

To: Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council

From: Executive Director Richard B. Gauthier

Re: CEW Certification Training

During the June, 2013, meeting of the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council, Attorney General Sorrell requested that the Council conduct a comprehensive and formal review of the training provided to Vermont law enforcement officers regarding conducted electrical weapons (CEW) such as TASERS. He further requested that the Council do a similar review of the training provided to officers regarding interactions with persons in crisis or who have cognitive impairments or disabilities. The purpose of the reviews was to assist the 2014 legislature with reviewing bills and taking testimony.

CEW Training Review

A review of training provided to Vermont law enforcement officers revealed the following:

Use:

- TASER is, far and away, the most commonly used CEW in Vermont, with approximately 575-600 law enforcement officers belonging to state, county, and local agencies either having them issued to them or made available (either for use for courtroom security, or being checked in and out at the beginning and end of a shift).

Training:

- TASER provides training material training for initial certification to use/carry the CEW that is designed to meet objectives, and provides trainers with guidance on how to run the course (see attached). The training material involves extensive use of Power Point presentations and short videos (see attached sample). TASER also makes recommendations for annual recertification.
- Agencies using CEWs are using the training course developed and offered by the manufacturer.
- Agencies choose whether or not to provide only what TASER offers, or add content to



supplement TASER training.

- As far as can be determined, there are no officers carrying a CEW without having had at least the manufacturer's course and adhering to minimum recommended training. The majority of users are receiving training that goes above and beyond the manufacturer's curriculum in length, content, and frequency.
- TASER makes reference to vulnerable populations in its training, but it's limited in scope.
- There are approximately 65 CEW instructors in the state. With the exception of two, all are TASER instructors. Initial certification of TASER instructors involves one day of online training and two days in the classroom.
- There are two TASER master instructors in the state.

With the exception of Massachusetts, no law enforcement training academy in the Northeast is offering an independent CEW training (Connecticut is in the process of developing one). It was generally accepted that a given manufacturer's training, along with whatever an individual agency wanted to add to that, was sufficient for CEW use.

Officer Interactions with Persons in Crisis

The VCJTC currently provides an 8-hour training course entitled, *Interacting with People Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis*, to each Full-time Basic Recruit Class. Back in 2005, during the 79th Basic, the course was expanded from the original length of 2 hours to 4 hours, and then in the 82nd Basic it expanded again to 6 hours. Beginning with the 87th Basic in 2009, the course expanded once more to its current length of 8 hours. An in-service class has also been provided since 2006 that was originally 6.5 hours in length, but expanded to 8 hours about a year ago.

The course begins with discussion about the current state of the mental health system in Vermont and the over-representation of folks with mental illness in correctional systems. Other topics covered include:

Stereotypes & Stigma and their impact on people accessing treatment; role of media

Deinstitutionalization

Crime victim with disabilities

Americans with Disabilities Act

Basics of Psychiatric Illness (causes, symptoms, major categories)

Suicide & Self-Injury

Trauma, anxiety

Personality Disorders

Brief overview of child-specific concerns

Substance abuse/co-occurring disorders

Medication issues

Developmental Disabilities (also including Autism, Dementia, and TBI)

Communication & De-escalation

 Tone (Demeanor, approach)

 Atmosphere (Scene safety, personal approach)

 Communication (Verbal and non-verbal communication)

 Time (understanding that crisis calls will take more time than other types of calls)

Resources

Inpatient Treatment

Legal aspects (including involuntary admission procedures, how to write a Warrant application)

Transports

A vital component of the instructor model for this training course includes a person with psychiatric diagnoses giving a firsthand account of their life experience. Often their stories include interactions with police, both positive and negative. The presenters tell stories of what worked and what didn't when they are in crisis, how it felt to be shackled, medication issues, dealing stigma and many other meaningful points.

VCJTC Course Recommendation

Based on the foregoing, any certification course the Council would require for CEW users should consist of the CEW manufacturer's course, the use of at least three scenarios, a review of the user's department policy, a review of relevant use of force issues, and a component on dealing with persons in crisis.