

## **The Profession: Another Step Closer**

*by Michael Lindsay, Deputy Director - ILEA - 7/20/07*

In a somewhat mechanical way, we have recently taken another step in becoming a recognized profession through our newly acquired ability to exclude members from our ranks for misconduct.

This occurred when the Indiana legislature enacted a provision which allows the Law Enforcement Training Board to revoke a basic training certificate under a few, well-defined, conditions.

When discussions occur on law enforcement's status as a profession, one of the issues that some say is a stumbling point is our ability to discipline or exclude those who would violate our standards. Of course, departments have always had the ability to terminate an officer's employment, but this does necessarily brand someone ethically. We all know that some firings occur for political purposes or because of personality conflicts. Conversely, someone terminated from one department is not barred from employment at another department.

Indiana, as well as many other jurisdictions, has multiple levels of practitioners-as well as competency levels. All levels have arrest powers that are substantially the same. The difference then is not so much if someone has arrest powers but more as to how well trained and how professional the highest strata has become.

Most states allow sheriffs and chiefs to appoint special deputies, special officers or auxiliary officers who are required to have no formalized training or continuing education. These are typically limited commissions for a particular purpose or for a restricted time period although there are occasionally a few of these appointees who are paid, full-time officers.

Many states also allow reserve officers who, like military reservists, typically have less training and experience than regular officers but are fully empowered and used to supplement the regular force.

In addition to these officers, Indiana also has several groups of specialized enforcement officers who, even though they are full-time employees, are granted authority only while working for a particular type of agency or for a specific department. These officers are often allowed to complete an abbreviated basic training program.

At the top of this hierarchy is the fully certified officer who is authorized to enforce all of the criminal law and who can move freely from department to department because the basic and continuing education requirements for this officer are the highest required of any enforcement group.

It is this top layer that sets the standards and strives to maintain a professional status.

The Law Enforcement Training Board has recently concluded its first revocation hearing for one of these certified officers. The outcome-revocation of his certificate-was actually less important than the fact that this procedure is now available and used.

On a more philosophical level, this new law has substantially changed the focus of our Indiana certification statute. Previously, our basic course certification was merely an acknowledgement that the basic course had been successfully completed. Once certified, always certified was the law in Indiana .

The revocation power has altered the basic course certificate from being merely an acknowledgement of training to being an on-going professional license.

Although the grounds for decertification are limited at this time, this law along with the new "refresher" statute is a radical change in the philosophical underpinning for this highest level of Indiana enforcement officer.

With this new law, we have taken another substantial step towards the goal of demonstrating to the public-in a concrete way-that we have addressed one more essential element of a profession that was previously in question. - M. Lindsay