., terrorism and cybercrime). However, it should not come at the expense of time dedicated to policing in criminal justice degrees as policing involves safety, social services, and other helping activities, and not just focusing solely on crime detection and intervention.

Criminal justice programs can also support the workforce by offering police-focused degrees that center on sector-specific skills and knowledge mid-level police officers need to advance in their careers. Cordner highlights the University of San Diego’s Master’s in Law Enforcement and Public Safety Leadership program as a degree that offers courses specifically catering to police leaders and managers, such as organizational leadership, budget and finance, and public safety law.^{28,46,48,49,51,52}

Finally, internships help those interested in a law enforcement career build realistic expectations; these can be incentivized by granting participants priority hiring.⁵³

Findings

To assess how Washington state’s CTC system can better support law enforcement and corrections workforce needs, the project team sought to characterize the current labor market and workforce landscape and conducted qualitative fact-finding with various stakeholders (detailed methodology can be found in *Appendix A*).

Workforce Landscape

Law enforcement and corrections agencies are key societal agents, operating at the junction of public safety, community support, and constitutional rights and freedom protection. Because these industries are rolled up into the larger federal and local government sectors, access to detailed labor market data is considerably limited.

To make this research project relevant to the intent of the Legislature, the report focuses on occupations most related to criminal justice instructional programs. In law enforcement, these notably include police officers, detectives, and their supervisors. In corrections, these relate to correctional officers, probation officers, and their supervisors. Additional details can be found in Appendix B and a separate [interactive dashboard](#).

Law Enforcement

Police and sheriff's patrol officers dominate the law enforcement labor pool. In 2024, Washington state had 11,150 workers in this occupation, followed by the first-line supervisors of police officers and detectives, with 3,274 workers. Detectives and criminal investigators (1,863 workers), as well as forensic science technicians (452), are law enforcement occupations requiring more education, technical skills, or work experience than entry-level police officers. There are also 63 transit and railroad police officers in the state (Table 1).

Table 1. Main Law Enforcement Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Description	Typical Entry-Level Education	Work Experience Required	Job Titles	2024 Jobs	2024-2034 projected % Change - Jobs	2024 Openings	Median Annual Earnings
Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	High school diploma or equivalent	None	Deputy (Sheriff), Law Enforcement Officer, Patrol Deputy or Officer, Police and Patrol Officer, Public Safety Officer, State Trooper	11,150	11.2%	1,032	\$94,182
First-Line Supervisors of Police and Detectives	High school diploma or equivalent	Less than five years	Police Captain, Shift Supervisor	3,274	9.2%	258	\$123,094
Detectives and Criminal Investigators	High school diploma or equivalent	Less than five years	Crime Scene Investigator (CSI), Criminal Investigator, (Fugitive) Detective and Investigator, Narcotics Detective and Investigator, Police Detective, Special Agent	1,863	10.1%	164	\$105,123
Forensic Science Technicians	Bachelor's degree	None	Crime Lab and Scene Analyst, Crime Scene Technician, Criminalist, Crime Scene Investigator, Evidence Technician, Forensic Science Examiner, Forensic Scientist and Specialist, Latent Print Examiner	452	14.2%	63	\$77,168
Transit and Railroad Police	High school diploma or equivalent	None	Law Enforcement Officer, Patrol Officer, Patrolman, Police Captain, Police Patrol Officer, Police Specialist, Railroad Police, Railroad Police Officer, Transit Police Officer	63	9.4%		\$74,848

Police officers also have a greater number of annual job openings (1,032) than other occupations in the sector. These represent 9% of total employment for this occupation. In comparison, forensic technicians have the largest number of openings relative to the number of positions (14%), indicating rapid growth.

The employment forecast in the law enforcement sector shows that police and sheriff’s patrol officers will benefit from the largest growth in terms of absolute job creation: 1,243 new positions will be created within the next ten years, an 11% increase in employment. However, as previously mentioned, forensic science technicians will grow the fastest, as employment in this occupation will increase by 14% between 2024 and 2034, going from 452 to 516 technicians.

Law Enforcement Compensation

With solid earnings potential and generous benefits packages, positions in police departments are financially attractive. In Washington state, new police recruits can expect to make \$32 per hour, while more experienced officers may earn up to \$56 per hour. As officers climb the career ladder to become detectives and eventually supervisors (such as captains), their hourly earnings may vary between \$51 and \$59. Interestingly, forensic science technicians are often required to have a bachelor’s degree, but starting salaries are lower than those of other occupations in the field at \$24 per hour (Figure 2).

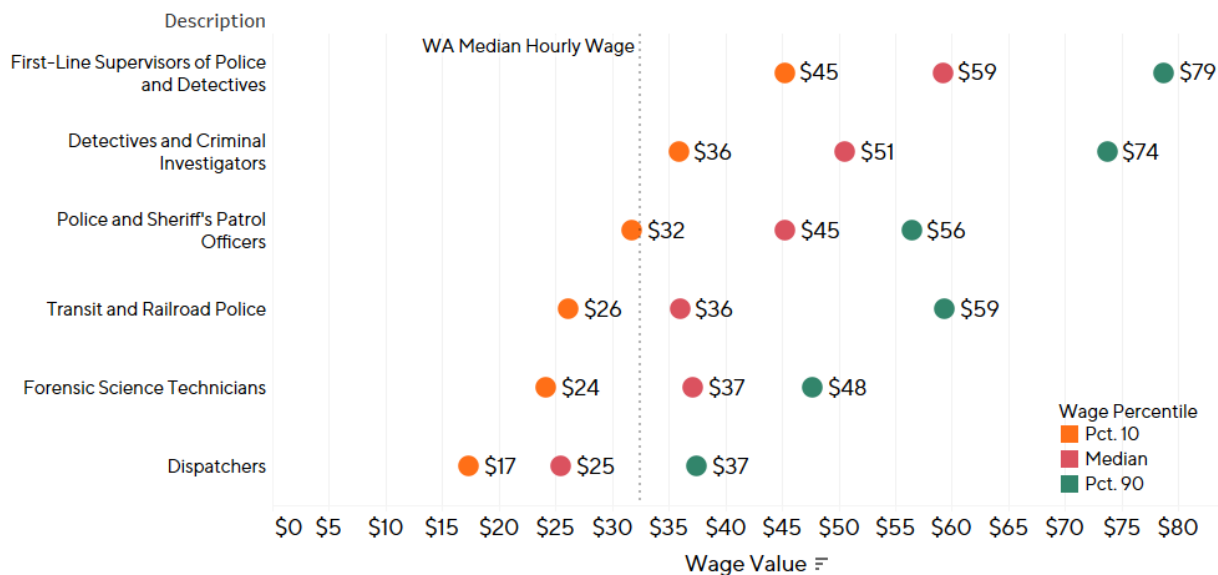


Figure 2. Hourly Earnings for Main Law Enforcement Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024.

Law Enforcement Training Pipeline

There are three pathways for sworn officers. Those hired by local and state agencies, excluding Washington State Patrol, attend the Criminal Justice Training Commission’s (CJTC’s) Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA). Those employed by the Washington State Patrol (WSP) attend the WSP Academy. Finally, those employed by tribal law enforcement agencies may attend either CJTC’s BLEA or the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ US Indian Police Academy at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, New Mexico, often augmented by CJTC’s Basic Law Enforcement Equivalency Academy (BLEEA) (Figure 3).

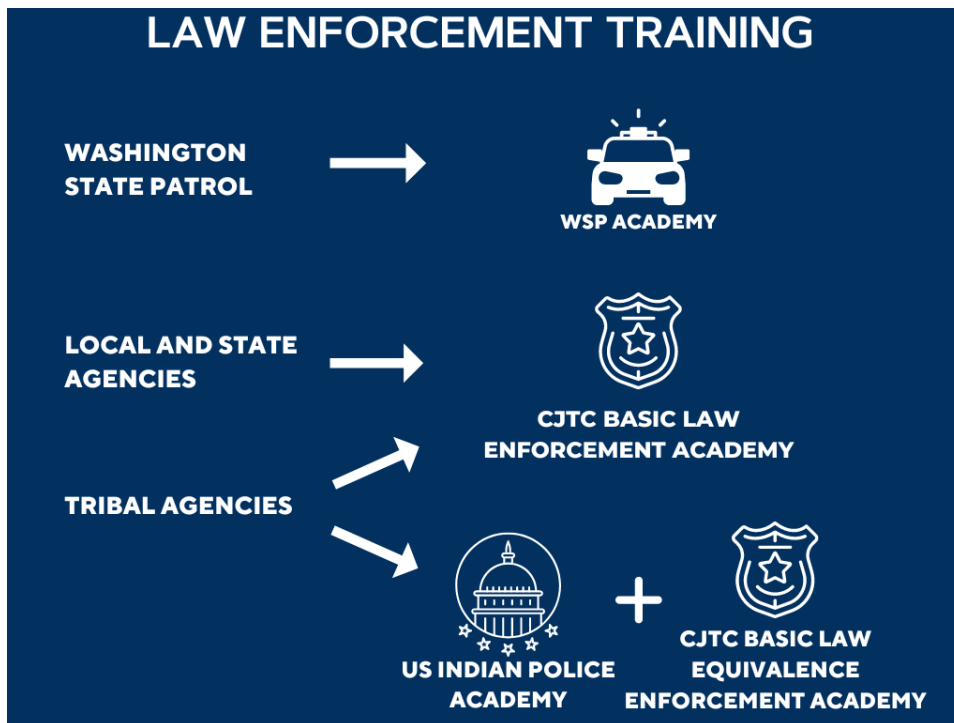


Figure 3. Law Enforcement Training

The Legislature sets admission requirements and curriculum content for the Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA) and WSP Trooper Cadet Training. In Washington state, those between 18 and 21 years old are typically prohibited from possessing and carrying a pistol or semi-automatic rifle.⁵⁴ State law provides exceptions for those employed in a public law enforcement or corrections agency.⁵⁵

However, even though state law does not set a minimum age for employment in law enforcement or corrections, most agencies require candidates to be at least 20.5 years old. Candidates must also hold a high school diploma or equivalent to participate in BLEA or WSP Trooper Cadet Training.

The number of recruits who completed CJTC’s Basic Law Enforcement Academy increased more than three-fold between 2011 and 2018 but varied more for the WSP’s Trooper Cadet Training (*Figure 4*). However, these larger BLEA cohorts are insufficient to cover all vacancies, thus contributing to the labor shortage.

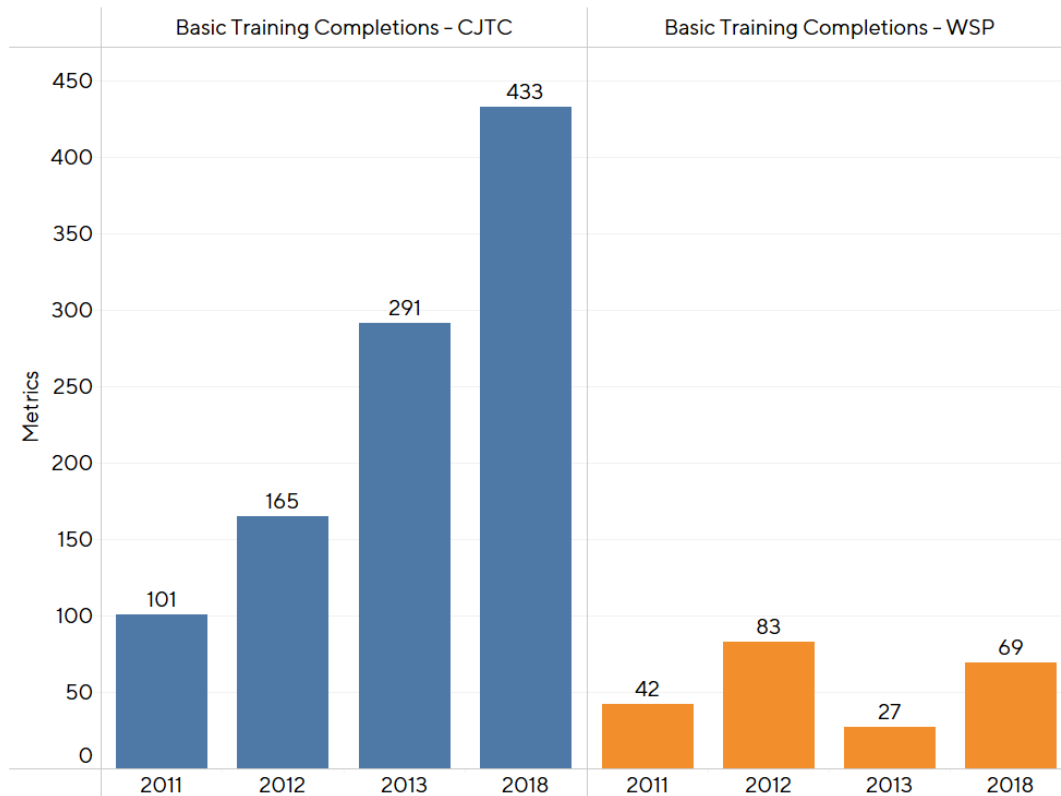


Figure 4. Law Enforcement Training Academy Completions, 2011-2018.
Source: 2018 Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies, Department of Justice, 2021

Law Enforcement Officers’ Educational Background

In Washington state, the educational background of law enforcement officers (Appendix B and separate [interactive dashboard](#)) shows that, among law enforcement workers with at least a bachelor’s degree, those who hold supervision duties are more likely to have majored in history, composition, or communications. Additionally, senior law enforcement workers (first-line supervisors of police and detectives, as well as detectives and criminal investigators) are more likely to hold a bachelor’s degree than police officers (39% and 56%, respectively).

Colleges could better support entry-level workers looking to climb the career ladder by acquiring additional degrees. This could be achieved, for example, by leveraging CTCs’ applied baccalaureate degrees, designed to help those with an associate or workforce degree quickly complete an additional educational step.⁵⁶ The recommendations section of this report describes in greater detail ways to support incumbent workers by developing the educational pathways between the CTCs and the CJTC.

Corrections

Correctional officers and jailers dominate the labor pool for correctional agencies. In 2024, this occupation accounted for 6,371 workers in Washington state, followed by probation officers and correctional treatment specialists (the only positions that require a bachelor’s degree), with 2,135 workers.

Job openings are greatest for correctional officers (605 in 2024, representing 9.5% of the workforce). Similarly, openings represent approximately 9% of the workforce for probation officers and first-line supervisors.

Table 2. Main Corrections Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Description	Typical Entry-Level Education	Work Experience Required	Job Titles	2024 Jobs	Change - Jobs 2024-2034 projected %	Openings 2024	Median Annual Earnings
Correctional Officers and Jailers	High school diploma or equivalent	None	Booking Officer, Community Services Officer (CSO), Correctional Officer, Corrections Officer (CO), Deputy Jailer, Detention Deputy, Detention Officer, Jail Officer, Jailer, Jailor	6,371	1.8%	605	\$62,816
Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists	Bachelor's degree	None	Adult and Juvenile Probation Officer, Correctional Counselor, Deputy Probation Officer (DPO), Parole Agent, Parole Officer (PO), Probation Agent, Probation and Parole Officer, Probation Counselor	2,135	8.9%	191	\$68,432
First-Line Supervisors of Correctional Officers	High school diploma or equivalent	Less than five years	Correctional Officer Captain, Correctional Supervisor	1,328	4.6%	119	\$79,872

The employment forecast shows that despite correctional officers and jailers having the largest employment pool (6,371 workers in 2024), probation officers and correctional treatment specialists will experience the largest growth in terms of absolute job creation: 190 new positions will be created within the next ten years, a 9% increase in employment.

The number of corrections officers will grow more slowly, as employment in this occupation will only increase by 2% between 2024 and 2034, gaining 116 new positions.

Corrections Compensation

Probation officers can expect to start their career at \$26 per hour, which is lower than the average for occupations requiring a bachelor’s degree. This comparatively low rate makes attracting and retaining applicants in this field difficult.

New correctional officers can expect to make \$24 per hour, while more experienced officers may earn up to \$40 per hour. As officers advance to first-line supervisors (such as sergeants or lieutenants), their hourly earnings can typically reach between \$38 per hour, up to \$50 per hour (Figure 5).

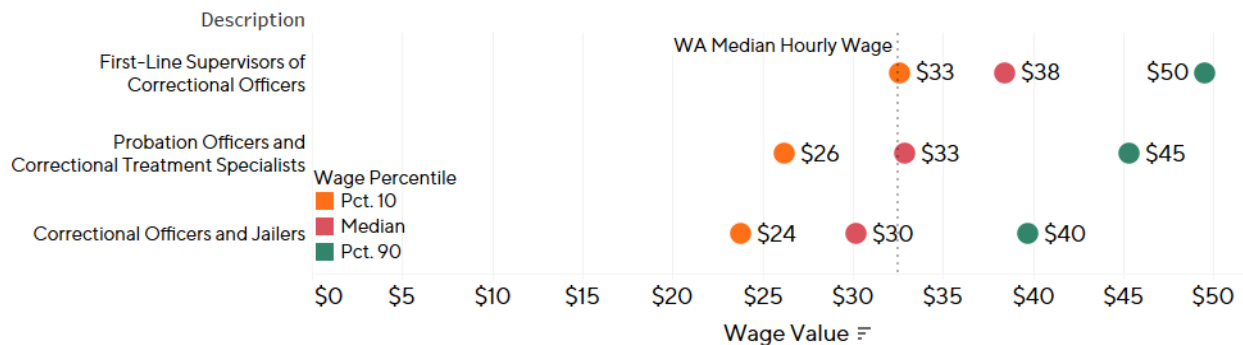


Figure 5. 2024 Hourly Earnings for Main Occupations in Corrections
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Corrections Training Pipeline

In Washington state, Level 1 corrections officers must have at least a high school diploma or equivalent and pass a criminal background check and drug screening, among other requirements. After their hire, the Department of Corrections (DOC) recruits must complete a six-week Correctional Worker Core (CWC) training offered by the agency.

In addition to physical training, the CWC consists of courses centered on the skills and knowledge necessary to work successfully with the incarcerated population. Some courses focus on safety or search techniques, while others focus on behavioral issues and mental health.⁵⁷ This coursework suggests potential recruitment channels from behavioral health, psychology, or social science education programs.

Correction officers employed by county and municipal agencies complete the CJTC’s Corrections Officer Academy (COA) within the first six months

of employment.⁵⁸ COA is a 400-hour (11-week) course covering basic knowledge and skills for safe work with adults in jail.⁵⁸

Community corrections officers (probation and parole officers) are also essential to correctional agencies. Agencies typically require entry-level candidates to hold a bachelor's degree (78% of online job postings for entry-level probation officers and correctional treatment specialists require at least a bachelor's degree).

The Legislature mandates that entry-level community corrections officers complete the CJTC Correctional Services Academy or Misdemeanant Probation Counselor Academy, depending upon the role, within six months of hire (*Figure 6*).⁵⁹ The latter lasts 80 hours and offers specialized training on several topics, including case management, community safety, and motivational speaking.

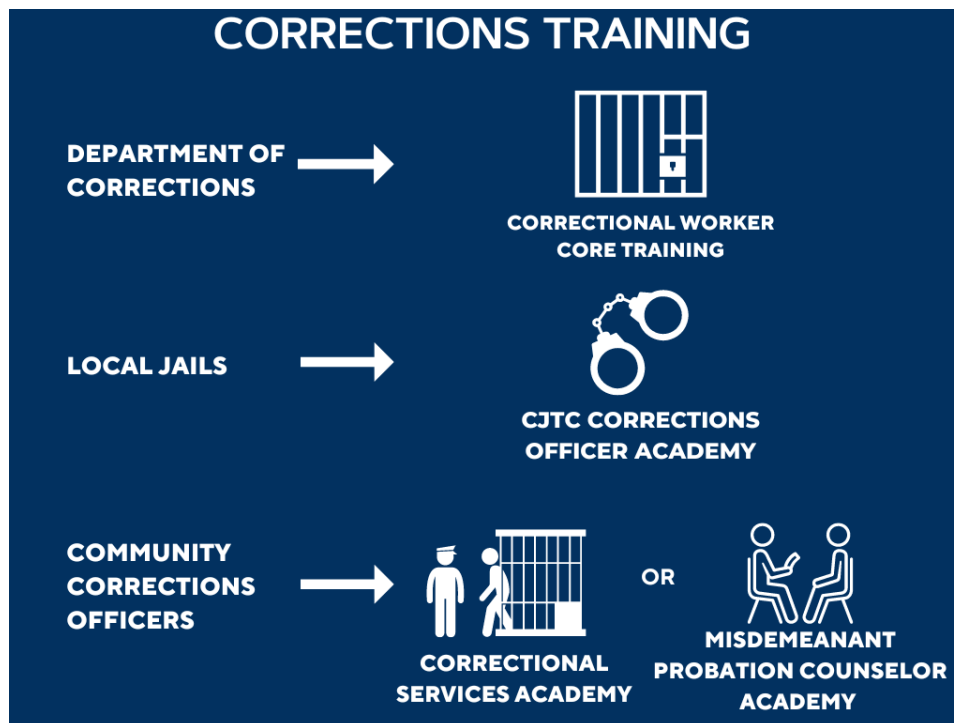


Figure 6. Corrections Training

Correctional Officers' Educational Background

Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists are more likely to hold a bachelor's degree (70%), followed by a high school diploma or equivalent (12%). Like police officers, the smaller percentage of workers with an associate degree or college award (Appendix B separate [interactive dashboard](#)) indicates a gap in educational attainment. Desk research shows that employers prefer degrees in criminology, sociology, social work, psychology, or behavioral science for these positions.

Changes in Postsecondary Education

Individual law enforcement agencies set their own education requirements for entry-level jobs. However, most do not require a college degree. Most of these positions require that applicants be 21 years old by the time they finish the required training, so applicants cannot apply directly out of high school. The number of students who graduate from a community or technical college with a degree in criminal justice accounts for only a fraction of new hires in law enforcement and corrections (Appendix C and [separate interactive dashboard](#)).

Graduations from criminal justice programs at community and technical colleges were stable between 2016 and 2020 but have trended downward since the COVID-19 pandemic. This trend is similar to that of annual enrollments in professional/technical programs in Washington state, as unduplicated FTEs declined by 36% between the 2018-19 and 2022-23 academic years.⁶⁰

The pandemic shifted education to online classes and limited opportunities for in-person interaction, which is crucial for preparing officers to work with community members.

Simultaneously, the police killing of George Floyd and other high-profile police brutality events further damaged public perception of police practices.⁷ According to multiple education representatives, these events led to an increase in students enrolling in criminal justice courses in order to participate and learn more about the ongoing discussions happening in the sector rather than with the intent of working in law enforcement or criminal justice. Additionally, many students enroll in criminal justice programs to seek employment in the legal sector. As a result, a sizable share of criminal justice students is not seeking employment in law enforcement or corrections.

Stakeholder Input

Law Enforcement and Corrections Leadership

Law Enforcement

For this study, the project team interviewed 39 law enforcement and corrections professionals from across the state. They asked these professionals about their agencies' workforce needs and challenges, how CTCs might help address their current recruitment and retention challenges, and how CTCs can help attract recruits from non-criminal justice program pathways into law enforcement and corrections careers. The feedback below highlights both workforce challenges, and the skills and backgrounds professionals seek in candidates.

Shrinking Applicant Pool

Law enforcement agencies identified the long-term decline in applicants as the primary source of workforce challenges. Several law enforcement leaders reported that the number of applicants for open positions has decreased from hundreds to a dozen over the past several years. One local police agency representative pointed out that fewer overall applicants resulted in fewer high-quality candidates able to meet the basic hiring requirements, pass the drug and background tests, and complete basic training. Nevertheless, the representative voiced reluctance to reduce hiring standards.

Law enforcement professionals offered some reasons for the overall decrease in applicants. Chief among them was the decline in public approval of law enforcement in the wake of George Floyd's killing in May 2020. The professionals interviewed universally cited the incident as a cultural inflection point where the perception of both the police and a law enforcement career negatively impacted recruitment and retention.

The George Floyd killing also reportedly created the perception among incumbent, career law enforcement professionals that local and state political leaders' support for law enforcement declined, leading many to retire early or leave the field altogether. However, leadership anticipated the shrinking applicant pool and increased attrition long before the summer of 2020 or Ferguson in 2014.⁶

Washington State Patrol reported that lower pay compared to some local police departments hampered their recruitment and retention efforts. However, the primary challenges law enforcement professionals described were cultural, not material; they were rooted in a negative perception of law enforcement rather than in consideration of pay or benefits, which many interviewees mentioned as being considerably better than other fields that do not require a college degree.

Corrections

Corrections agencies face different challenges than those reported by law enforcement agencies. The DOC reports having largely recovered from the decline in corrections officers accompanying COVID-19. Their workforce needs vary depending on the facility, with Clallam Bay being noted as consistently difficult to staff. Yet, overall, the DOC cited their primary workforce challenges being with positions other than correctional officers.

***I don't think any agency [is] interested in lowering those standards, because that's just going to create problems down the road.
—Police Human Resources Representative***

Need for Support Staff

The DOC reports a high demand for support staff such as nurses, behavioral health specialists, food service specialists, and facilities maintenance and repair staff. One challenge mentioned explicitly by the DOC is that students studying for these in-demand fields are unaware of DOC job opportunities. One DOC representative noted that CTCs could play a role in bridging this awareness gap between students preparing for high-demand fields and the corrections jobs available to them.

Working Conditions

Local corrections agencies' experiences are different from those in the state DOC. They report recruiting and retention challenges related to the low pay compared to other entry-level jobs that offer less challenging working conditions. Indeed, jail administrators explicitly cited difficult working conditions as a recruitment and retention challenge. The low entry-level pay combined with difficult working conditions creates a situation in which local corrections agencies have become a stepping stone to a career in law enforcement. Losing officers to law enforcement can further deteriorate conditions for both employees and incarcerated individuals.

Most agencies interpret state law as requiring corrections officers to be 21 years old. However, some interpret the law to allow the hiring of 18-year-olds. One corrections supervisor described it as relatively common to hire an 18-year-old who would spend three years with the corrections department while building relationships with the local police department, which would hire them when they turned 21.

This does indicate an opportunity to formalize an informal career pathway from local corrections to local law enforcement. Indeed, some law enforcement agencies offer additional points on applications to those who have served as corrections officers for three years. However, corrections leadership emphasized the demands of jail work, which indicates a need for more preparation, support, and professionalization in these roles.

The corrections sector sees higher rates of mental illness—particularly mental health crises—and substance use disorders among the jailed population. For example, a 2017 report from the U.S. Department of Justice found that 14% of prison and 26% of jail inmates experienced serious psychological disorders compared to 5% of the general population.⁶¹ At the same time, corrections officers are wholly responsible for the physical well-being of those in their custody and compliance with an array of state and federal regulations.

I saw a joke one time where somebody said, you know, I wanted to be a firefighter. I wanted to be an EMT, and I wanted to be a cop. So, I became a corrections officer in smaller jails. That's true. We do it all... We become mental health counselors, we become nurses. We become paramedics, EMTs... the hardest part in my opinion, is how do you keep people from hurting themselves... we are obligated to try.
- Jail Administrator

One jail administrator shared that it took three years to know how to do the job well and that they struggle with employee attrition primarily due to the mental toll of the job. This indicates that these roles should not be treated as a mere stepping stone into other careers.

Desired Skills

While the challenges facing law enforcement and corrections agencies differ, leaders desire similar skills, education, and backgrounds in their applicants. Both law enforcement and corrections representatives cited strong verbal communication skills and emotional intelligence as the most critical to a successful career. These two skills equip police and corrections officers to read and empathize with people and communicate effectively with them to de-escalate, investigate, and resolve a situation without force.

However, leaders also noted that verbal communication and emotional intelligence are skills that recruits struggle with the most. Several interviewees mentioned that younger recruits were reticent when interacting with people face-to-face. They tended to lack “command presence,” the ability to project authority, establish leadership, and take control of a situation. The amount of time dedicated to developing a cadet’s communication skills and emotional intelligence is 103 hours for BLEA⁶² and 37 hours for the WSP academy.^{63,64} In comparison, a 5-credit course at a community and technical college is approximately 150 hours (*Figure 7* and separate [interactive dashboard](#)).

Documenting an interaction clearly and accurately is another highly desirable skill for law enforcement and corrections officers. Report writing emerged repeatedly as a skill recruits lack when arriving at the academy and still struggle with after graduating and returning to their home departments. BLEA allocates about 19 hours to various types of report writing, while the WSP academy dedicates 16 hours. Several local law enforcement agency chiefs noted that recruits, particularly those without college backgrounds, often lack basic English composition skills, such as verb tense agreement, punctuation, and paragraph usage.

When asked if they were aware of their local community and technical college and its offerings, most law enforcement and corrections leaders indicated they were not and did not see the CTC as a resource for them. This response is surprising, given that many professionals also indicate that they will take any training available and noted that it is difficult to get into CJTC training because they must prioritize BLEA over continuing education for sworn officers.

***...[Getting] even basic high school level English writing skills mastered would be huge. The ability to write a complete sentence, to punctuate, use grammar appropriately. [Those] reports are going to the prosecutor and it's going to end up in a courtroom.
– Corrections Supervisor***

Criminal Justice Associate Degree Curriculum Content Comparison

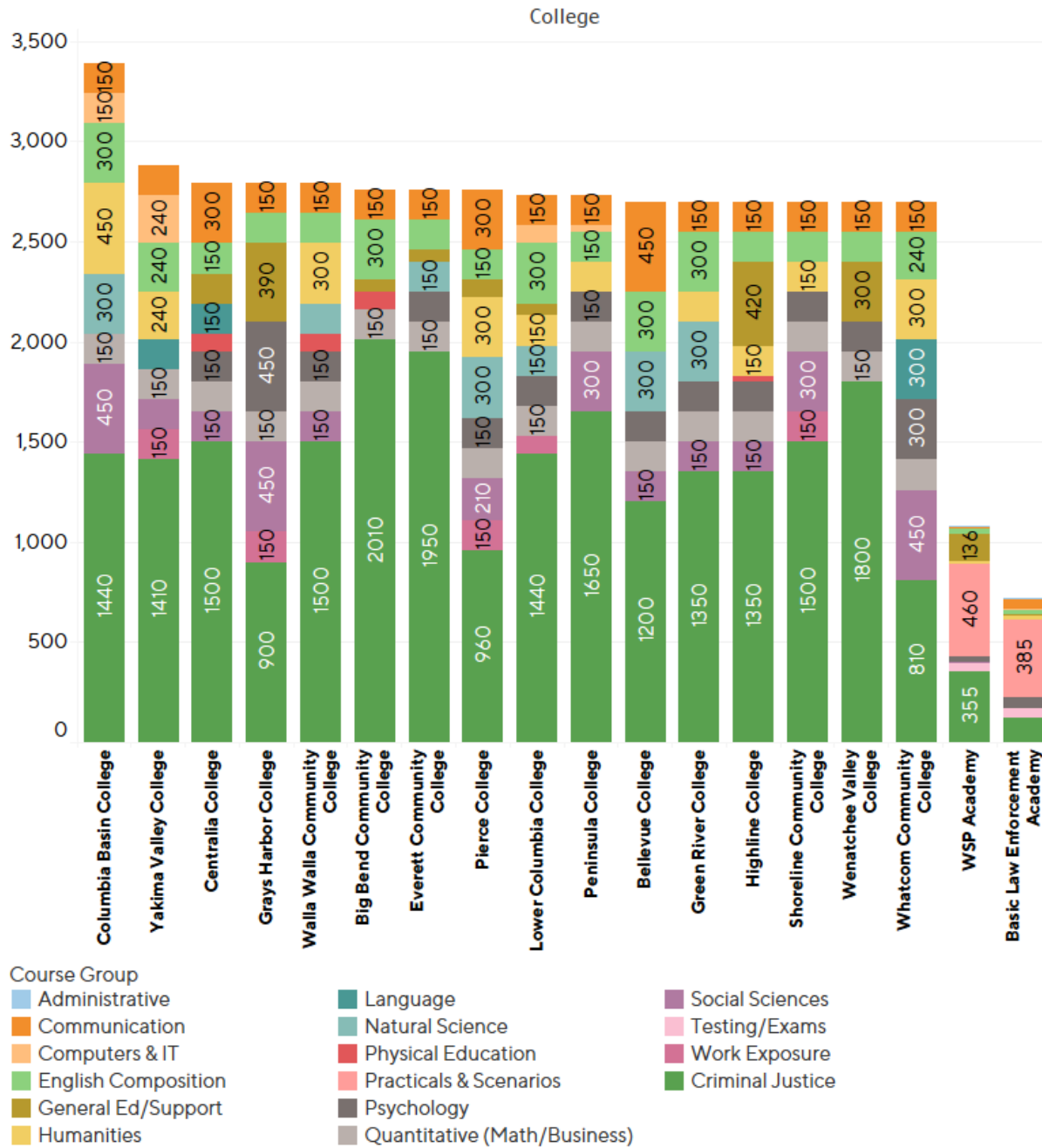


Figure 7. Comparison of CTC Criminal Justice Curricula

Desired Background

Law enforcement and corrections agency representatives also agreed on the most desirable career backgrounds and education. Military service is a commonly sought background due to recruits' demonstrated ability to work within a hierarchical command structure. Those agencies near military bases mentioned recently discharged military personnel as among their top recruiting targets.

Law enforcement professionals also note that applicants with a background in customer service roles possess the emotional intelligence and verbal communication skills necessary to manage difficult interactions with the public.

Behavioral health and psychology also emerged as desirable backgrounds, particularly in corrections, where the DOC is implementing the Amend program across the department.⁶⁵ The Amend program seeks to change prison culture by adopting a public health and human rights-based approach to staff training and workplace practices. One DOC representative mentioned that adopting Amend has shifted DOC's recruitment toward those with behavioral health and psychology backgrounds.

Surprisingly, a criminal justice major did not emerge as a desirable educational background for law enforcement or corrections. Furthermore, few law enforcement or corrections leaders identified criminal justice graduates as a significant recruitment source. On the contrary, several leaders indicated that they would encourage those interested in a career in law enforcement to consider an education in anything *but* criminal justice.

Instead, these leaders recommended obtaining a degree that would allow them to pursue a career outside of law enforcement if the field was not a good long-term career fit. For those interested in developing skills relevant to law enforcement careers, leaders believed that degrees in psychology and sociology would provide better preparation. They noted that well-rounded educational programs provided the context, critical thinking, communications, and writing skills they valued most in a candidate.

This opinion is more surprising given that the criminal justice Associate of Applied Science (AAS) programs offered at the CTCs require many courses that leadership deems valuable. Criminal justice AAS programs include at least one communications course, English composition, quantitative reasoning or math course, and a sociology, psychology, or humanities course.

...one of the people we just hired, who I have high hopes for [...], she worked at Safeway for a while. I think she was [also] a waitress for a while. I do think that [experience] enhances those soft skills that we're looking for.
- Local Police Chief

[Y]ou can take some criminal justice classes if you want to, but have something else, right? Because if you are out your second day on the job, you blow out your knee chasing a suspect, you're going to want to have some other skills to fall back on.
- Local Police Chief

These courses range between 30% and 70% of the overall course content for criminal justice programs offered at CTCs (Appendix D and separate [interactive dashboard](#)). This amounts to between 600 and 1,900 hours of the type of content that leadership finds valuable. By comparison, BLEA offers a total of 139 hours of comparable content: 56 hours of psychology, 47 hours of communications, 19 hours of English composition focused on report writing, and 17 hours of humanities-related content, such as the history of policing and ethics.

That law enforcement leadership does not view criminal justice programs as a viable recruitment resource even though criminal justice degrees teach many of the concepts and skills these leaders value reveals a need for greater alignment and coordination between criminal justice faculty, college administrations, the CJTC, and local law enforcement and corrections agencies.

Public perception may impede enhanced interaction between academic and law enforcement practitioners. Several law enforcement representatives and some criminal justice instructors reported that college administrators were reluctant to allow uniformed police to establish a regular presence on campuses where criminal justice programs are offered.

Analysis: Perception Gap

The methodological approach of this work seeks to identify emerging themes. The project team sought to recruit a diverse cohort of participants from across the state to capture a breadth of perspectives rather than a representative sample to establish statistically valid relationships. However, one of the primary themes that emerged across law enforcement and corrections leadership is that they do not place particular value on college degrees in general or criminal justice degrees specifically.

With striking consistency, most of the law enforcement and corrections leaders interviewed, both explicitly and implicitly, indicated that while they are nice to have and often introduced helpful skills and knowledge to the agency, college degrees themselves are not treated as a recruiting priority, nor were colleges viewed as especially fruitful recruitment opportunities by those interviewed.

However, when asked about the specific skills and attributes they were seeking, leaders described the very skills and perspectives honed through a college degree, such as writing, communication, historical context, and critical thinking. This is supported by the labor market data indicating that a larger proportion of those in supervisory and specialized roles have college degrees than rank-and-file officers.

*[T]he kid I was talking to yesterday, he's like, I'm going to WSU to get my criminal justice degree. That's the best thing to do, right? I said, well, quite frankly, if you're gonna get a bachelor's, [agencies] sort of prefer you to have it in something else like math, accounting, you know, things that we can find useful later [as a] detective. A criminal justice degree is kind of a dime a dozen as far as it's not specialized really in anything that gives you any kind of leg up...
– Local Police Chief*

*Any type of education [where] you get into sociology and psychology [it's] going to help you a lot to understand the people that we serve.
–State Patrol Officer*

When asked about what educational background prepares students for law enforcement and corrections, many law enforcement and corrections leaders specifically called out sociology, psychology, and behavioral health, all courses included in a criminal justice degree, as indicated above in *Figure 7*.

Students, Recruits, and New Officers

The research team wanted to capture and represent community and student perspectives on law enforcement and corrections sectors and related occupations. To do this, the study team recruited community members, new officers, recruits, and students, both those majoring in criminal justice and those majoring in other fields, to participate in focus groups. In total, 46 participants were distributed between four focus groups in Western Washington and three in Eastern Washington to ensure the perceptions of both sides of the state were represented.

The students enrolled in criminal justice programs were asked why they chose to enroll, in which industry they intended to seek employment, and why. The students and community members who were not enrolled in a criminal justice program were asked what they found appealing and unappealing when considering a career in law enforcement or corrections. The team asked new recruits and officers to reflect on their educational background and its relevance to their current occupational duties, along with their motivations to enroll in a criminal justice program or work in law enforcement or corrections.

Motivations

For all the groups, serving the community and having the opportunity to help others were the most common motivational factors to enter the field. The overwhelming majority of participants valued how law enforcement and correctional occupations could positively impact society. The law enforcement sector's generous compensation and benefits packages were the second most commonly cited motivational factor.

Hesitations

However, many students from other majors feared the negative public perception of these sectors due to recent social crises. Some recent law enforcement recruits echoed this sentiment, indicating that they had lost friends over their career choice. Difficult working conditions that could lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, burnout, and poor mental health were other concerns for students and recruits.

Finally, female students were concerned about the lack of gender representation; they wondered about unsafe working environments and a potential lack of career advancement opportunities.

I think for me it'd be that you get to work with community service and being able to protect a community. [...] So, there's that opportunity to help and serve.
-Non-Criminal Justice College Student

Students from other majors felt that recent high-profile events had worsened the divide between law enforcement and corrections sectors and the public, exacerbated social stigmas, and damaged communities' relationships with local agencies. They felt that rebuilding police training using a "public service" and community-policing lens would be essential to rebuilding those relationships. They indicated that they would want a greater sense of integrity through more transparency into law enforcement and correction agencies and more accountability for professionals in the field to consider law enforcement as a career.

Mental Health

Many participants, irrespective of major, mentioned the importance of emphasizing mental well-being in sworn officers' training and allocating enough time for regular mental wellness check-ins throughout an officer's service. Students also suggested increasing time in training programs dedicated to psychology, sociology, and de-escalation techniques.

Value of Perspective

New recruits and recent BLEA graduates with criminal justice degrees reported that the college curriculum they experienced was biased against policing and reflected an overall critical view of the police. Nevertheless, they also reported that their criminal justice education was valuable and provided them with useful skills and historical context that helped them be more effective in their jobs.

Importance of Relationships and Work Exposure

Interestingly, recruits and recent BLEA graduates pointed to a personal relationship or experience with a police officer, often facilitated through their criminal justice program, as the critical factor in their decision to join the police department. This work exposure included ride-alongs, internships, and relationships established through officers' regular attendance in their criminal justice courses.

Gaps in BLEA

Finally, recruits who had recently completed the Basic Law Enforcement Academy felt that the teaching approach was too focused on case scenarios because reality can vary widely from narratives. More time to practice problem-solving would help recruits better adapt to their new working conditions.

Community oriented policing, being out there in the community, showing a different perspective of law enforcement than what is portrayed typically on a day over day basis, typically within media.
-Criminal Justice College Student

Report writing would be something we should really hit on, considering that ends up probably being more like 70% of the job.
-Recent Recruit

Several participants also felt that additional report-writing exercises could have helped them better understand that job function.

Improving Recruitment

When asked what would motivate them to apply for a law enforcement or corrections vacancy, students from majors other than criminal justice emphasized the need for greater engagement with recruiters at career fairs and similar events. These conversations could help students learn more about sworn officers' working conditions and highlight employment opportunities other than sworn officers' positions.

Promoting inclusivity during these outreach campaigns was also mentioned several times. Students suggested sending officers of color and women officers to encourage a diversity of students to enter the law enforcement and corrections sector.

Criminal justice students lamented the lack of interactions between their educational institutions, local agencies, and the local community. There was a consensus about the need to rebuild relationships between law enforcement and corrections agencies and local postsecondary institutions.

Finally, interviewees also recommended shortening the hiring process and making it more transparent.

If law enforcement provided more education, like in high schools and colleges, [...] job fairs about those different officer [positions]. There are different departments rather than just police officers. I think a lot of people could be interested in it, but they just don't know that those things are available.

-Non-Criminal Justice Student

Community and Technical College Faculty

The project team interviewed several CTC faculty members from across the state for this study. The team asked faculty how college criminal justice programs can help address law enforcement and corrections agency workforce challenges. Interviewees strongly supported the idea of working more closely with local agencies to provide curricula that develop desirable skills. They pointed out that general education requirements were critical in providing law enforcement and corrections professionals with the tools they need to do the job: communications, critical thinking, writing, cultural awareness, and historical context.

While CTC faculty recognized the necessity of cultivating and maintaining close relationships with local agencies, several noted that these relationships atrophied in the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown and the George Floyd killing. These relationships served as an essential conduit for criminal justice students to establish familiarity with local departments that could lead to employment. Faculty observed that the break in connections has negatively impacted their students' ability to access employment opportunities, internships, and ride-alongs.

They cited three reasons for atrophy. First, local departments were short-staffed and did not have the capacity for previous levels of community relationship-building and passive recruitment work. Second, on the college side, administering and building these relationships is not considered in professional evaluations, and there is no dedicated funding for the time it takes, so they suffer among competing priorities. Lastly, school administrators hesitate to allow regular, uniformed, and armed police presence in an educational role on campus as part of their criminal justice program, while law enforcement professionals maintain that officers must remain armed to be able to respond to an emergency. The result is a negative feedback cycle where agencies cannot as readily inform program learning outcomes and recruit candidates, and students cannot establish relationships with the local agencies who might hire them, so agencies do not prioritize recruiting from those programs.

Recommendations

This section of the report outlines the recommendations that emerged from this study. The recommendations are organized as they pertain to cultivating partnerships, curriculum development, policy changes, and outreach strategies.

Partnership Recommendations

Partner with Local Law Enforcement & Corrections Agencies

The central recommendation emerging from this research study is to rebuild relationships between the institutions that educate public servants and the local agencies that employ them. Though there are several avenues through which the CTC system could better support the law enforcement and corrections workforce, they all depend on strengthening the relationship between agencies and colleges. However, these collaborations require ongoing investments of staff, time, and resources from local colleges, law enforcement, and corrections agencies and may require dedicated investment from the state.

Strengthening relationships between CTCs and local law enforcement and corrections agencies offers an opportunity to contend with the abovementioned perception gaps. Law enforcement and corrections agencies do not perceive college criminal justice programs as fruitful recruiting opportunities despite their apparent workforce shortage and the fact that these programs provide the multidisciplinary educational background they describe as valuable.

At the same time, several criminal justice instructors reported difficulty establishing relationships with local law enforcement and corrections agencies on behalf of students seeking connections and exposure to the field. The recommendations outlined below align with the goal of fostering active relations between criminal justice programs and law enforcement and corrections agencies needing qualified candidates.

Support Criminal Justice Advisory Committees

Advisory committees are required for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, which include criminal justice.⁶⁶ Faculty from the relevant CTC program lead these committees of local industry, business, and labor representatives. Their purpose is to “provide advice on current job needs and on the courses necessary to meet these needs.”⁶⁷ As part of that mandate, advisory committees review and evaluate program curricula to ensure effectiveness and alignment with the needs of local industries and employers.^{47,48(pp11-16)} Advisory boards also provide a mechanism for colleges to organize those exposure opportunities that influence students to join a law enforcement or corrections profession. Faculty and law enforcement professionals can also engage in problem solving in these committees.

CTC criminal justice faculty at programs with robust relationships with local agencies pointed to their advisory committee as central to maintaining those relationships. For example, the Pierce College advisory committee encouraged discussions between committee members during the pandemic and recent racial reckoning events. Those discussions, partially based on anti-racist readings, helped them change how they interact and work together.

For those programs that do not have strong connections to local law enforcement and corrections agencies, the existing CTC advisory committee structure can facilitate reviving those relationships. However, faculty from institutions with robust criminal justice advisory committees revealed that oversight often becomes an additional administrative burden. They pointed out that such service is neither compensated nor considered as part of performance reviews. They indicated that without administrative support, compensation, or professional incentives, management of the advisory boards can suffer against competing interests that are often more highly incentivized. This was particularly the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many committees have not recovered from this disruption.

Moreover, the project team learned from several respondents that retired officers are often overrepresented among advisory committee members. Retired officers have fewer active relations with their local agencies and are less able to organize work exposure opportunities. Furthermore, they may not be up to date with current trends and emerging policing doctrine and are, thus, less able to ensure the relevance of curricula.

CTCs could begin by recruiting early-career officers when launching or reviving a committee. One criminal justice faculty member indicated having success by recruiting recent graduates of their criminal justice program. Recent criminal justice graduates may be in a better position to build upon established relationships with students and faculty to inform curriculum development. They are more likely to be invested in the program's success and in driving recruitment from their criminal justice program and others. However, staff capacity constraints in local agencies might hamper the recruitment of early-career officers in advisory committees, highlighting the necessity to communicate the value of an active committee.

Advisory committees may also benefit from the membership and guidance of law enforcement and corrections recruiters. Recruiters can work with criminal justice departments and advisory committees to provide current information on in-demand jobs, benefits, recruiting and hiring processes, and requirements. Recruiters are also informed about the wide variety of non-uniformed, specialized, and support roles that are available beyond commissioned officers.

Invest in Work Exposure Opportunities & Paid Internships

Advisory committees also enable criminal justice instructors to cultivate close working relationships with local police departments, leading to meaningful work exposure opportunities for students. As previously mentioned, several criminal justice students, recruits, and recent BLEA graduates cited personal relationships or positive work exposure experiences as the most critical factor in deciding to pursue a career in law enforcement. These respondents pointed to a connection with a resource officer at their high school, a ride-along, an internship, or a relationship established when an officer regularly visited the classroom to talk about their job.

Those with access to such work exposure opportunities reported that it allowed them to gain some hands-on experience in the field, learn about the realities of the job, and determine whether it was a good career fit. They also described how these work exposure experiences reduced stigma and made them more open to law enforcement or corrections careers.

One criminal justice instructor with an active advisory committee reported being able to lean on that group to facilitate successful internship opportunities and ride-alongs for students. Yet despite the apparent value these work exposure experiences provide students, only four of fifteen criminal justice programs require such exposure as part of the degree.

Criminal justice programs and administration could prioritize rebuilding active relationships with local agencies and providing students with these critical work exposure experiences.

Though many agencies invest in recruiting, they often invest it in initiatives with limited effectiveness, according to prior research.¹⁹ At the same time, they have not had the capacity to establish internships, shadowing, and one-on-one connections with professionals that new officers, recruits, and students said influenced their decision to pursue a career in law enforcement and corrections. Career Connect Washington is working with other sectors to provide structure and guidance for work-based learning exposure opportunities ranging from awareness to on-the-job experience.⁶⁹ Their Career Explore, Career Prep, and Career Launch framework and platform can offer a conduit through which faculty and agencies can develop work exposure opportunities and connect students to them.⁷⁰

However, as one participant mentioned, many of the internships available to criminal justice students are unpaid and come with costs like paying for a background check. Many of the criminal justice students they serve are low-income and often juggling their schoolwork, childcare, and full-time jobs. Criminal justice program advisory committees can work with local agencies to establish paid internship programs that provide students with a wage while they gain valuable exposure to the law enforcement or corrections field. The aforementioned Career Launch model includes paid work-based experiences within instructional programs, and thus, Career Connect Washington may be a resource for problem-solving in partnership with colleges and agencies to meet the need for paid internships.^{69,70}

Additionally, paid internships may create a viable bridge to the field for students under the age of 21, allowing them to be paid while gaining exposure to, and experience in, the industry. Meanwhile, participating agencies can fill critical support roles where several agencies are reporting shortages.

Partnering with the CJTC

The postsecondary education system could complement the CJTC's training programs in several ways, contributing to community-policing initiatives, supporting skills development, and enhancing worker retention efforts.

How to Teach

Currently, officers teaching in CJTC programs are sworn officers sent by their home agencies to train future recruits at one of the CJTC's academies. CJTC evaluates candidates for Training, Advising, and Counseling (TAC) Officer positions in areas including teaching and mentoring. They must also complete a train-the-trainer course. However, while officers might have strong peacekeeping skills and years of experience, they have less expertise in efficiently conveying information and teaching skills.

The existing literature on teaching techniques is dense, but there is a consensus that good teachers create an engaging and nurturing environment where students feel comfortable learning and being challenged. Community and technical colleges and the CJTC could combine their strengths and leverage their respective commitment to teaching and training. Specifically, colleges could work with the CJTC to train TAC officers in teaching methods that respect the need for practical training and recognize that recruits will sometimes be pushed out of their comfort zones. Instructing TAC officers on effective teaching could improve the quality of instruction at BLEA and help retain recruits. Washington's community and technical college system offers an intensive, hands-on course for its professional and technical instructors to gain competencies in classroom management, adult learning, and facilitation skills. Such a program could be adapted for new TAC officers.

Expanding Capacity

Many interview participants indicated that they took every training opportunity they could because they wanted to continually improve their policing and progressively acquire more than just core policing skills to successfully fulfill new responsibilities as they climb the career ladder. While CJTC offers additional training and leadership courses, it is required to prioritize BLEA, leaving limited capacity to offer additional training.

In addition, sending officers to the CJTC campus in Burien is costly for agencies. The cost and time for travel, in addition to the officers' time away from regular duty, can make it difficult for agencies, particularly small agencies in other regions of the state, to send officers to the limited training available. While the regional academies do offer some potential to reduce that cost, they also prioritize BLEA and are staffed by a limited pool of TAC officers on loan from the very agencies that are understaffed.

That's a thing I've learned a lot about here is just teaching. How do you effectively teach people. [...] There's some sort of teaching that you're doing or mentoring other people. So, I think that would be a big help, just how do you teach an adult, that'd be good.
-CJTC Representative

Even an Excel course. I know a lot of agencies use Excel to keep track of all their different things. So, you know, maybe just an Excel 101, how do you, what's the, what are the basics of making a spreadsheet or, you know, manipulating or entering data into a spreadsheet would probably be helpful.
-CJTC Representative

Finally, the leadership courses do not offer the breadth and depth of administration, project management, and budgeting skills that senior professionals need for their jobs. Some interviewees acquired necessary but non-core policing skills outside of the CJTC by completing a degree in business administration or organizational leadership. However, although most agencies contribute financially to tuition, officers must still absorb the bulk of the cost and dedicate considerable time to programs not necessarily designed for professionals with busy work schedules or specifically for law enforcement and corrections administration.

CTCs can work with the CJTC to provide education and training in these areas that are not core policing skills to expand the CJTC's capacity to meet the demand for ongoing skills development. CTCs can host this training at campuses local to agencies or online, reducing travel time and cost.

One potentially fruitful area of focus of training where the CTCs and CJTC could partner is building a positive workplace culture. Workplace culture is critical in driving a virtuous feedback cycle between recruiting and retention. Inclusive and friendly workplace cultures are more attractive to candidates that agencies indicate they want to hire. Agencies with positive workplace cultures can then select candidates who help reinforce a positive workplace culture where people wish to apply and remain. Community and technical colleges can play a critical role in supporting law enforcement and correction agencies in cultivating and sustaining a positive workplace culture by offering professional development and leadership courses designed to do so.

The state requires these career-level certifications but it's [...] a leadership management type curriculum. They touch on some of those things but it's like a 40-hour course and they spend two hours talking about budgeting and how budgeting works. So, some public administration type stuff or basic business education, I think would be huge.
-Correctional Agency Representative

Curriculum Recommendations

Communicating the Alignment of Curriculum with Local Workforce Needs

As highlighted above, criminal justice advisory committees perform many valuable functions, one of which is to assist CTCs in continually aligning their curriculum with the needs of local law enforcement agencies by regularly collecting localized or regional data of the kind gathered during this research project.

In 2015, the Center of Excellence for Homeland Security and Emergency Management hosted a Criminal Justice work group, which mapped out a core curriculum for the criminal justice programs across the CTCs, consisting of five common courses; learning objectives; and the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that graduates should possess.⁷¹

The learning objectives and KSAs identified align with the skills that law enforcement and corrections professionals have identified as most desirable in this research, yet many law enforcement and corrections professionals interviewed for this paper did not indicate that criminal justice programs were a source of the skills they seek.

Further exploration is needed to understand why this perception gap exists. However, one need that emerged through this study is targeted communications to agencies about the value criminal justice certificates or degrees contribute to their workforce. Colleges could use the workforce landscape data to make law enforcement aware of how their program currently aligns with agency recruitment needs and how, through partnering, they can further tailor curricula and improve recruiting effectiveness and the quality of their applicant pool.

Targeted Courses

In collaboration with the local agencies and with the CJTC, colleges could package law enforcement-focused courses and specific technical skills into certifications for professionals in the field. For example, colleges could build on the sociology, psychology, and behavioral health skills that agencies value by developing courses tailored to officers and rooted in criminal justice-based content and subject matter. Colleges could provide additional psychology and behavioral health training with specialized courses rooted in law enforcement subject matter and focused on specific types of essential skills, such as trauma-informed practice, de-escalation techniques, wellness and self-care, and emotional intelligence.

Specialized, applied courses in communication could also be offered, again grounded in relevant subject matter, such as police interviews and criminal investigations, which emphasize interpersonal interactions and face-to-face communication. Many interviewees reported poor written communication and reporting-writing skills among recruits despite report-writing instruction in the academy. CTCs could offer a report-writing course that focuses specifically on writing a variety of police and corrections-related reports. A basic knowledge of Spanish or other locally spoken languages would also be valuable to local agencies. Again, such courses could apply to law enforcement and corrections, utilizing relevant vocabulary to conduct interviews and mock investigations.

Several colleges nationwide offer these types of police-focused short-term courses. Golden West College in Huntington Beach, California, houses a Regional Criminal Justice Training Center and offers short-term courses to pre- or post-academy officers, including police report writing and dispatch communications. The Southern Police Institute at the University of Louisville also offers leadership and management courses to incumbent certified officers.⁵¹

People who get jobs in criminal justice or in two-year colleges aren't necessarily teachers. They haven't been trained to be teachers. So, I do a lot of coaching on how to facilitate those hard conversations.

-Community and Technical College Representative

CTCs could offer virtual shared or pooled courses to students and incumbent officers. A shared or pooled enrollment structure could allow colleges to specialize in different skills or disciplines based on existing expertise, allowing colleges to attract and maintain enrollment via state-wide participation.

This is most likely to be successful with agency leadership involved in developing course learning outcomes, where they can articulate their specific skill needs. As one CTC faculty member said, they cannot develop a course unless they are confident there will be adequate enrollment and meaningful outcomes for learners. Law enforcement leadership involvement could facilitate officer enrollment.

Cross-Listing Criminal Justice Courses

Programs may be able to reach students outside criminal justice by expanding the number of criminal justice courses cross-listed with other related disciplines such as sociology, humanities, political science, or psychology. The approach reduces students' risk of taking an elective outside one's declared program path. For example, psychology students can gain psychology credit while being exposed to criminal justice as a field.

These courses can be promoted to students by appealing to their stated desire for greater transparency in the sector. They can be encouraged to take a cross-listed course in criminal justice to be a better-informed citizen or resident and have the knowledge to understand and assess what they see in the media.

Cross-listing criminal justice courses might be more difficult to achieve in a guided pathway context. Guided pathways help students navigate a clear route between college and employment while ensuring that they remain on track to achieve their educational and career goals and acquire the skills employers value. Because these pathways must align course sequences to show clear paths for students, cross-listing a criminal justice course means that it would be offered by multiple departments, potentially muddling guided pathways. This could be offset by embedding criminal justice courses in guided pathways' structured exploratory experiences.

Leadership Track

Developing a law enforcement leadership track in public administration degree programs with courses in administrative, management, and soft skills could benefit professionals seeking advancement and allow agencies to engage in workforce development even when CJTC programs are at capacity.

Bates Technical College’s newly launched Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree in Public Safety Administration,⁷² is an example of such a program. It aims to prepare students for management positions in public safety agencies.⁷³ There are several other BAS degrees in business management, organizational management, and other administration and management disciplines with similar learning objectives across the state that can be leveraged and marketed to officers seeking advancement (*Figure 8*).

CTC Administration & Management Bachelor of Applied Science Programs

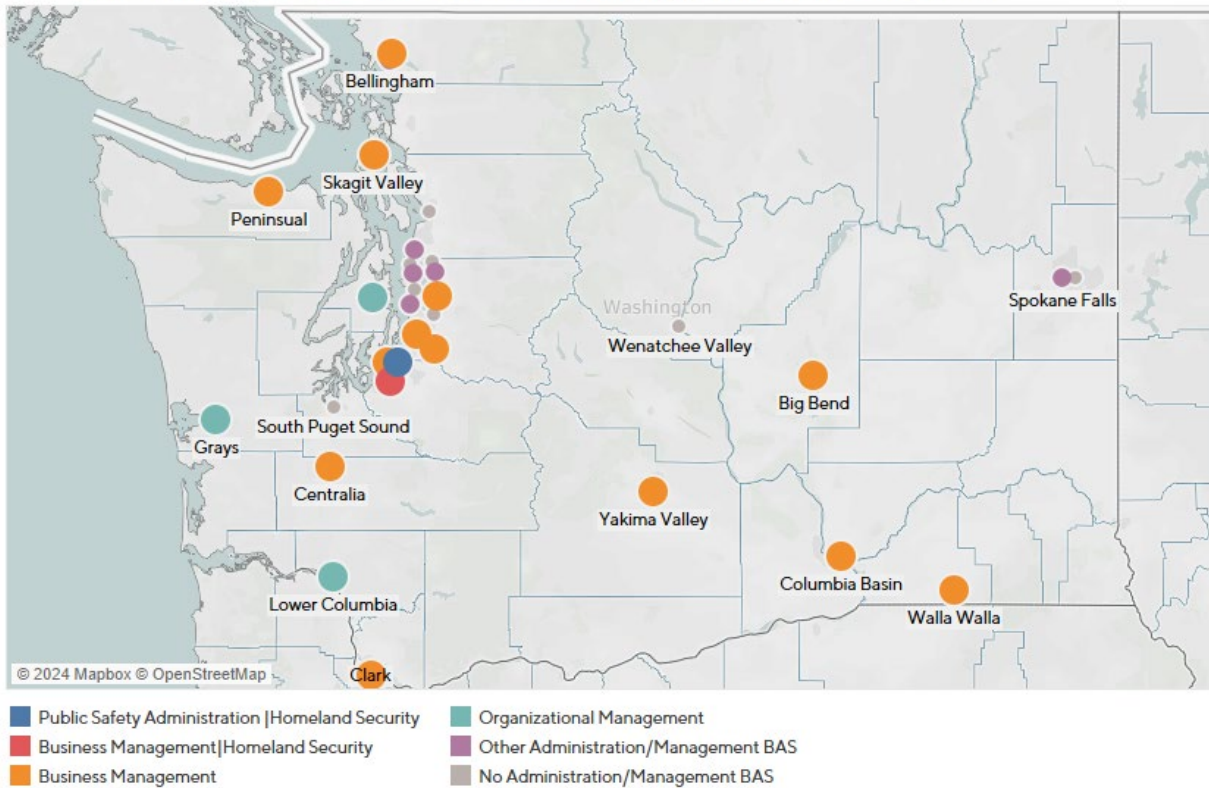


Figure 8. CTC Administration and Management Bachelor of Applied Science Programs

Policy Recommendations

Washington state has a goal that 70% of adults age 25 to 44 will earn a postsecondary credential.^{74,75} This goal was set in recognition that 70% of jobs in the state will be filled by workers who hold a degree or certificate or complete an apprenticeship, and if Washingtonians are not prepared, they will miss those opportunities. Several policy levers are available to help smooth the transition between postsecondary education and employment to encourage education attainment and promote career advancement.

Credit for Prior Learning

Credits offered for prior learning incentivize those working in the field to enroll in a credentialing program by reducing the time and cost and recognizing the value they bring to the classroom. Credits for prior learning enable law enforcement and corrections personnel to increase their educational attainment and improve their job performance and satisfaction which, in turn, improves retention.

However, given the skills that law enforcement and corrections leaders desire, past relevant work experience should not be limited to public safety, military, or corrections experience. Expanding the definition to adjacent fields like behavioral health may encourage nontraditional students to explore criminal justice as a major and law enforcement and corrections as a career.

Additional strategies, including credit equivalency and summer programs, are touched on in Appendix D.

Develop a Stackable Criminal Justice Degree Program

One theme that emerged in discussions with recent graduates of criminal justice and new post-academy hires was that the hiring process was very long and difficult to navigate. While addressing this recruitment and hiring barrier is not in CTCs' scope, there are policy options that make the transition from the classroom to the workplace easier.

As described above, working exposure opportunities surfaced as an important catalyst in students' decisions to pursue a law enforcement or corrections career. These opportunities create bridges for those interested in the industry to learn about the various jobs, determine what fits their interests, and make important connections that often lead to a job while earning college credits in the classroom.

However, once hired, the incentive to complete their degree drops substantially because there is no degree requirement in law enforcement or corrections. But, after they have been on the job for a while and are considering career advancement opportunities, the incentive to complete their college degree increases.

CTCs may want to consider designing for this dynamic by structuring degree programs in a clear progression of short-term modular, competency-based certificates, followed by an associate degree and, if desired, eventually a bachelor's degree in public administration or organizational management such as those offered at Bates, Gray's Harbor, Lower Columbia, and Olympic community and technical colleges.⁷⁶

Psychology, sociology, wellness, those kind of classes really can prepare people to be on this campus, you know, when they're ready to make that switch into a law enforcement career.
-CJTC Representative

One example of a stackable degree program⁷⁷ offered at CTCs across the state is Early Childhood Education (ECE). The ECE stackable certificate program is designed to provide both new and incumbent workers with a clear educational pathway organized into stackable modules that can be completed along a flexible timeline and are integrated into the state’s quality recognition and improvement system for early learning programs and professionals.⁷⁸ Presenting a clear educational progression that local agencies support may reduce perceived and real educational barriers to ongoing education.

However, because there is no education or degree requirement in law enforcement or corrections, being able to clearly demonstrate the value that a criminal justice degree contributes to the workforce is a critical aspect for generating necessary buy-in from local agencies that will support the ongoing education and professional development of their staff.

Another caveat to a stackable approach is ensuring sufficient participation to justify its development and implementation. One way to address this challenge is to offer these courses remotely and enable participating CTCs to deliver the course material in a pooled or shared configuration where students from different CTCs can enroll in remote courses offered by another college. This may allow CTCs to distribute the cost and staff time required to implement such a program in person. However, further study may be necessary to assess the costs and benefits of offering such courses remotely compared to those offered in-person.

At one time there [were] 28 different people who worked in the criminal justice field who were on my advisory board. And when online classes first came out, they said, you will not do any online classes.

—Criminal Justice Faculty

Bridging the Gap Between 18 and 21

One of the most common suggestions for improving agency recruitment and retention is outreach to middle and high school youth. This serves two purposes. The first is to raise interest and encourage young people to see themselves in those roles. The second is to inform youth about activities they should avoid so they are not disqualified from a career in law enforcement. However, because most agencies do not require more than a high school diploma or equivalent and will not hire individuals for sworn officer positions before they are 21, there is a three-year gap during which young people are not engaged.

In addition to the paid internships mentioned above, there are two avenues for filling that gap that will also contribute to improving education attainment and addressing accessibility barriers: apprenticeship and Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC). Each of these mechanisms allows students to be paid while learning and gaining valuable work experience while also allowing local agencies to fill in-demand support roles.

Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship model is an “earn while you learn” model, in which apprentices are employed by participating employers and complete college classes while being trained on the job by fully qualified, experienced workers.

At first glance, apprenticeships do not appear to be a good fit for agencies in Washington. The sector already has an “earn while you learn” model where agencies hire and pay recruits to attend basic training followed by a period of on-the-job training. However, agencies could implement apprenticeships for 18- to 21-year-olds. Individuals could enroll in an apprenticeship that involves significant supplemental instruction from CTCs—well beyond basic training academy criminal justice and ancillary skills—and gain on-the-job experience before swearing in as an officer.

In Washington state, apprenticeship educational standards must be reviewed by the Department of Labor and Industries and approved by the Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council (WSATC) to guarantee program quality and set clear expectations. All registered apprenticeships must have a sponsor accountable for all aspects of the program. Employers interested in participating in an apprenticeship can simply join an existing registered apprenticeship program as a training agent.

Apprenticeships offer several benefits beyond the 18- to 21-year-old demographic. One is that they help them avoid activities that disqualify them from careers in the sector, such as drug use and accumulating debt. Second, retention in other sectors is higher for workers who entered the field through apprenticeship than through other career pathways. Finally, apprenticeships also create an additional on-ramp for youth who may be financially unable to attend college immediately after high school graduation.

Because apprentices are not as productive as more seasoned employees, their wages are below those of fully qualified employees, but wages increase over time based on performance and time in the program. Apprentices also begin earning wages, contributing to retirement programs, and receiving the benefits of full-time employment in their chosen career sooner than they would by other paths.

There are two barriers to establishing this model for law enforcement: the first is determining what constitutes on-the-job experience for apprentices, and the second is determining how to fund the positions. Given their current staffing constraints, departments are unlikely to be willing to shift funding from fully sworn officer positions to apprenticeship positions. Thus, alternative funding streams would have to be identified.

Reserve Officer Training Corp

Another alternative is to expand and build out cadet programs to formal Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC), wherein CTC students attend periodic training and work exposure while enrolled and commit to working for an agency for a set number of years after graduation. In exchange, the agency or state pays their educational expenses.

The community and technical colleges could work with CJTC to maybe change some things around in the curricula that they're doing. So, we could put in maybe a sociology or a writing class in there so that people could get, you know, ten credits that would go further.
-Community and Technical College Representative

This would increase new recruits' educational attainment while keeping the 18- to 21-year-olds engaged and reducing financial barriers to attending college. It would also advance the state's goal for 70% of adults to earn a postsecondary credential.⁷⁹

Given the expansion of the Washington College Grant and the Seattle Promise Program, this solution may have limited appeal for CTC students. This model would also require additional training and administrative capacity for law enforcement and corrections agencies, and the CJTC would need to facilitate ongoing training and engagement throughout enrollment.

Outreach Recommendations

Outreach to Nontraditional Students

Students and workers from nontraditional fields are already a significant source of law enforcement and corrections recruits. Law enforcement officials value that recruits from nontraditional fields can easily apply skills and knowledge acquired in prior degrees or work experience to similar skill sets in law enforcement. Based on the feedback provided by current and recently graduated students, the research team developed potential communications and messaging strategies that may be useful for criminal justice programs and law enforcement and corrections agencies that want to reach out to students who might not have considered a career in law enforcement and corrections, particularly students who embody the characteristics agency leaders indicate are most valuable.

As discussed above, students enrolled in a program other than criminal justice are affected by the wider negative public perceptions about law enforcement and corrections careers in the wake of the George Floyd killing. They are also concerned that a career in law enforcement or corrections would negatively impact their mental health. Female students felt that the work environment may not be a good fit for them.

However, when asked what they found appealing when considering a career in law enforcement or corrections, there was overwhelming consistency in responses, starting with public service, followed by compensation and job security.

Depending on a given student's educational priorities, colleges can translate these perceptions into outreach strategies focused on the audience groups: students who prioritize public and community service, students who prioritize obtaining living-wage employment as soon as possible, and students who are seeking a transfer degree on the path to a four-year bachelor's degree because of the cost.

Students Who Prioritize Public and Community Service

Students who prioritize public and community service may be enrolled in programs that allow them to express this desire in various ways. However, generally, this group can be characterized by a commitment to service. This could include customer service in a public or private setting, community service through a non-profit organization or public institution, or entry into a “helping profession” such as counseling, nursing, teaching, and public safety. They may be enrolled in college programs such as psychology, education, sociology, public health, political science, and behavioral health. This group of students is committed to public and community service and may be flexible on how that desire is expressed in a career.

As discussed above, students outside the criminal justice field are affected by the wider negative public perceptions of law enforcement and corrections careers. To reach this group of students, CTC advisers and law enforcement and corrections agencies should use strategies that speak to their desires to positively impact society through public and community service.⁸⁰⁻⁸² Such campaigns might foreground how law enforcement protects at-risk populations and helps those most in need, such as victims of drug trafficking, domestic abuse, and sexual violence. They might also emphasize how a criminal justice degree equips them with the tools, context, and resources necessary to enforce the law more equitably in their communities.

There is a subgroup for these students who wish to serve the public in a law enforcement or corrections capacity but may not be interested in becoming an armed commissioned officer. For these students, an outreach strategy might promote the diversity of roles beyond being a commissioned officer. Depending on their individual interests, such students might be advised to explore forensics, cybersecurity, behavioral health, 911 and police dispatch, and a variety of support roles.

In the correction industry, there is a high demand for facility repair and maintenance, nursing and medical staff, and behavioral health and counseling. The Washington State Patrol is seeking emergency dispatch and commercial vehicle enforcement officers. These career pathways allow students to pursue their desire for public service without being an armed, commissioned officer.

Salespeople probably [have interesting skill sets to be effective in these jobs], people that have worked in sales just because they've got that quicker wit and, you know, communication ability, ability to read people. [...] You can use those same customer service skills dealing with these folks, and you get a much better outcome.

-Correctional Agency Representative

A law enforcement or corrections career offers some distinct financial benefits over other industries. Those committed to public service are also interested in their wages, their opportunities for advancement, and the cost of their education. In this regard, the law enforcement and corrections industry can leverage a financial edge over other professions.

Relative to other helping industries, law enforcement and corrections have relatively higher entry-level pay compared to other helping occupations that require less than a bachelor’s degree (*Figure 9*).

Weighted Average of Entry-Level Hourly Earnings of Helping Occupations

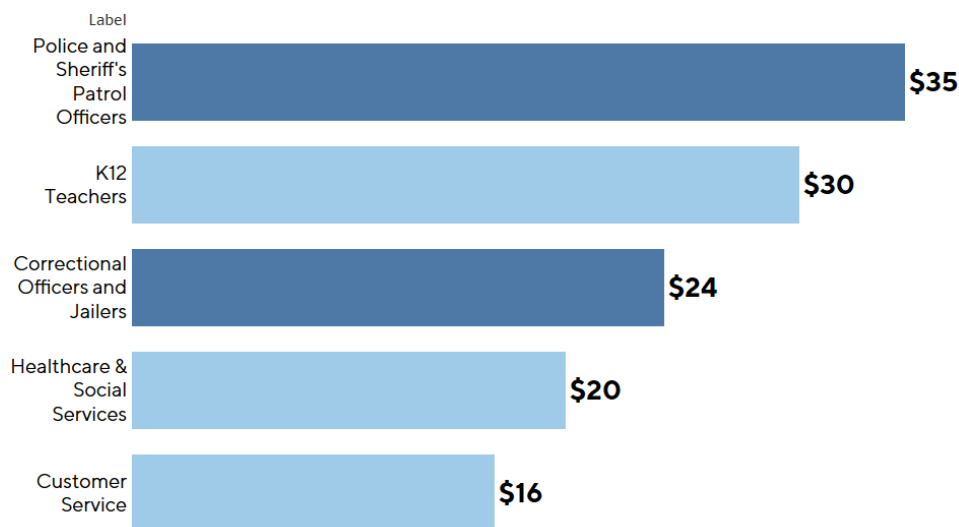


Figure 9. Weighted Average of Entry-Level Hourly Earning in Helping Occupations
 Source: Lightcast, 2024

Law enforcement and corrections occupations offer a rare combination of high pay and strong job stability, captured through low turnover rates as shown in the figure below. For example, while customer service occupations rely on skills similar to law enforcement and corrections and have education requirements, they offer lower wages and experience high turnover. Inversely, K12 teachers are required to have a bachelor’s degree or more but earn less than police officers (*Figure 10*).

Entry-Level Hourly Earnings and Turnover Rates in Helping Occupations

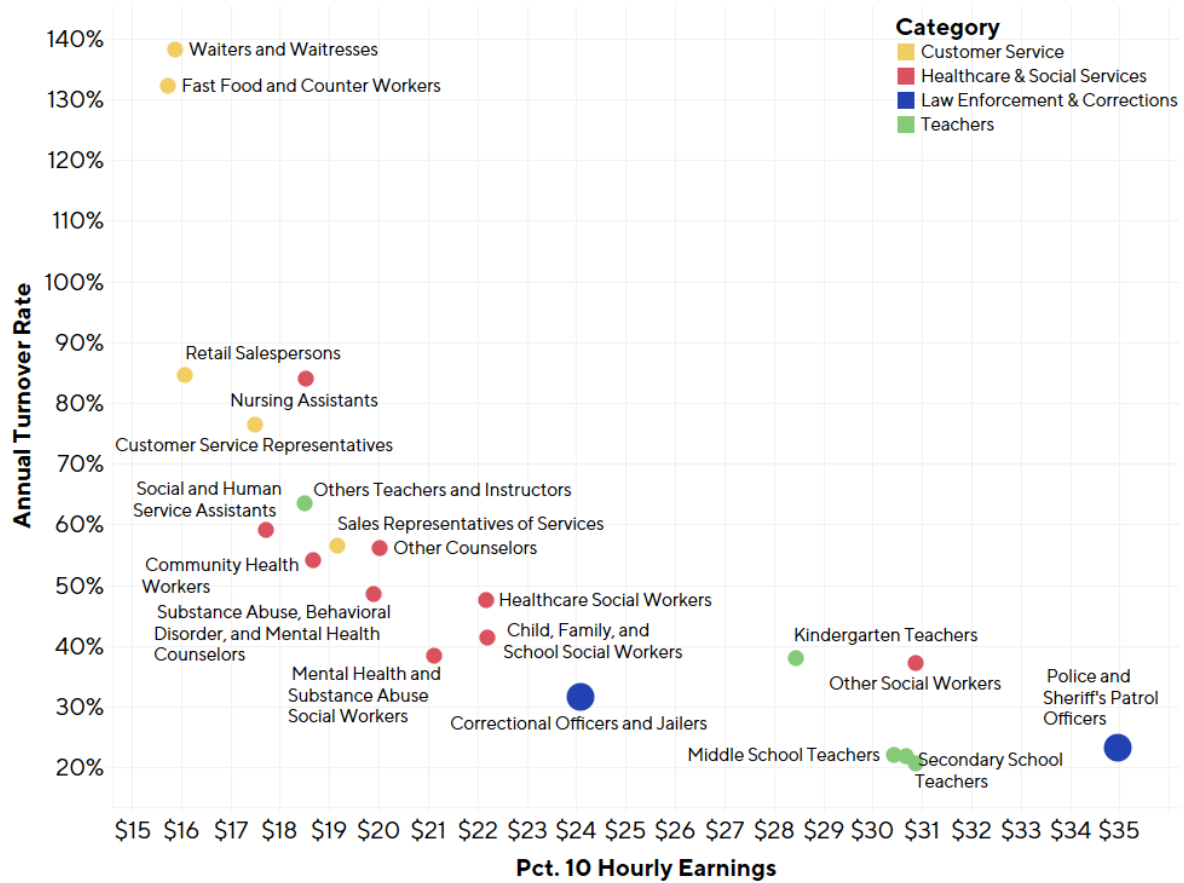


Figure 10. Entry-Level Hourly Earnings and Turnover Rates in Helping Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Another financial advantage law enforcement and corrections enjoy over these industries is that while there are no degree requirements and no credential deadlines after hire, education opens opportunities for advancement. This situation creates a lower barrier to entry relative to other industries while still maintaining an incentive for educational attainment after entry.

Furthermore, for those who wish to transfer into a criminal justice degree program from another field, many agencies offer tuition support and reimbursement upon hire. These students can realize their wish to serve the public more quickly, at a higher wage, while incurring little to no student loan debt. Once hired, employees may also benefit from continuing education programs that lead to professional advancement, with tuition reimbursed by the agency.

Students Who Prioritize Employment

Students prioritizing securing employment may attend a CTC to obtain a short-term certification or degree that opens the door to a living-wage career. These students may be recent high school graduates seeking entry into a growing industry, dislocated workers or participants in worker retraining programs, veterans attending college using their G.I. Bill, or they may be working part or full-time while supporting a household and seeking to increase their income. This group of students may be more flexible about their field of study and more open to a variety of industries that can present a clear pathway to a high-paying career.

To reach this group of students, an outreach strategy might highlight the median entry-level wages offered in law enforcement and corrections, \$32 and \$26 per hour, respectively.¹⁴ Such a campaign may also foreground the wages and compensation packages to other entry-level careers where no college education is required.

Students who prioritize obtaining living-wage employment may also wish to see a clear pathway into a law enforcement and corrections career. CTCs may wish to develop and highlight relationships with local agencies that result in work exposure opportunities that, in turn, lead to employment. These work exposure opportunities may include a classroom presence in cross-listed criminal justice classes, paid internships, or a mentor network of recent criminal justice program grads who successfully found employment in the industry.

CTCs may also consider highlighting the career support services they offer to assist these students, such as job search assistance, including support for writing a resume and cover letter, interviewing, and navigating the application, hiring process, and background check process. Lastly, an outreach strategy to this group of students may also wish to promote a career in law enforcement and corrections as a pathway to a professional wage with good benefits while serving their community.

Students Who Prioritize Obtaining a Bachelor's Degree

The characteristics of this group of students are somewhat self-explanatory—they are enrolled at a CTC to obtain a general education or transfer associate degree or are working with their advisors on a transfer application to a four-year college to pursue their bachelor's degree. This group of students cuts across various academic disciplines and educational programs. And, importantly, this group of students also intersects with the two groups of students mentioned above: those who prioritize public or community service and those who prioritize obtaining living-wage employment.

These transfer students seeking to obtain their bachelor's may be enrolled in some of the programs mentioned above, such as psychology, behavioral health, nursing, sociology, communications, political science, or, of course, criminal justice. However, these students may not be looking for, or be aware of, the opportunities they have in law enforcement and corrections.

The intersection between transfer students and the other two groups may be an opportunity to present law enforcement and corrections as careers where students have a clear pathway to obtaining their four-year degree while earning a professional wage and accumulating little to no student loan debt, while working in an industry where they can make a positive impact in their community.

An outreach strategy geared toward this group of students might draw on many of the strategies outlined in the section above, though perhaps with a slightly different emphasis. Outreach to four-year transfer students might emphasize how a law enforcement and corrections career will reduce or eliminate their need for student loans. Colleges can promote criminal justice degrees as pathways that can be fully or largely paid for through the Washington College Grant.⁸³

Law enforcement outreach campaigns may also wish to emphasize that many agencies will provide tuition reimbursement and, where student loan debt is accumulated, it would likely qualify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness.⁸⁴ This message could be reinforced by emphasizing how degree attainment opens promotion opportunities.

Lastly, outreach to those interested in obtaining their four-year degree may emphasize the stackable nature of a degree pathway that will allow them to enter the industry and earn a higher wage more quickly than compared to other industries where a bachelor's degree in psychology, sociology, or communications, might not translate so directly into a professional-wage career without additional graduate schooling and increased student loan debt.

Prerequisites for Successful Outreach

Several components need to be in place for these outreach strategies to be successfully implemented. These prerequisite investments partially mirror the policy recommendations listed above and cut across the student audiences above. Each prerequisite investment reinforces the other to increase awareness among students about a career in law enforcement and corrections, create opportunities for them to access criminal justice classes, and reduce barriers to entry for students who wish to pursue a career in the industry.

Relationships

First, community and technical colleges must cultivate strong, durable working relationships with local law enforcement and corrections agencies via advisory committees. These committees provide several important functions necessary to create clear pathways from colleges into careers in law enforcement and corrections. As discussed above in the policy recommendations section, these functions may include ensuring that the criminal justice curriculum is aligned with the needs of the industry. They may coordinate a regular presence in the classroom by a variety of agencies and jobs to provide career information, answer questions, and reduce perceived barriers and stigma between agencies and students.

Advisory committees can establish work exposure opportunities such as ride-alongs and paid internships where students gain valuable experience and learn more about the industry. They can develop a network of student mentors from prior program graduates who entered the law enforcement or corrections fields. They can coordinate career days where students can speak with local agencies about their career options and the hiring process.

Pathways for Working Professionals

Second, and flowing directly from the relationships established from strong relationships with local agencies, CTCs may consider developing clear learning pathways that facilitate the smooth transition of learners from the classroom to a hybrid learning environment for working professionals. Law enforcement and corrections professionals and criminal justice faculty alike reported that because there are no degree requirements to enter the industry, there is a disincentive to completing their degree after being hired. CTCs and law enforcement agencies, together, can remove barriers to make it easier for people to complete their program while working in the field.

One example of such a learning progression is a stackable degree program designed for working professionals. A stackable degree program can be designed for working professionals to reengage their education more opportunistically to develop professionally throughout their careers. Research from SBCTC indicates that, for this approach to be successful, students must be well-advised and supported to ensure that it's both practical and rewarding enough to stay engaged in an educational pathway. In this way, stackable credentials must be well-aligned to colleges' Guided Pathways maps.⁷⁸

Finally, career counselors and academic advisors must have the information necessary to effectively communicate about the industry with students from the audience groups outlined above. Students should be informed about job demand and future growth, wages and benefits, career advancement, and the diversity of career pathways and job opportunities within the industry.

Conclusion

In light of heightened obstacles to recruitment in the law enforcement and corrections sections observed nationwide, this report explores opportunities for community and technical colleges to support agencies in their recruitment and retention efforts and help address their workforce challenges. The roots of staffing issues in law enforcement and corrections reach far deeper than recruiting from CTCs. However, the atrophied relationships between CTCs and local agencies pose opportunities to regain ground lost during the pandemic simply by reviving those connections.

More robust advisory committees with active law enforcement and corrections professionals would improve the flow of information, serving several purposes at once:

- Improve awareness of criminal justice programs and curricula in law enforcement and correction agencies.
- Improve alignment of criminal justice programs with agency needs so that the programs are a greater value-add for agencies and not viewed as simply “basic training plus.”
- Increase work exposure and classroom opportunities.
- Increase understanding of each institution’s priorities and constraints.
- Establish an advisory body dedicated to problem solving.
- Develop programming suited for incumbent officers.

The larger CTC system can work with the CJTC and WSP Academy to expand their training capacity by allowing community and technical colleges to provide desired training and content outside of core policing skills. CTCs can develop report-writing courses and behavioral health training, among other short-term professionalization, and deliver those curricula in coordination with or through CJTC.

To support officer retention and advancement, the CJTC and CTCs could collaborate to develop more robust programming that focuses on public administration and law enforcement leadership.

Future Research Opportunities

There were several issues that arose during this study that merit further investigation.

First and foremost, there is interest in evaluating agency recruiting methods to better understand why some agencies are successfully attracting more female recruits while others have seen a decline in gender diversity among new hires.

A second area of research is to test the hypothesis that law enforcement and corrections leadership do see a clear value in criminal justice degrees by conducting a broader survey of leadership, seeking a representative sample to ensure that patterns by region, communities served, agency size, and respondents' educational background are accounted for.

A third area for future research is targeted assessments of whether officers with criminal justice degrees performed better on the job. Criminal justice students are interested in the relationship between officers' educational background and incidents of excessive force and civilian complaints in Washington state. Given how often agencies' leadership cited writing and the ability to effectively work with the public as in-demand skills, there is a need to evaluate whether CTC criminal graduates are better prepared than non-graduates. This research would help close the perception gap between what CTCs offer and what leadership is seeking and help identify areas for further improvement.

Finally, there is a need to assess whether CTC programs effectively support diversifying law enforcement and corrections agencies at all levels. Are CTC programs feeding more diverse candidates into applicant pools? Are CTC programs helping more diverse officers advance into leadership positions?

Appendix A: Stakeholder Engagement

Identifying Stakeholders

In December 2023, the Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) and IF Project research team, in a collaborative effort with the SBCTC, initiated exploratory discussions with several subject matter experts (SMEs). This collaborative approach aimed to a) gain qualitative insight into the current state of the workforce from key law enforcement and corrections agencies across Washington state and b) build a list of contacts for stakeholder interviews and focus groups. By involving these SMEs, the research team ensured a diverse and comprehensive representation of the stakeholder landscape.

Leveraging these connections, the research team formed two statewide advisory committees comprising representatives of law enforcement and corrections agencies identified in the contract (see *Table 3*). These committees, one from Eastern Washington and one from Western Washington, were not just for show. They were convened in January 2024 to inform the stakeholder engagement process, ensure the protocols would yield useful results, and assist the team in connecting with stakeholders.

With advisory group input, the research team prepared and submitted a stakeholder engagement protocol to an Advarra Institutional Review Board (IRB) in February 2024. The IRB submission included an audience-specific interview and focus group protocols, informed consent, privacy and data protection protocols, participant incentive protocols, recruitment goals, intended stakeholder groups, and outreach material. The IRB reviewed the protocol to ensure ethical standards and participant privacy compliance. Once approved, the team compiled a contact list for each stakeholder group identified in the contract.

Interviews

The contract established a goal of 40 key informant interviews representing the identified stakeholder groups. The research team sought to recruit a representative cross-section of stakeholders through these 40 interviews by:

- Recruiting representatives from the eastern and western sides of the state.
- Conducting both in-person and virtual engagement.
- Including at least one representative from each stakeholder group.

In March and April 2024, the research team contacted 176 individuals with an interview request and conducted 53 interviews. The three stakeholder groups most engaged are those most necessary to delivering on any research findings: criminal justice-related faculty at community and technical colleges (CTCs), administrators and training officers from the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC), and local and state law enforcement and corrections agencies.

The research team drew from the state's eastern and western sides. However, the distribution mirrors the state's population distribution more closely than an equal distribution between the two regions, with 13 and 31 interview participants, respectively. The SBCTC also allowed greater flexibility in conducting interviews virtually, reducing logistical friction and ultimately enabling greater participation.

Table 3: Stakeholder Interviews

Contract Stakeholder Groups	Total	West	East	State-wide
Local Law Enforcement Agencies	11	9	2	0
Criminal Justice Training Commission	9	3	1	5
Community and Technical Colleges	8	5	3	0
Department of Corrections	6	3	1	2
Other (not specified in the contract)	4	3	0	1
Washington State Patrol	4	2	2	0
County and City Jail Representatives	3	0	3	0
Current Students and Recent Graduates of Criminal Justice and Corrections Instructional Programs	3	2	0	1
Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies	3	2	1	0
K-12 Career and Technical Education Programs	1	1	0	0
Four-Year Higher Education Institutions	1	1	0	0
Workforce Development System Representatives	0	0	0	0
Homeland Security & Emergency Management Center for Excellence	SME Interview			
Under-Represented in Law Enforcement and Corrections Occupations	Focus Group			
Total	53	31	13	9

Stakeholder Group Engagement

The research team also convened seven focus groups. Like the interviews, the goal was an even distribution between Eastern Washington and Western Washington. In consultation with the SBCTC, the research team decided that in addition to the advisory groups convened in January, the team would recruit focus group participants from the following four stakeholder groups:

Table 4: Focus Group Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholder Group	Rationale
Current Students and Recent Graduates of Criminal Justice Training and Education Programs	To learn why these participants chose to study criminal justice or enroll in a law enforcement or corrections training program.
Current Students and Recent Graduates of Nontraditional (Non-Criminal Justice) Related Education Programs	To learn about the general perceptions of a career in law enforcement and corrections from those who are not already engaged with the field
Representatives from Underrepresented Communities	To learn about the perspectives of law enforcement and how the industry might better appeal to underrepresented communities
Training Officers at the Criminal Justice Training Center	To learn about the current training program, the gaps in recruit readiness, and how the colleges might help recruits better prepare

The participation goal for each group engagement was between six and eight participants over eight engagements, equaling a total participant goal of 36 to 48. At completion, the total number of participants was 46 in the focus groups, with an additional 15 in the advisory committees. However, it was not possible to conduct a focus group with the CJTC training officers or with current CJTC academy students. As a result, the research team conducted seven focus groups (four from Western Washington and three from Eastern Washington) in addition to the advisory committee meetings. The feedback from those two CJTC stakeholder groups was collected through interviews.

The team conducted most focus groups in person (five of seven) and found that the in-person method was met with greater participant engagement.

Table 5: Stakeholder Group Engagement

Stakeholder Group	Organization	Region	Medium	Participants	Date
Law Enforcement & Corrections Advisory Committees	Advisory	West	Virtual	13	1/9/2024
	Advisory	East	Virtual	2	1/16/2024
CJ Training Programs – Current Students & Recent Grads	Pierce College	West - 1	Virtual	5	3/11/2024
	Before the Badge (Seattle PD)	West - 4	In-person	5	3/28/2024
	Washington State University PD	East - 1	In-person	3	4/1/2024
	Columbia Basin College	East - 3	Virtual	7	5/3/2024
Nontraditional Programs – Current Students & Recent Grads	Whatcom Community College	West - 2	In-person	12	3/12/2024
	Walla Walla Community College	East - 2	In-person	8	4/2/2024
Under-Represented Communities	The IF Project	West - 3	In-person	6	3/14/2024
CJTC State-Wider Trainers	CJTC Educators and Trainers	State-Wide	Converted to Interviews		
CJ Training Programs - Current & Recent Grads	CJTC Academy Students	State-Wide	Converted to Interviews		

Appendix B: Literature Review

In a state and local government survey conducted by the Center for State and Local Government Excellence (SLGE), 78% of law enforcement agency representatives reported difficulty filling vacancies, and 77% for corrections vacancies. 85% also indicated having fewer qualified applicants than available corrections positions, and 77% responded that they had fewer qualified applicants than available for police positions.² Multiple factors can explain this labor shortage:

- In areas that have experienced an influx of migration in the past decade, there is an increased need for public safety professionals.
- Recent events have impacted social perspectives on law enforcement agencies' culture and interest in these careers.^{2,3}
- High retirement rates combined with high attrition rates due to unrealistic expectations of job activities from recruits have further reduced staffing.²⁸
- A highly competitive job market and relatively low pay in key agencies (e.g., small, rural departments and state agencies) create additional recruitment challenges.⁸⁵

Educational Requirements in Law Enforcement

The Criminal Justice Training Commission has the sole authority in Washington state to administer basic law enforcement training,⁸⁶ except in cases approved by the commission.⁸⁷ Recruits must start the BLEA training within the first six months of employment. If recruits have worked outside Washington state as law enforcement officers, they attend the Basic Law Enforcement Equivalence Academy instead (BLEEA, typically called the lateral academy).

Starting the fiscal year 2023, the state Legislature also committed to providing sufficient funding to the CJTC, supporting up to 25 basic law enforcement training classes per fiscal year. BLEA curriculum is also set by WAC 139-05-250⁵⁹ and includes core areas in communication, community policing, and professional ethics. Class size may be adjusted to accommodate demand, but a waitlist may not be put in place until 25 classes have been offered.

According to the 2018 Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies,⁸⁸ women made up 13.9% of the 2018 incoming CJTC cohort (most recent enrollment data year available). On the other hand, female students represented 46% of community and technical college students who graduated from a Criminal Justice/Police Science program as their first major in the 2021-2022 school year.⁸⁹

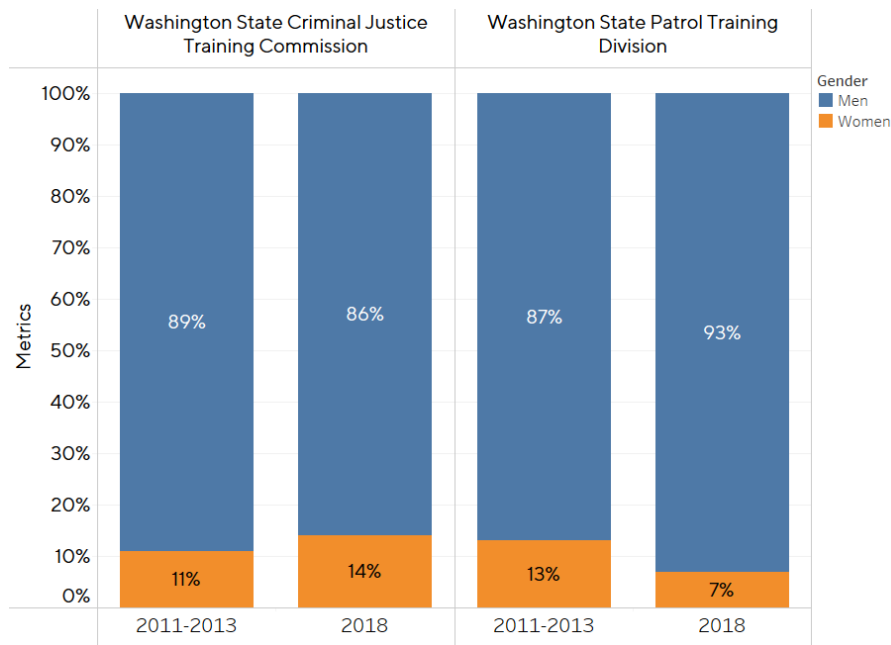


Figure 11. Completions from Basic Training Academies by Gender
Source: 2018 Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies, Department of Justice, 2021

Similarly, recruits from underrepresented minorities comprised 23% of the 2018 incoming CJTC cohort, compared to 55% of community and technical college students who graduated from a Criminal Justice/Police Science program. Creating more pathways between college programs and law enforcement academies could help further diversify future cohorts and, thus, the law enforcement workforce.

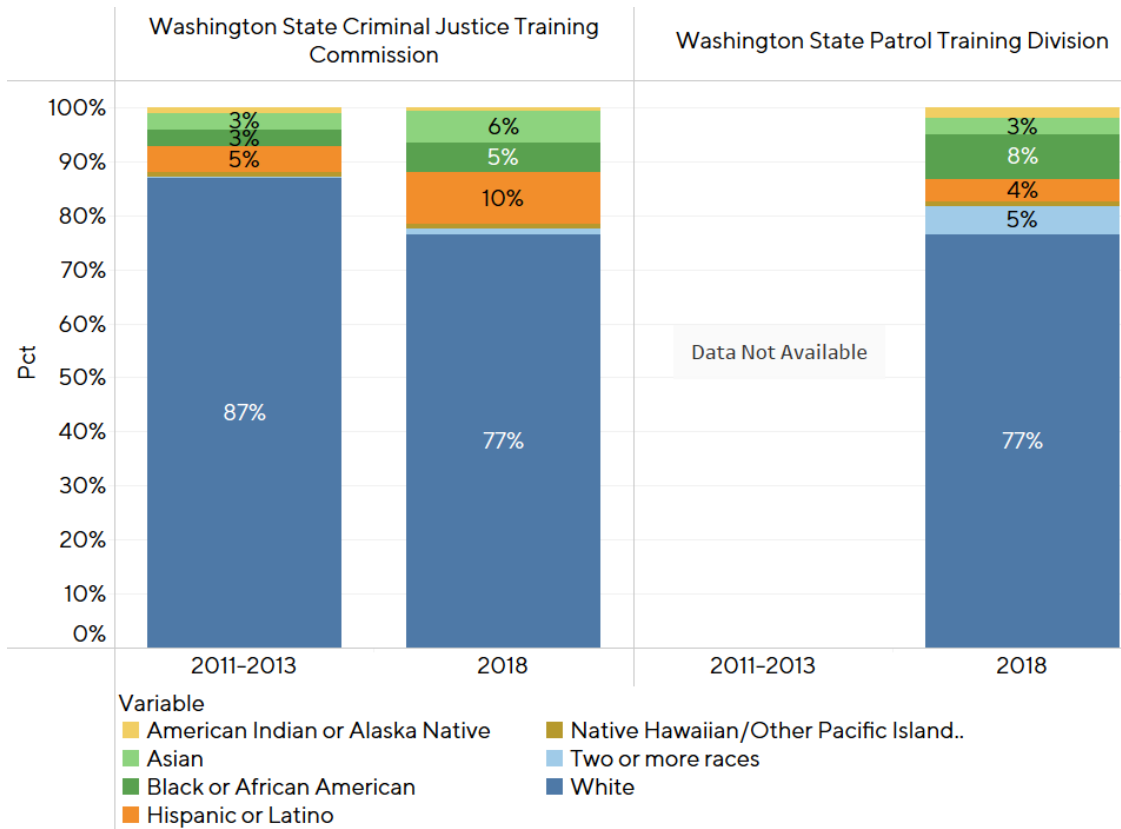


Figure 12. Completions from Basic Training Academies by Race
Source: 2018 Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies, Department of Justice, 2021

Regarding instructors, education requirements vary by institution, with BLEA not explicitly requiring formal education and the Washington State Patrol Academy requiring at least a high school degree or equivalent. However, full-time educators need several years of law enforcement experience and a state or Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) certification.⁸⁸

Educational Attainment of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Workers

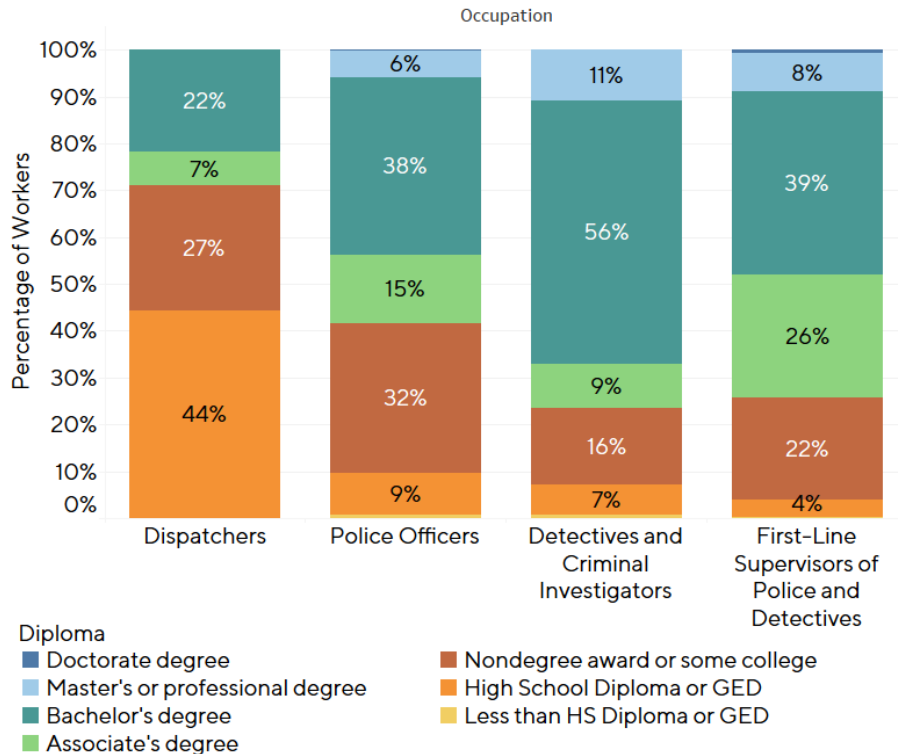


Figure 13. Educational Attainment of Law Enforcement Workers
Source: 5-Year ACS 2021 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

Educational Requirements in Corrections

Most entry-level correctional officers and jailers positions do not require a college degree. Census data for Washington state shows that 23% of these workers hold a high school diploma or equivalent. Another 37% have some college education or non-degree awards, while another 16% have an associate degree.

Educational Attainment of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Workers

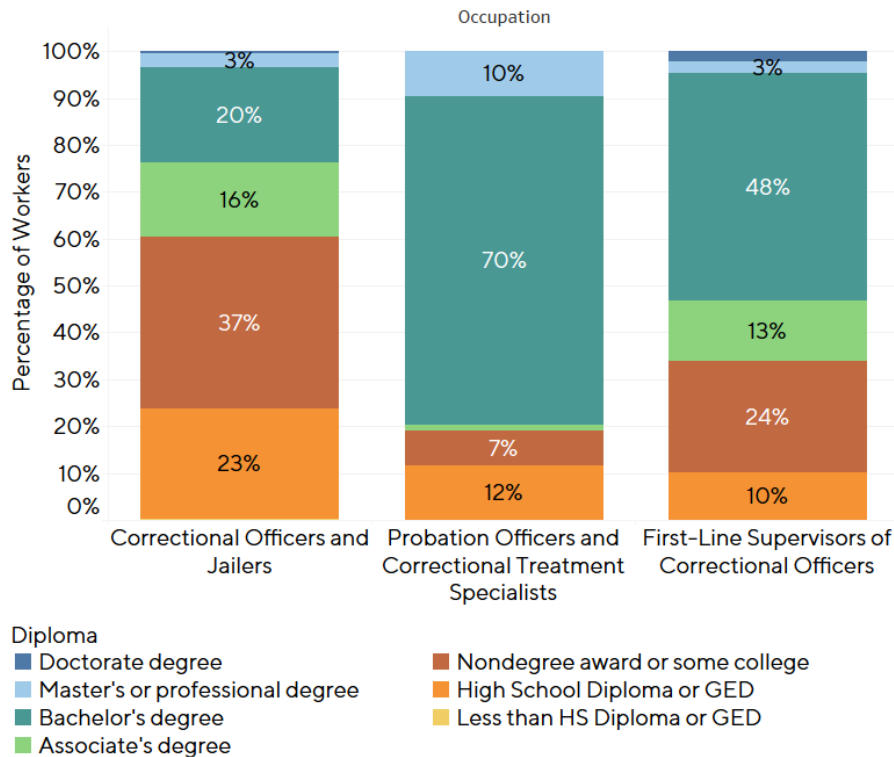


Figure 14. Educational Attainment of Criminal Justice Workers
Source: 5-Year ACS 2021 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

Nontraditional Recruits

Census data shows that many law enforcement workers with at least a bachelor’s degree graduated from a program unrelated to criminal justice. For example, the graph below shows that 13% of police officers in Washington state hold a degree in psychology, and another 10% hold a degree in sociology. Similarly, 12% of supervisors of police officers and detectives have a degree in history and social sciences. The degrees listed above often lead to occupations that rely on a skill set similar to law enforcement and corrections careers. Because of similarities in work duties, students who graduate with psychology or sociology degrees could easily transfer the skills and knowledge acquired in their programs to law enforcement and criminal justice positions.

Top 5 Fields of Study of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Workers With at Least a Bachelor's Degree

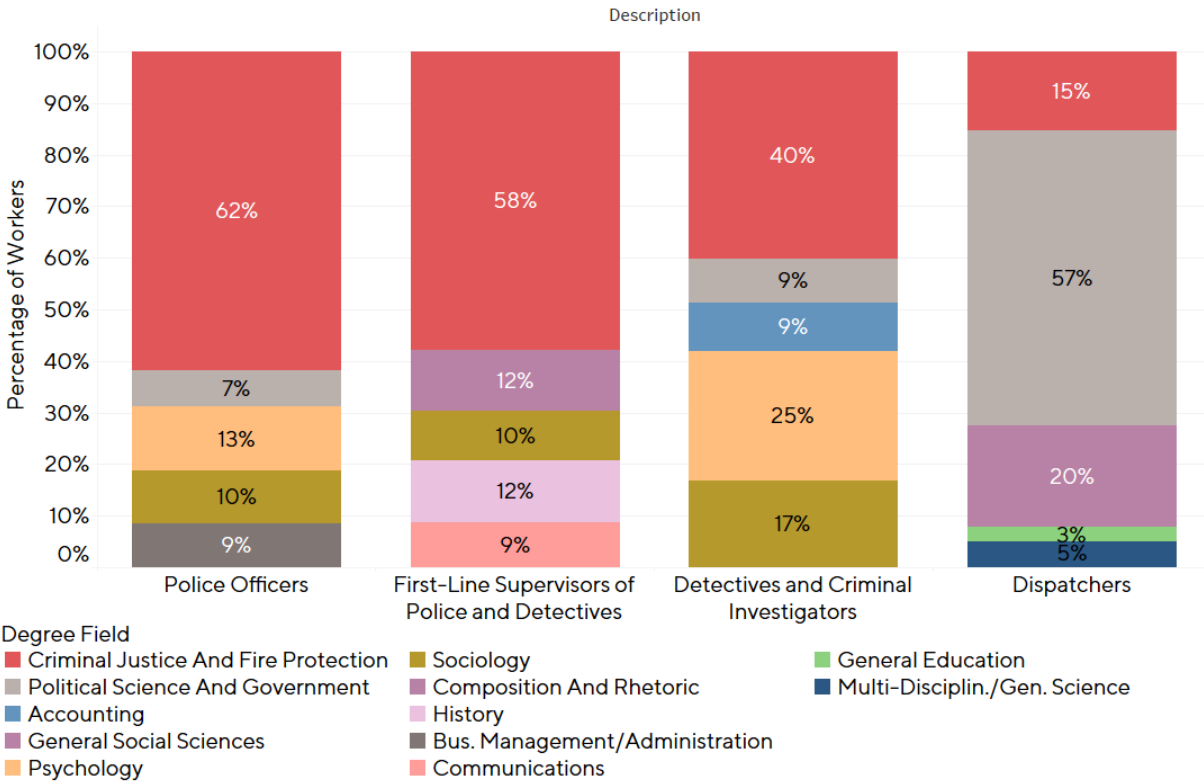


Figure 15. Fields of Study of Law Enforcement Workers
Source: 5-Year ACS 2021 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

Top 5 Fields of Study of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Workers With at Least a Bachelor's Degree

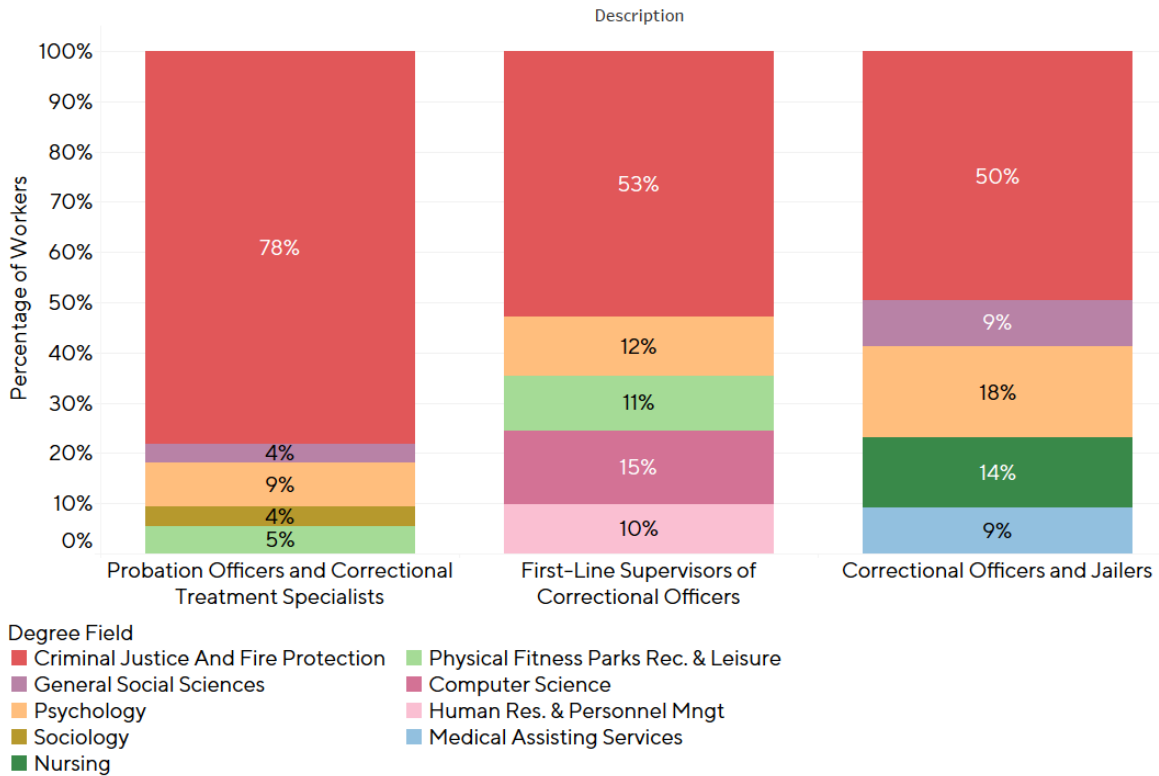


Figure 16. Fields of Study of Corrections Officers
Source: 5-Year ACS 2021 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

Appendix C: Workforce Landscape

Additional details are available in this separate [interactive dashboard](#).

Law Enforcement

Labor demand is strongest near larger urban areas, particularly the Seattle Metropolitan Statistical area, which includes King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties. These coincide with the location of criminal justice and other postsecondary instructional programs (university and CTC-based). Out of 48 institutions, 29 are colleges with programs ranging from two-year associate degrees to short-term certificates of less than a year).

Post-Secondary Instructional Programs Related to Law Enforcement

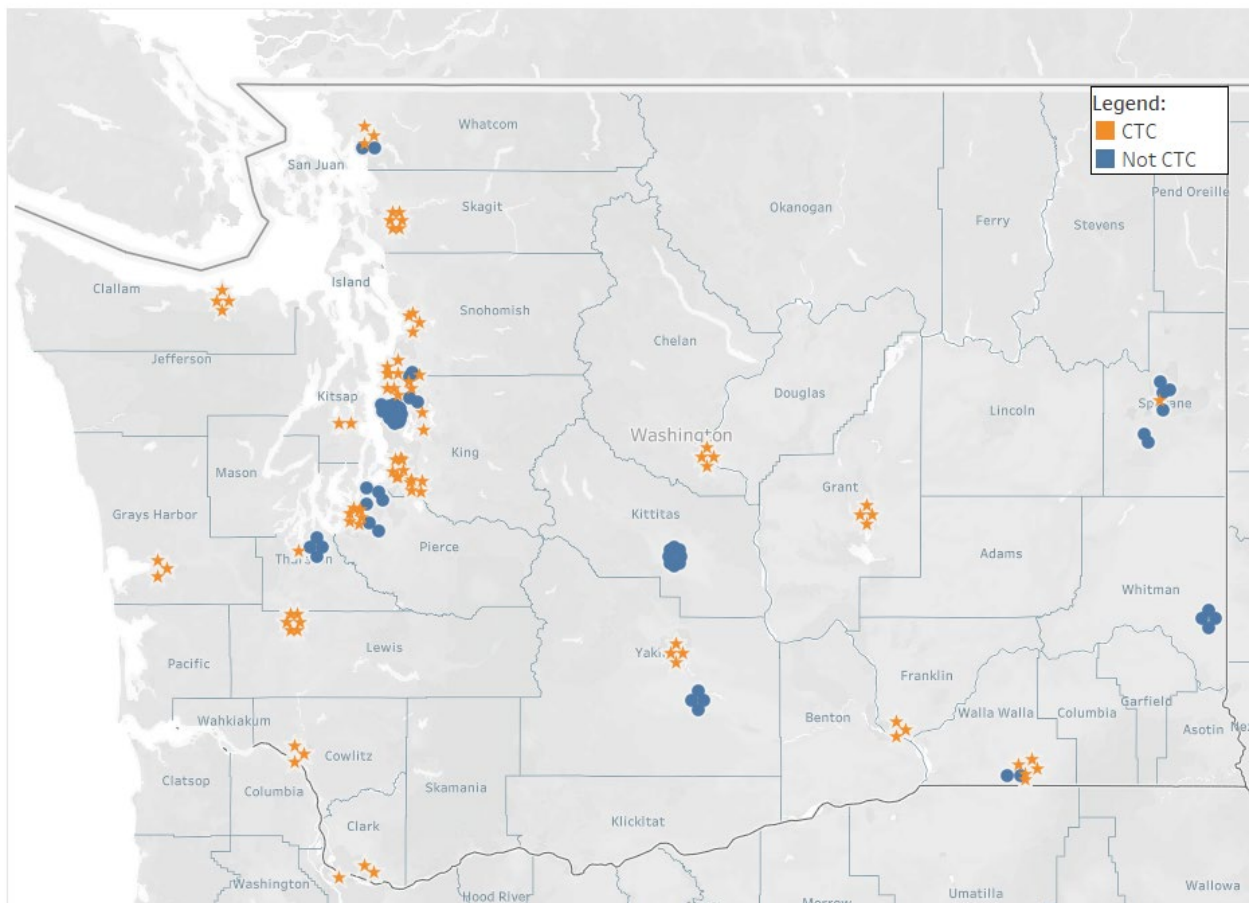


Figure 17. Postsecondary Criminal Justice Instructional Programs
Source: CareerOneStop, 2024

Law Enforcement & Corrections Job Openings in 2024

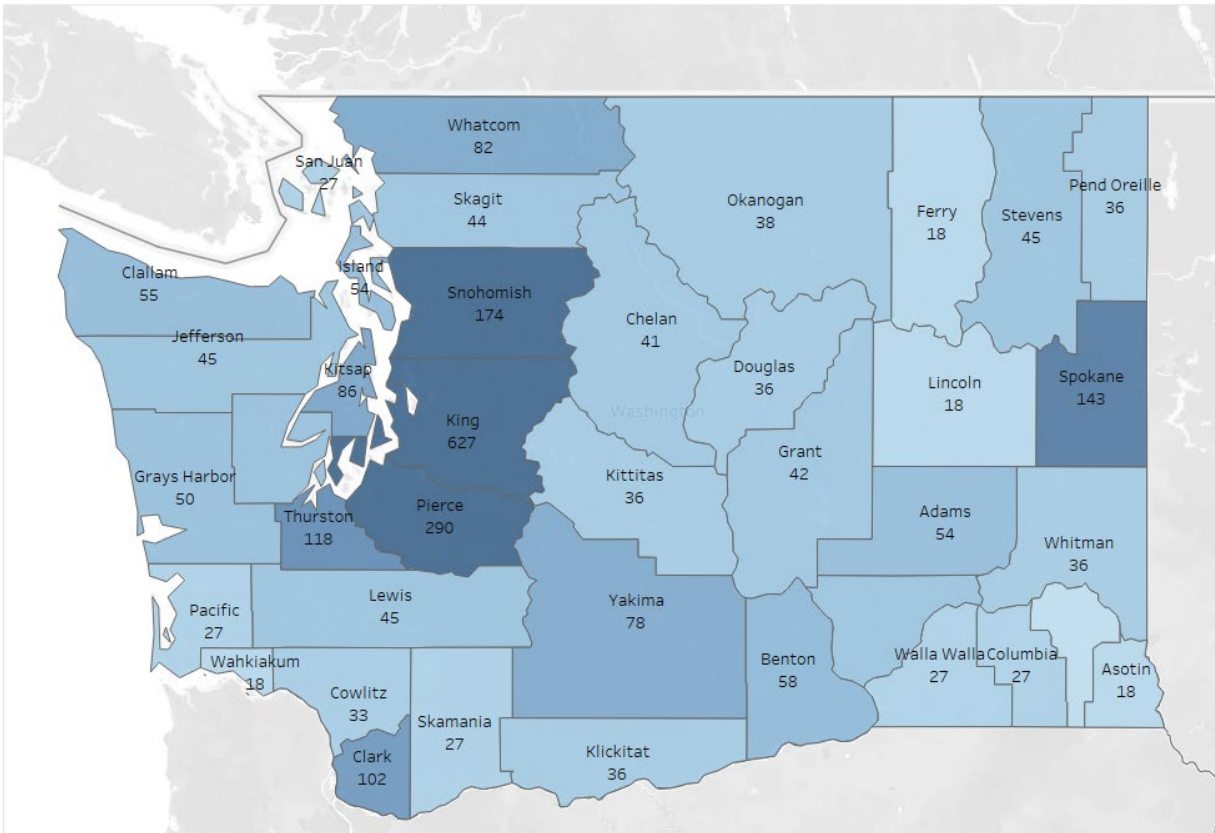


Figure 18. 2024 Job Openings for Main Law Enforcement Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Law Enforcement & Criminal Justice Employment Outlook in WA, 2024-2034

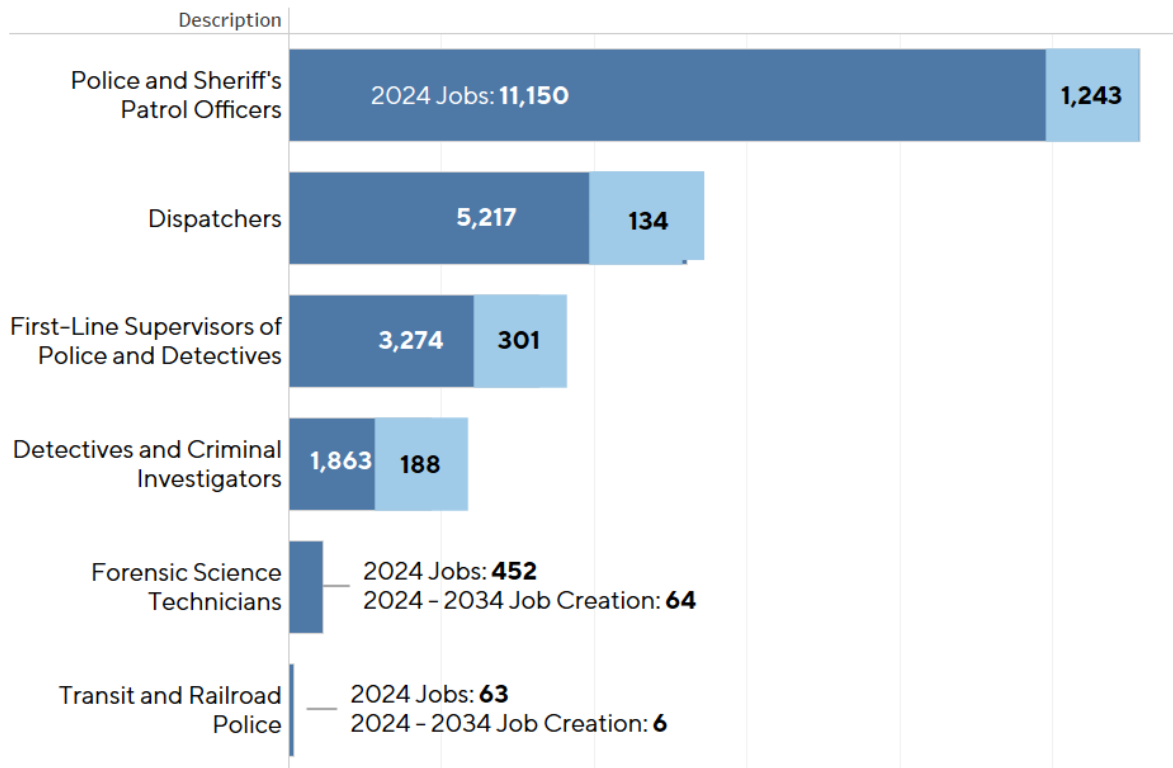


Figure 19. Employment Outlook for Law Enforcement Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024.

It is possible to estimate labor shortage in law enforcement using the combination of job separations and postsecondary institutional completions as a proxy for labor supply and the number of job hirings as a proxy for labor demand. Police officers are still the occupation with the largest estimated labor gap. As of September 2024, police agencies needed an estimated 422 officers more than were available.

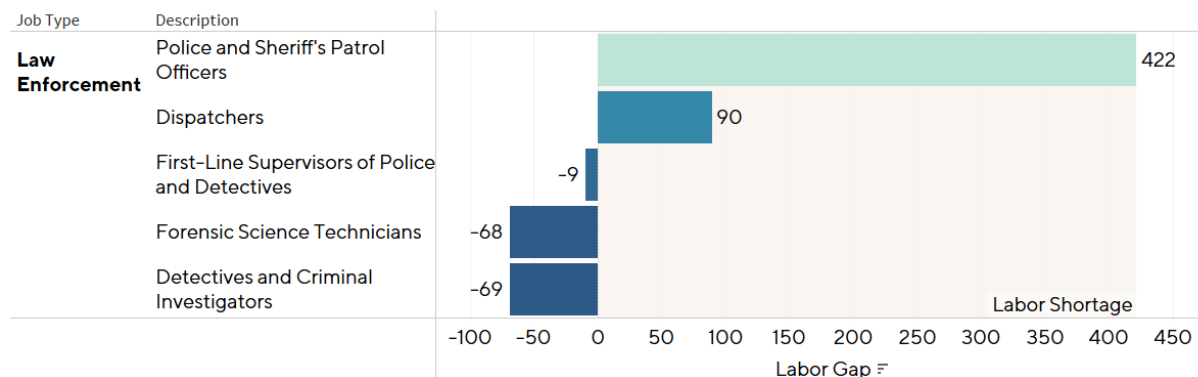


Figure 20. 2024 Labor Gap for Law Enforcement Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Forensic science technicians are the most diverse core law enforcement occupation, with the largest share of workers of color (34%) and share of women workers (52%) (after dispatchers). In contrast, police officers and supervisors are the two occupations with the smallest percentage of women and workers of color.

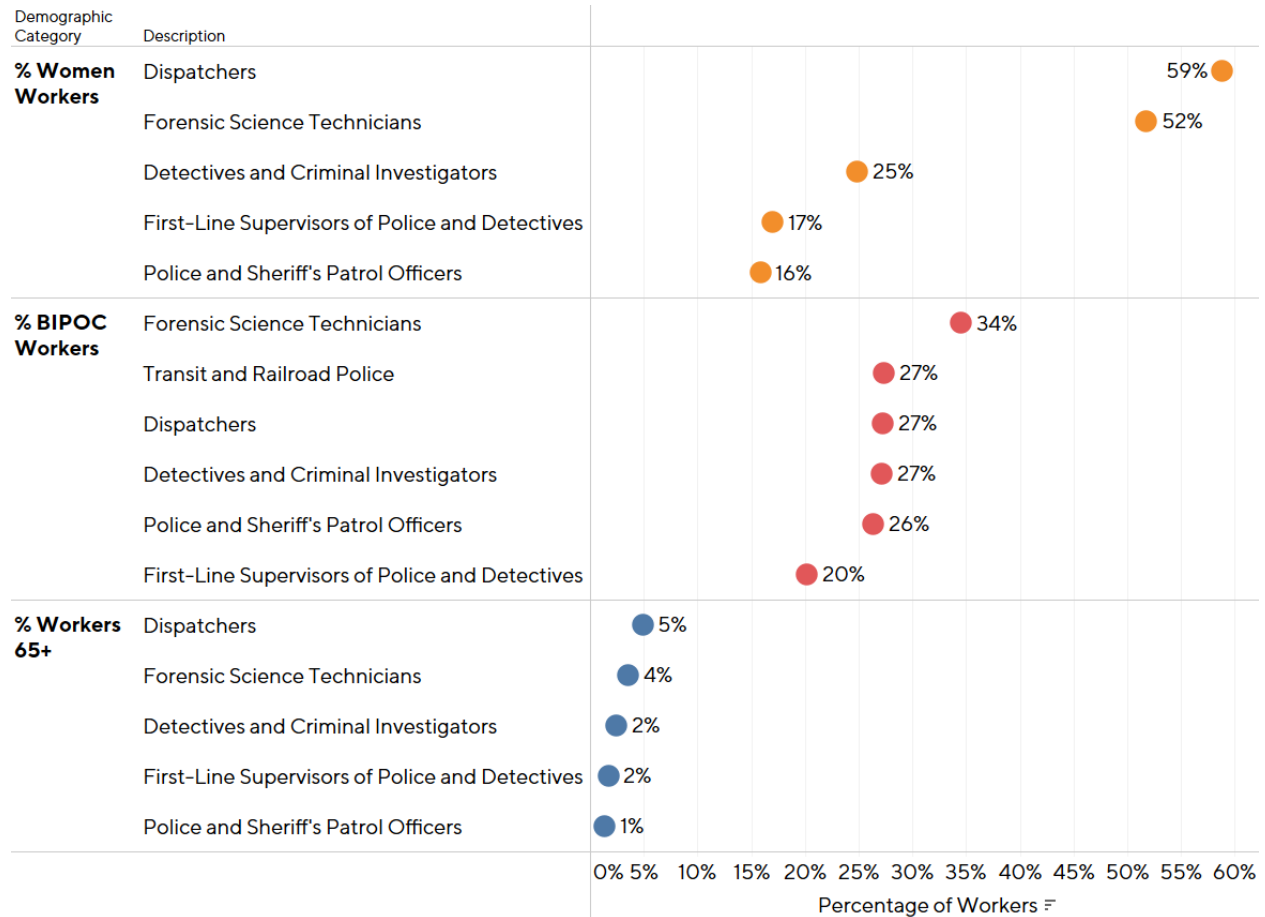


Figure 21. Workforce Demographics for Law Enforcement Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024.

Corrections

Postsecondary instructional offerings leading to corrections occupations are rarer than for law enforcement, potentially reflecting corrections employers' lack of appetency towards college degrees. Programs are concentrated toward King and Pierce counties, central Washington, and Spokane. These coincide with areas where labor demand is the strongest (Puget Sound and Spokane). Demand is also significant in the Olympic Peninsula and throughout south Washington.

Post-Secondary Instructional Programs Related to Correctional Agencies

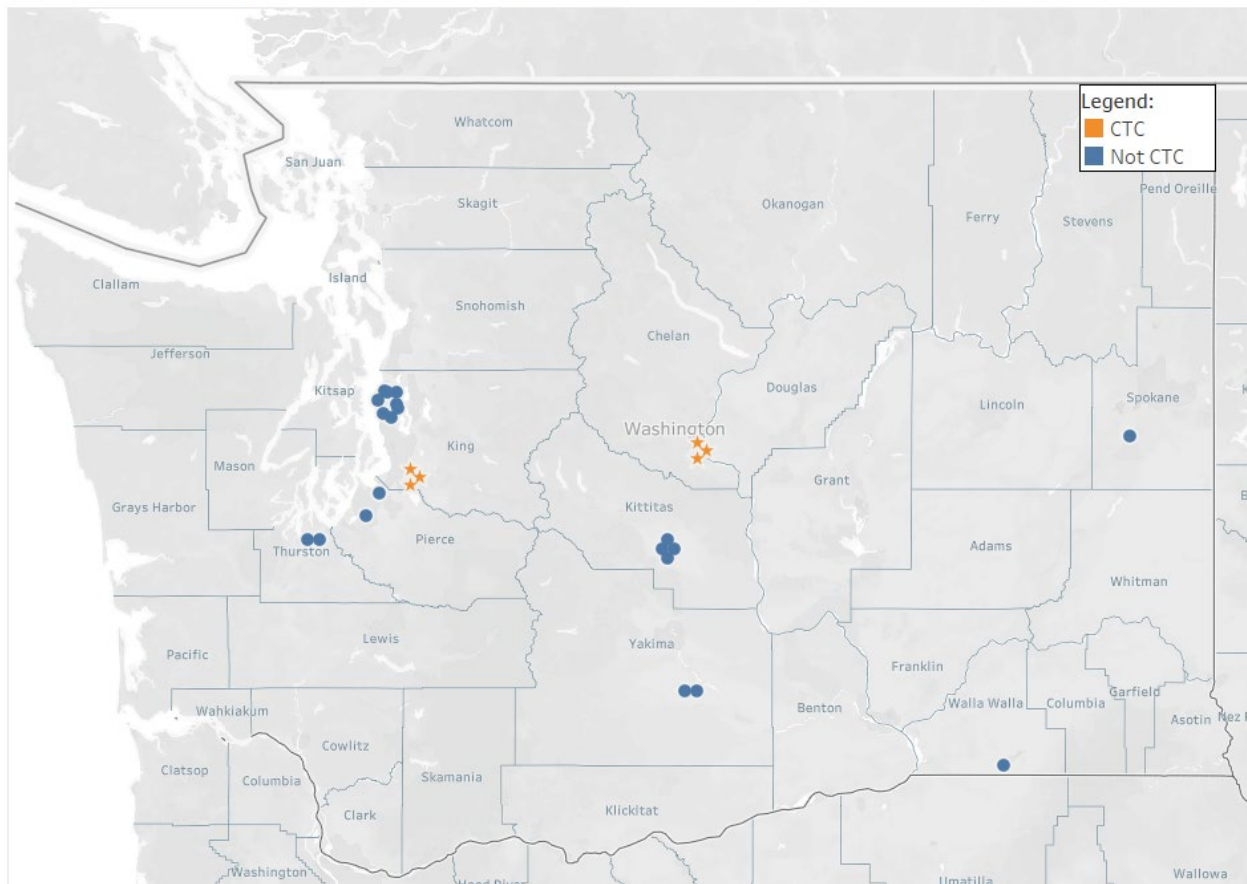


Figure 22. Postsecondary Corrections Instructional Programs
Source: CareerOneStop, 2024

Correctional Agencies Job Openings in 2024

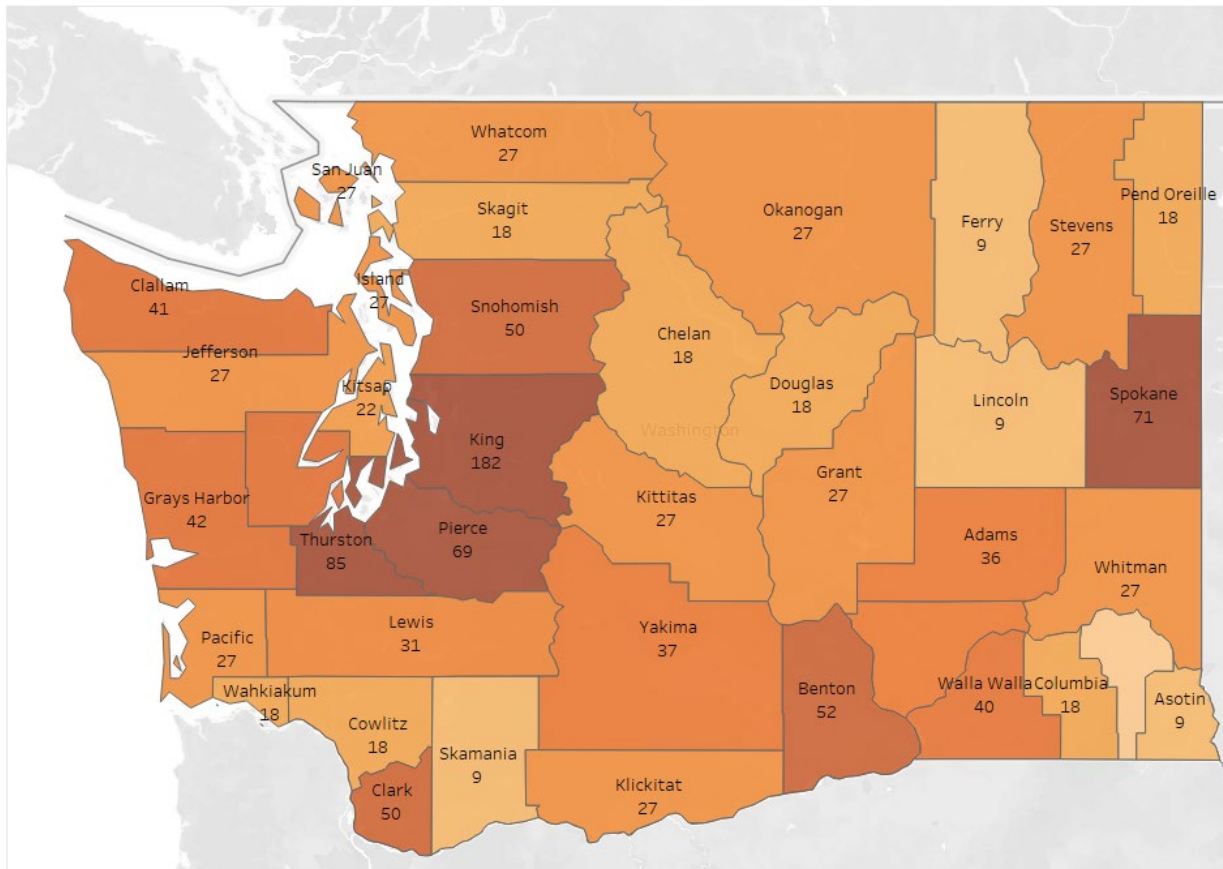


Figure 23. 2024 Job Openings for Main Occupations in Corrections
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Law Enforcement & Criminal Justice Employment Outlook in WA, 2024-2034

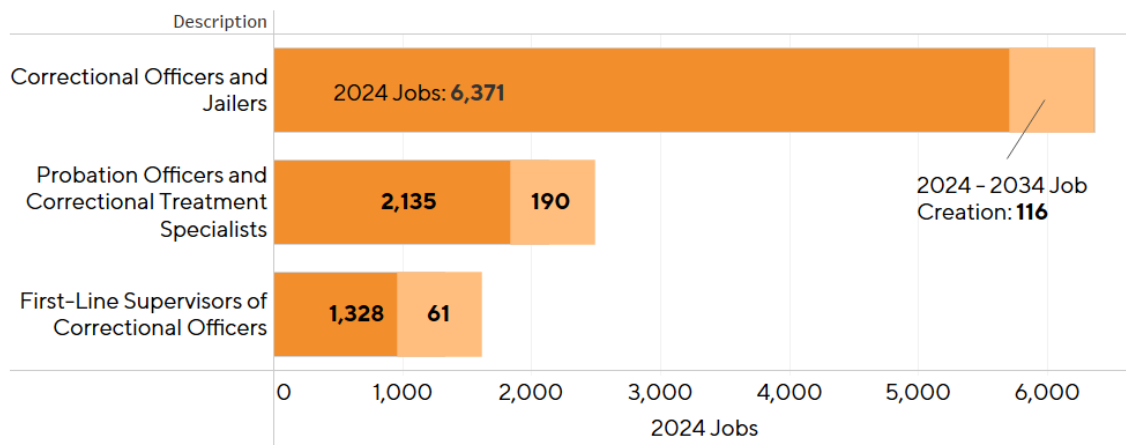


Figure 24. Employment Outlook for Main Corrections Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Looking at the corrections labor shortage using the combination of job separations and postsecondary institutional completions as a proxy for labor supply and the number of job hirings as a proxy for labor demand, correctional officers and jailers are the occupation with the largest estimated labor gap, with correctional agencies needing an estimated 47 officers more than available. Lower compensation schemes in corrections could explain recruitment difficulties for correctional officers and jailers. In contrast, probation officers and correctional treatment specialists are estimated to have a labor surplus (more available workers than employers need). However, postsecondary institutional completions overestimate the number of available graduates as these programs lead to a wide variety of positions in addition to probation officers and correctional treatment specialists. This means that not all graduates will end up working in correctional agencies. So, the estimated labor surplus observed for this occupation does not necessarily reflect employers' experience.

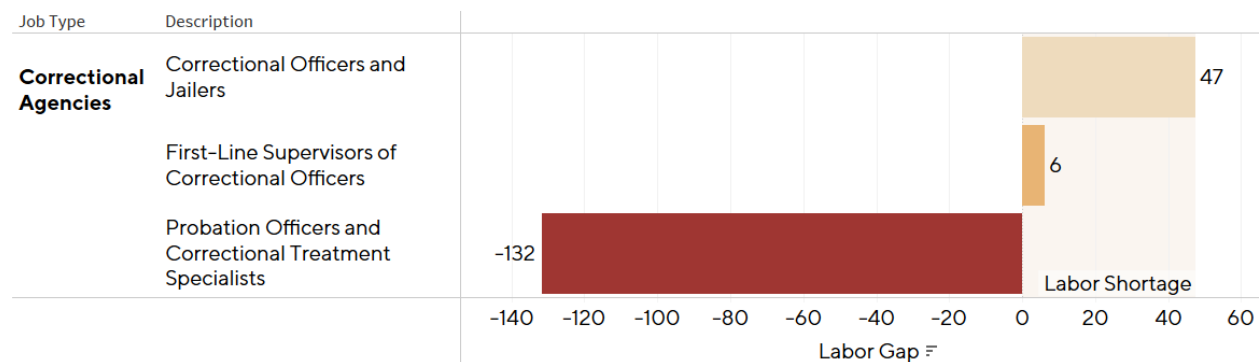


Figure 25. 2024 Labor Gap for Main Occupations in Corrections
Source: Lightcast, 2024

Finally, probation officers have the largest percentage of women workers (59%), well above correctional officers and their supervisors (31% and 30% respectively). There is a similar yet less pronounced pattern regarding the percentage of workers of color (34% for probation officers compared to 29% for first-line supervisors of corrections officers). A less diverse workforce in managerial positions can point to obstacles in career advancement, which could, in turn, negatively impact worker retention.

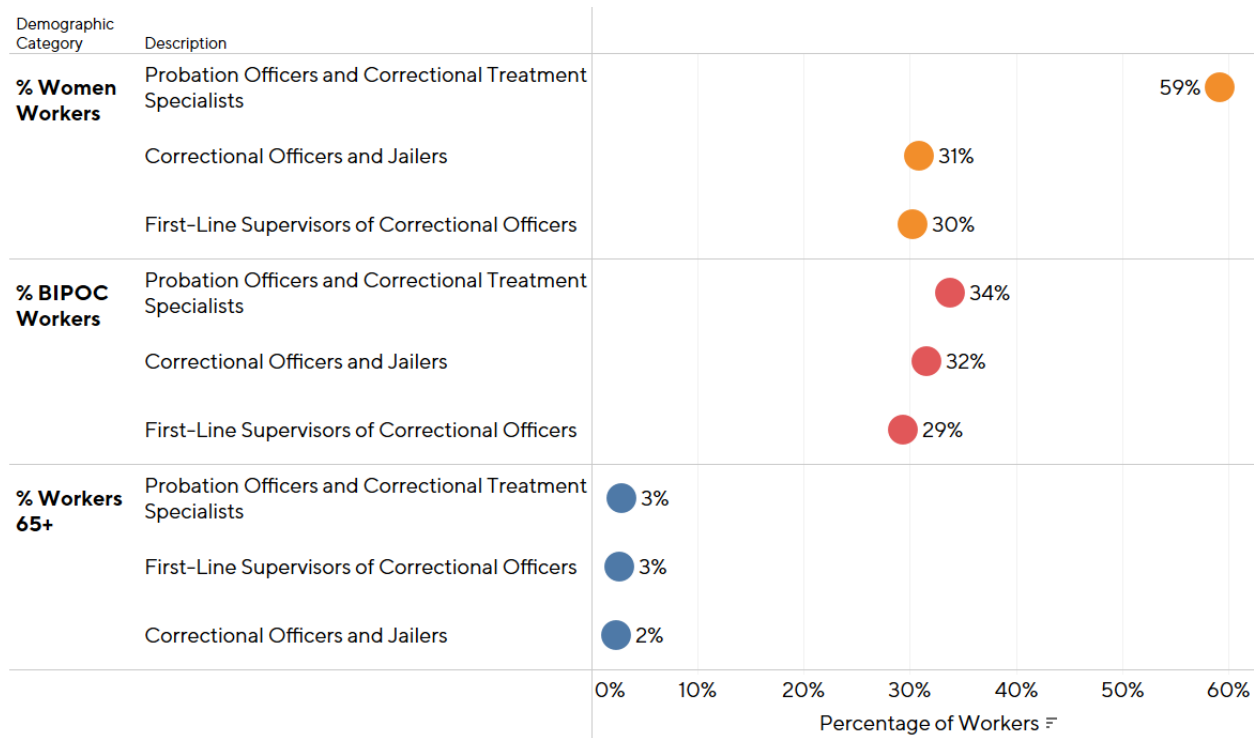


Figure 26. Workforce Demographics for Corrections Occupations
Source: Lightcast, 2024

On another note, wages in correctional institutions are lagging compared to other occupations in public safety. For example, as of June 2024, correctional officers in Washington state had a median hourly salary of \$30.20 compared to \$45.28 for police and sheriff’s patrol officers, despite both occupations often having similar eligibility requirements: at least a high school diploma or equivalent and completing a training program offered by the CJTC or their employer.

This difference in salary is explained by the fact that some police departments require at least some college education and favor past work or life experience in a candidate’s application. The CJTC’s BLEA is also much longer (720 academy hours) than the Corrections Officers Academy (400 academy hours). Corrections occupations being seen as a stepping stone into law enforcement is reinforced by the comparatively low wages.

Changes in Postsecondary Education

Degree and Certificates Offered

Most criminal justice degrees from community and technical colleges are workforce degrees (Associate of Applied Science, AAS, or Associate of Applied Science, AAS-T) or certificates of 20 to 44 credits. However, many 20- to 44-credit certificates appear to have been phased out over the years, with colleges going from delivering certificates in corrections, criminal justice/law enforcement, criminal justice/political science, and forensic science and technology in 2017 to

only delivering certificates in criminal justice/law enforcement in 2022. These program shutdowns resulted in a decrease in graduations from criminal justice programs. Using the 2016-17 academic year as a base year, Figure 24 below shows that the number of unique college students graduating with a criminal justice degree in the 2022-2023 academic year was only 62% of the 2016-17 figure. Overall, the number of CTC credentials delivered in criminal justice declined from 242 in 2016-17 to 150 in 2022-23.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have further accelerated this decline. However, this trend is not unique to the criminal justice field, as graduations from all workforce degrees have also followed a downward trend in the past few years. For example, the number of college students graduating with a workforce degree in 2022-2023 represented 76% of the 2016-17 figure.

Criminal Justice vs Workforce CTC Graduates (2016-17 Base Year)

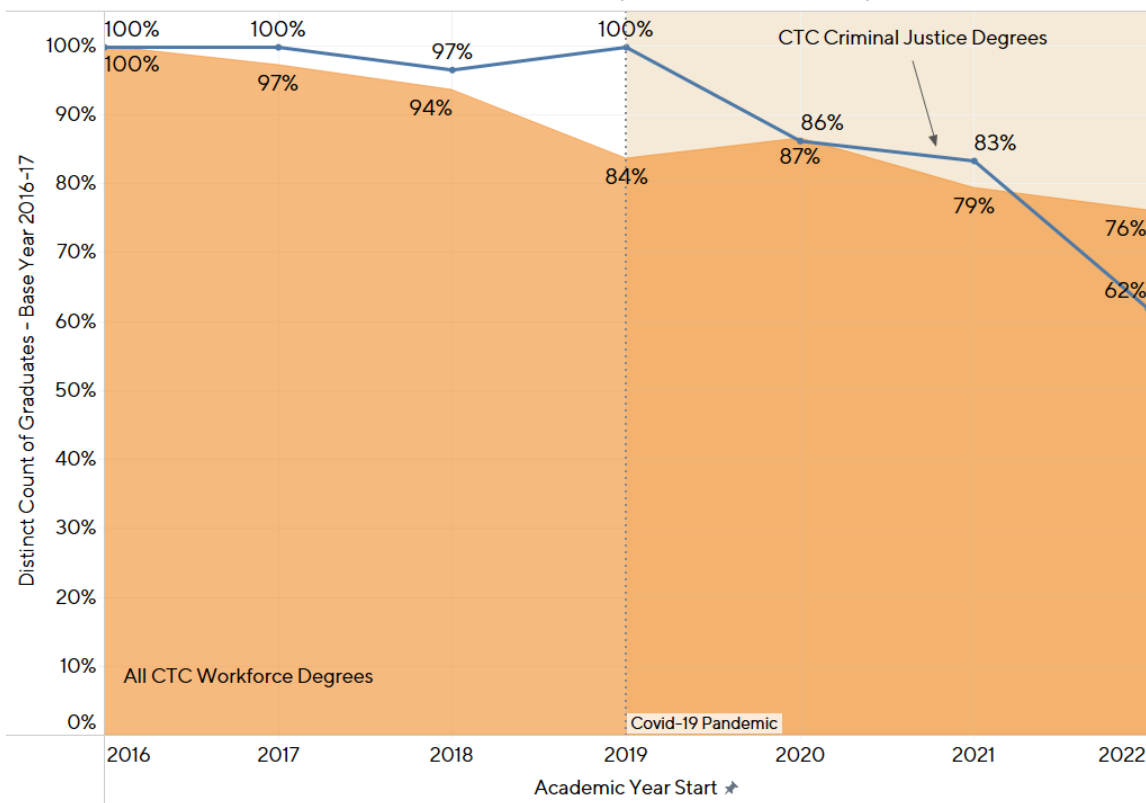


Figure 27. 2016-2023 Criminal Justice and Workforce Degrees CTC Graduates, 2016-17 Base Year
Source: SBCTC, 2024

This coincides with an overall drop in criminal justice degree and certification attainment. This is largely driven by a decline in the two largest awards, the workforce degree (AAS) and the 20-44 credit certificate. Though much smaller, the 45-99 credit certificates and AAS-T held steady or grew slightly in the same period.

Criminal Justice Graduates by Degree Type

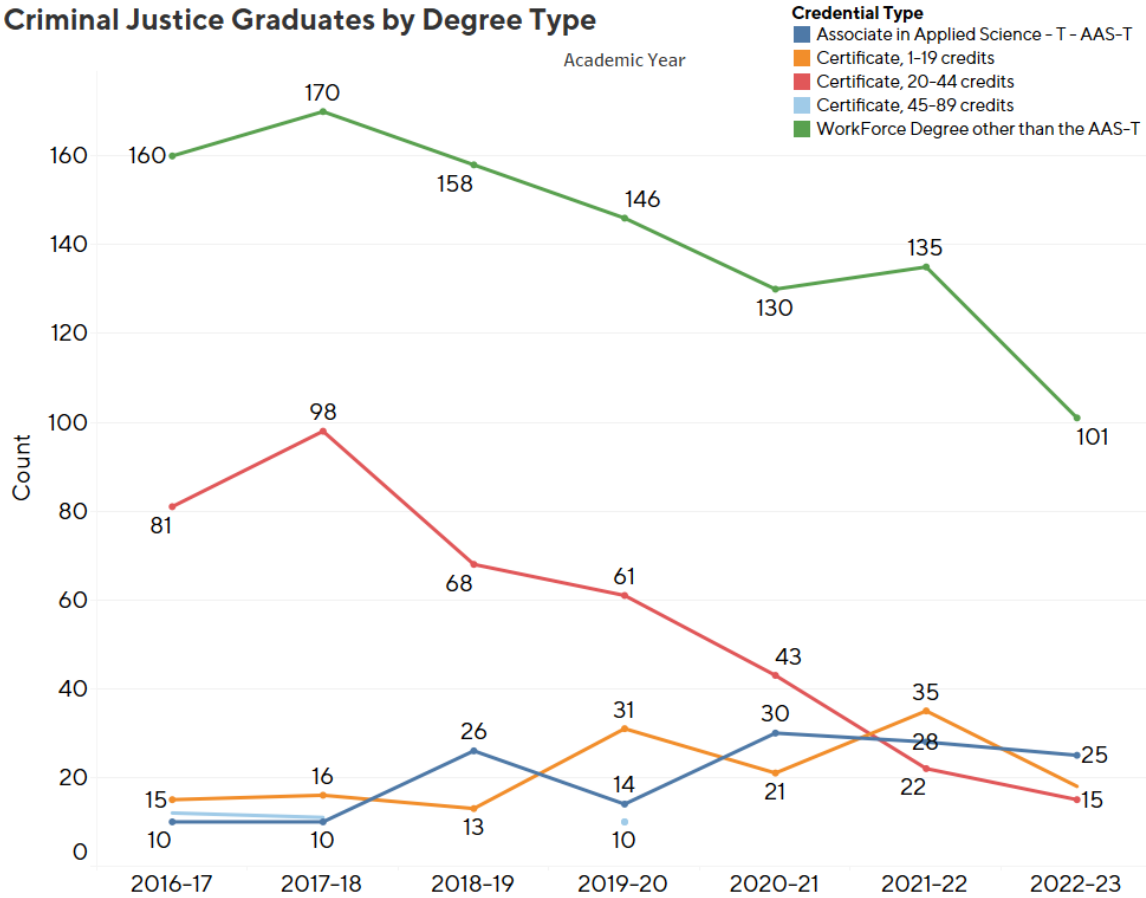


Figure 28. Criminal Justice CTC Graduates by Type of Degree
Source: SBCTC, 2024

Criminal Justice Degree Count by CIP Code

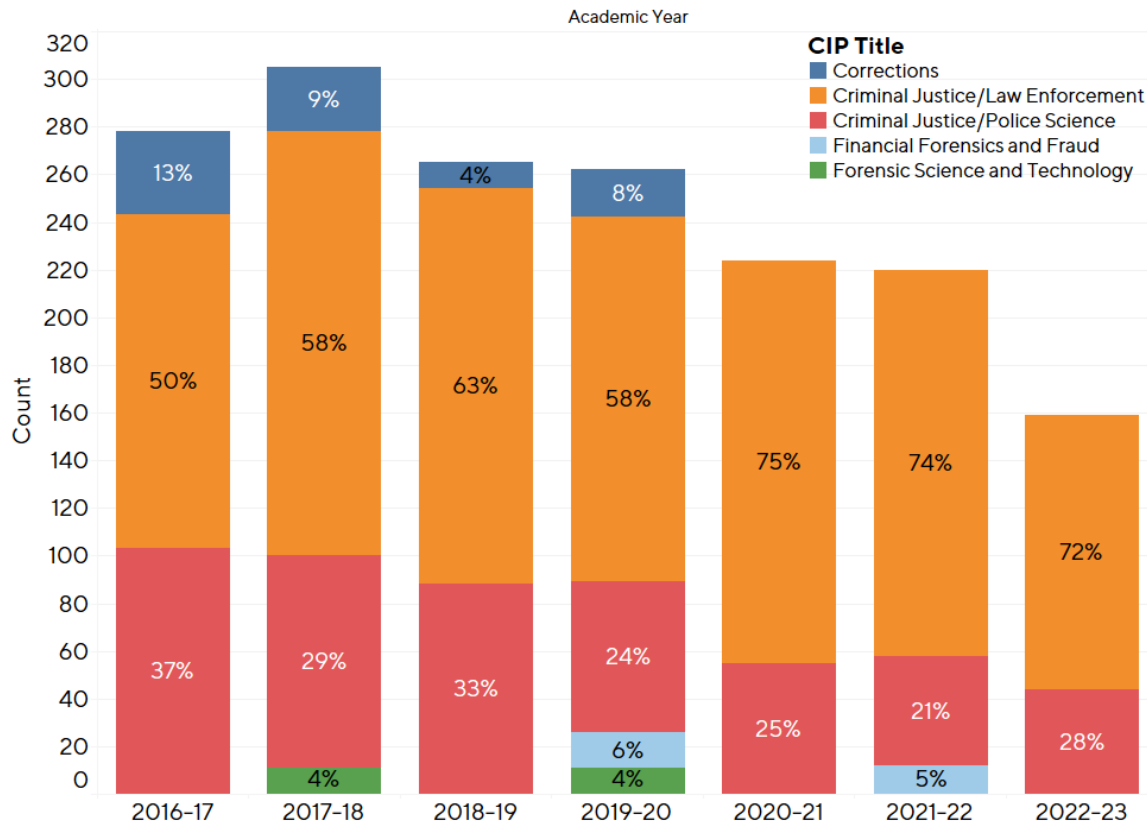


Figure 29. 2016-2023 Criminal Justice CTC Graduates by Major
Source: SBCTC, 2024

Employment Outcomes of Criminal Justice Degree Programs

Employment outcomes for all protective services programs (two-digit Classification of Instructional Program or CIP code) vary by degree type. As expected, many (29%) students enrolled in an associate in applied science transfer are not employed in the third quarter after completion. Many have successfully transferred to a four-year institution.

Still, most graduates, except those who graduated with a 1- to 19-credit or a 45- to 89-credit certificate, are employed in the third quarter after graduation. Employment rates are highest for workforce degree (AAS) graduates (75%), but 19% are not employed or enrolled in a community or technical college in the third quarter after graduation.

These graduates could be waiting to hear back from an employment application. Most law enforcement agencies have hiring processes that can take several months to a year or more, which could explain graduates' unemployment rates.

Protective Services Graduates by Placement Status & Degree Type

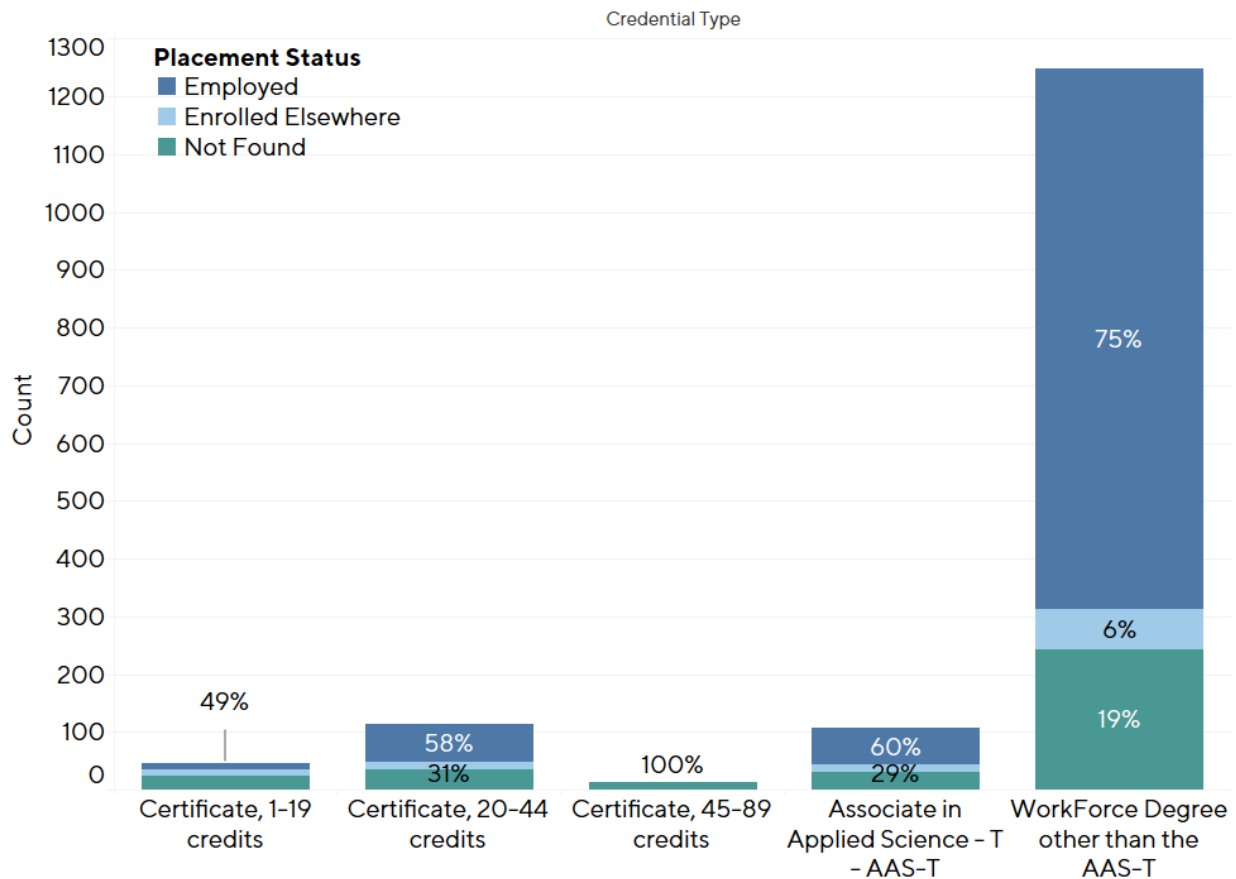


Figure 30. Protective Services CTC Graduates by Employment and Degree
Source: SBCTC, 2024

The selected core law enforcement and corrections occupations are primarily in the Public Administration industrial sector (NAICS 92). Police officers and detectives, among others, fall into the Police Protection subsector (NAICS 922120) and Other General Government Support (NAICS 921190). Transit police officers are commonly found in the Regulation and Administration of Transportation Programs sector. Similarly, corrections workers are most often employed in Other General Government Support (NAICS 921190), as well as the Courts (922110), Correctional Institutions (922140), Remediation Services (922150), and Executive Offices (922190) subsectors.

Among all protective services graduates employed in the third quarter after graduation, only 16% work in public administration. This industry represents federal, state, and local governments, including law enforcement and correctional agencies. An even greater percentage (19%) are instead working in the retail trade industry—a third (33%) work in other or unknown sectors. The relatively smaller share of graduates working in public administration could indicate the recent shift in student makeup as more students enrolled out of interest in recent social events than out of genuine inclination to work in the law enforcement and corrections sector. These smaller numbers could also be explained by the fact that

not all graduates seek employment after completion. Many transfer to a four-year institution, seeking part-time employment to support themselves while furthering their education, potentially explaining the large share employed in retail and hospitality. There are two additional caveats to this data. It does not include graduates who moved out of state and collapses categories to reach a minimum number of observations to protect individuals' privacy.

Criminal Justice Graduates by Employment Industry

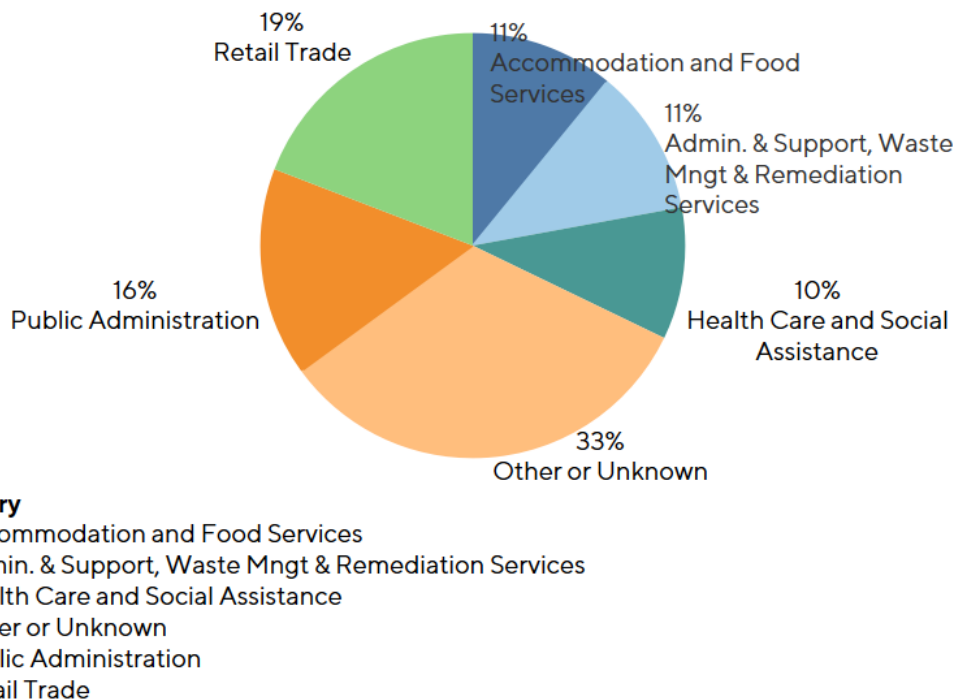


Figure 31. Protective Services CTC Graduates by Work Industry
Source: SBCTC, 2024

Degrees Held by Law Enforcement and Corrections Workers

Finally, as mentioned above, law enforcement, corrections agencies, and other public safety-related sectors rely on a wide variety of skills and talents beyond sworn and corrections officers. Additionally, it is not uncommon for officers who went to college to have completed a program other than criminal justice only to decide later that they wanted to work in law enforcement. As a result, the number of non-criminal justice CTC graduates who work in industries related to law enforcement is larger than the number of criminal justice graduates employed in these industries.

Law Enforcement & Corrections Workers by College Major

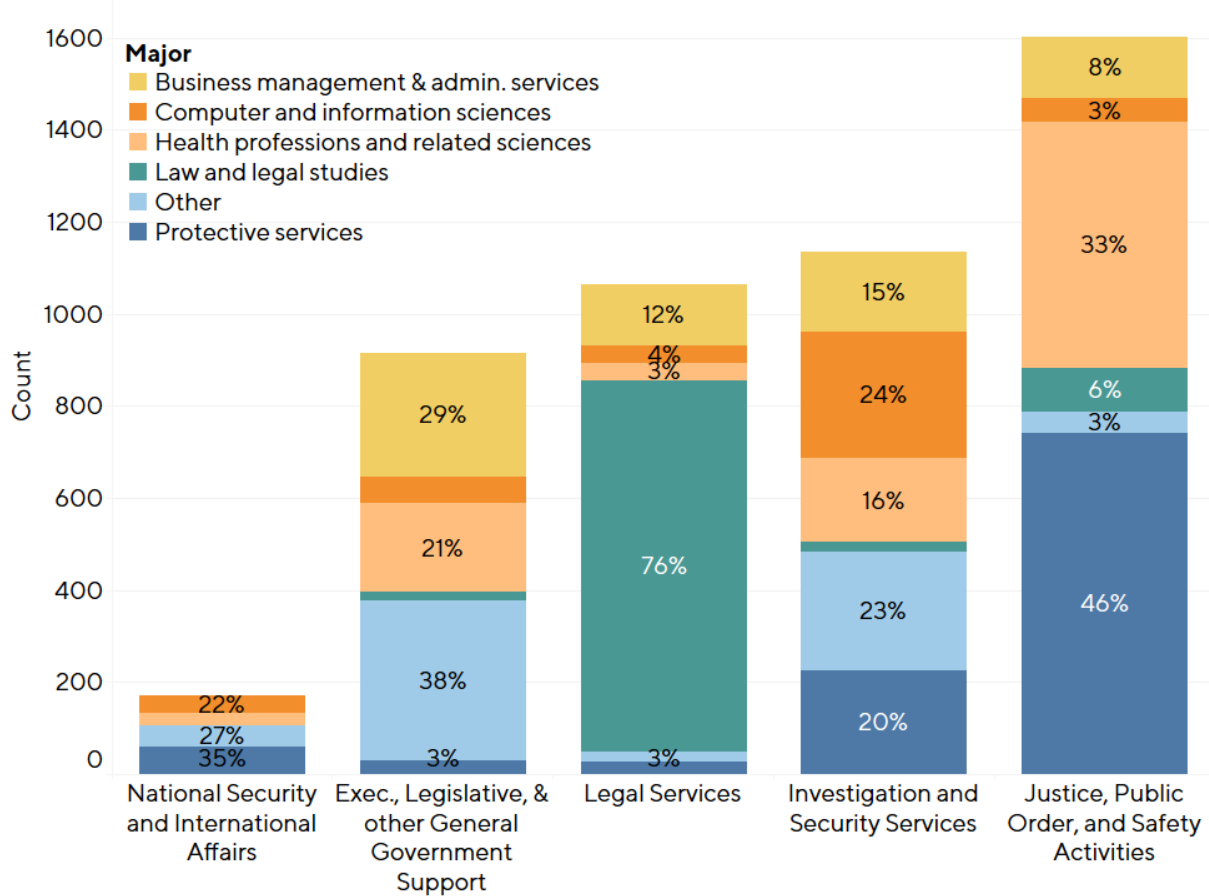


Figure 32. CTC Graduates Employed in Law Enforcement and Corrections
Source: SBCTC, 2024

However, like criminal justice graduates, employment in law enforcement-related industries has followed a downward trend for non-criminal justice graduates. In 2022, most of these graduated with a degree in liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities (43%). Another 20% graduated with a degree in health professions and related sciences (mostly from nursing, allied health, and medical assisting degrees), 9% from education degrees (including teacher education and professional development), and another 13% from other majors. These numbers highlight how the students from nontraditional pathways already serve as a key source of law enforcement and corrections recruits. However, multiple participants in the qualitative fact-finding activities pointed out that it was not uncommon for students unrelated to criminal justice to lack awareness regarding the variety of employment opportunities in law enforcement and corrections, specifically in healthcare.

Non-Traditional Graduates by Major

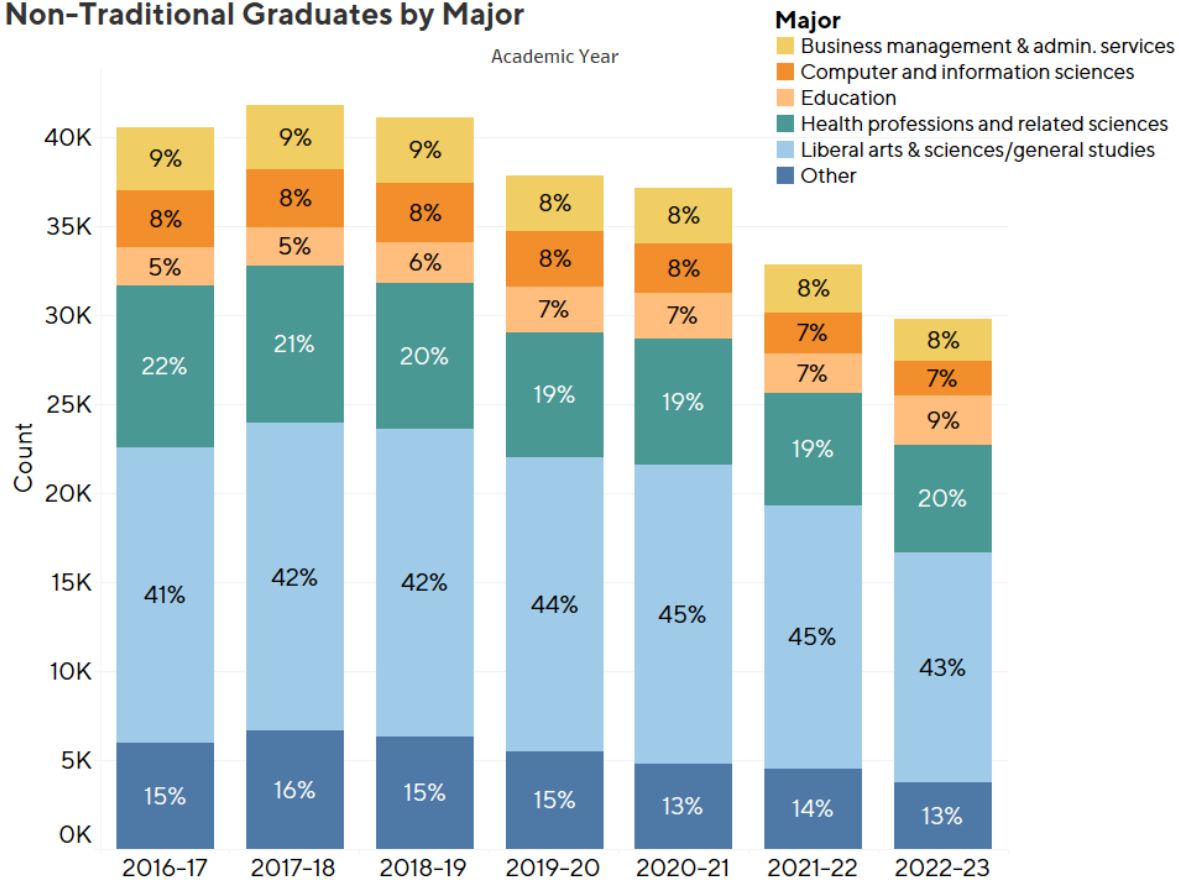


Figure 33. Non-Criminal Justice Graduates Employed in Law Enforcement and Corrections
Source: SBCTC, 2024

Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities Workers by Major & Graduation Status

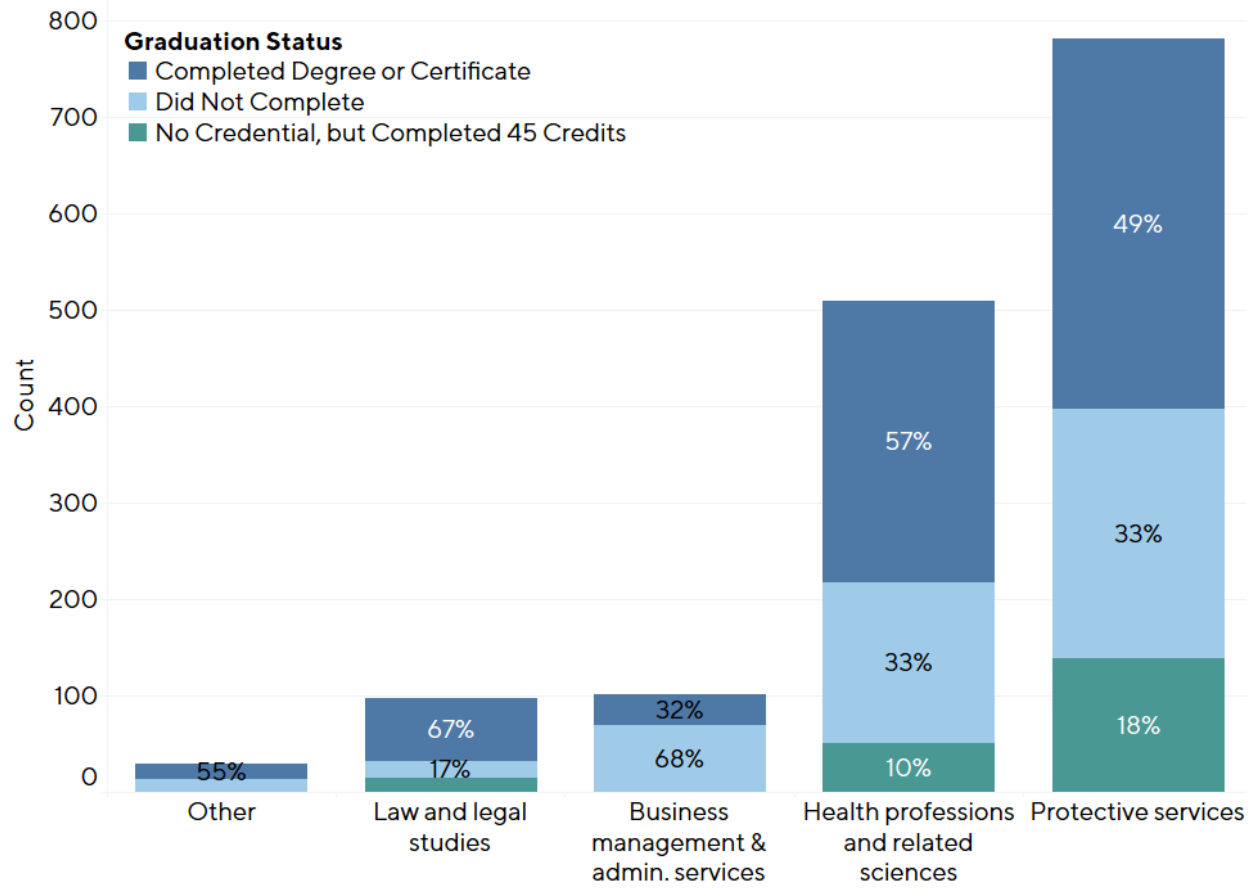


Figure 34. CTC Graduates Employed in Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities by Major and Program Completion Status
Source: SBCTC, 2024

Appendix D: Equivalency Between BLEA and Postsecondary Education

As detailed in the report, most entry-level law enforcement and corrections candidates are required to hold a high school diploma or equivalent and complete a training program relevant to the hiring agency. Community and technical colleges can help alleviate law enforcement and correction agencies' workforce challenges in several ways.

Pre-Academy Certificate

One of the most direct ways would be by taking responsibility for some of the training curriculum, offering training opportunities for incumbent workers to facilitate professional development and increase retention, or creating a pre-academy certificate. The latter, discussed among others in Davis and Hughes,⁶⁵ would be offered by community and technical colleges and provide graduates with credits for prior learning that they could use to shorten their time at the academy. A common course curriculum created by the CJTC and SBCTC would form the basis of this pre-certificate and contribute to developing equivalency pathways between the BLEA and the postsecondary education system and further reinforcing the basic skills required from recruits entering the academy, such as report writing and strong spoken communication skills, and relevant second language skills.

This has not been implemented because there is a strong desire to maintain common training for all sworn police officers in the state. Shortening time at the academy would compromise the cohort structure and shrink the commonality of the training that all police officers receive. At the same time, it has no direct implications for recruitment. However, it could free up capacity at CJTC and improve access, however marginally, to some nontraditional applicants, particularly those with caretaking responsibilities who find it difficult to attend a 20-week academy program away from home.

Summer Programs

Additionally, greater cooperation between the CJTC and the college system could improve worker educational attainment while shortening their time at the academy post-hire. For example, the Legislature has allowed CJTC to offer summer programs for criminal justice students enrolled in four-year institutions. Criminal justice students may complete basic law enforcement training with the CJTC in the summer following their junior and senior years but are responsible for the full cost of the training.

It is unclear to what extent this program is offered. Expanding this opportunity to CTC students could encourage them to seek employment in law enforcement or correctional sectors. Exploring alternative funding for this, including applying the Washington College Grant or other funding, would be important to ensuring access for CTC students. It could be an instrumental part of an ROTC program, as detailed in the report.

Credit Equivalency

It is currently unclear to what extent post-secondary institutions offer credits for prior learning to officers who have completed the CJTC Basic Law Enforcement academy. However, offering college credits for completing the Basic Law Enforcement Academy could encourage incumbent workers to seek additional credentials and further their professional development. Shortening degrees via credit transfer or equivalency has been shown to stimulate enrollment thanks to decreased time commitment and tuition

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, officers who wish to move up to senior or managerial positions must acquire leadership and management skills. Allowing them to apply credits towards degrees such as business administration could encourage and facilitate sworn officers' career development. However, this experience does not necessarily give the same skill development or knowledge acquisition as formal instruction.⁴⁸ That said, instead of leaving the task of negotiating credit equivalency to individual colleges, the SBCTC could directly negotiate credit equivalency on behalf of all colleges with the CJTC to consolidate efforts and achieve greater equity for all sworn officers.

Corrections workers employed by the Washington State Department of Corrections must also complete one or multiple training programs depending on their position (Correctional Worker Core Academy, Community Corrections Officer Academy, and the Case Management Academy), but there doesn't seem to be any prior learning agreement between the DOC and colleges. Supporting credit equivalency could help attract additional workers to correctional agencies and facilitate career development.

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