



**International Association of Directors of
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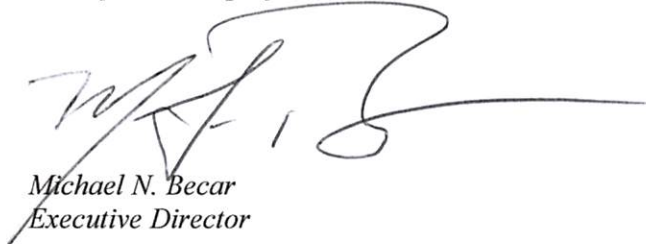
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In the 1950's the states began treating law enforcement as a profession. One of the hallmarks of a profession is that professionals must live up to certain standards or lose the privilege of practicing the profession. Professionalization of the delivery of police services requires continual monitoring to ensure practice meets the prescribed standards. When it falls below that standard or is unethical, there should be a mechanism for removing unfit officers. The need for professionalization of law enforcement has led to the establishment of state agencies usually called Police Officer Standards and Training Boards (POSTs). In every state except Hawaii, POSTs have the authority to set standards relating to hiring and training of peace officers. Unless the individual complies with those standards, he is not able to serve as a peace officer in the state. In 44 states, POSTs have the additional authority to certify or license all law enforcement officers when they meet the standards, and in cases of misconduct, they can revoke the officer's certificate, a process typically called "decertification." Massachusetts is one of six states that does not have the authority to decertify officers for misconduct.

Decertification is similar to the removal of a license common to most other professions and occupations. A peace officer who has been found after a hearing to have violated the state's statutes or regulations, will have his certificate revoked, thereby preventing the officer from getting hired by another police or sheriff's department within the state. In many states, an officer need not first be terminated from a local department; he can still be decertified even if he resigns prior to any action from the department. In terms of what kind of conduct can lead to decertification, there are two major approaches: (1) states that permit revocation on narrowly defined grounds such as a felony conviction or a misdemeanor conviction involving moral turpitude, and (2) states that permit revocation for conduct that has not resulted in a conviction.

When officers are decertified, it helps end the practice of problem officers who outrun discipline efforts by resigning positions in one jurisdiction to take up work in a neighboring jurisdiction in the same state, or another state. Approximately 30,000 law enforcement officers have had their licenses revoked since 1960 when New Mexico became the first state to decertify.

Policing requires public trust, and as long as Massachusetts does not have the authority to decertify unethical law enforcement officers, that public trust will erode and the law enforcement profession will be tarnished.



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