

State of New York  
Department of Correctional Services  
Building Number 2  
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Albany, New York 12226

**PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING PROGRAM  
FOR CORRECTION OFFICER APPLICANTS**

**1992**

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U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

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**PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING PROGRAM  
FOR CORRECTION OFFICER APPLICANTS  
1992**

**NCJRS**

**JUN 21 1993**

**ACQUISITIONS**

**OVERVIEW**

This seventh annual report of the Psychological Screening Program for Correction Officer Applicants summarizes the Program's activities for the period May 1, 1992 to January 15, 1993. As was noted in the sixth annual report, the Program had previously been disbanded on December 26, 1990 due to the fact that the Department had discontinued the hiring of Correction Officers. On May 1, 1992, the program was reactivated. For historical background information, please refer to the Program's previous annual reports.

During this period since the Psychological Screening Unit has been reestablished, a total of 1,021 applicants reported for their Day One psychological testing, and a total of 708 applicants reported for their Day Two psychological interview in Albany. All 708 applicants received final psychological ratings in this time period.

**A. Legislative History, Intent and Program History**

The objective of psychologically screening Correction Officer candidates is to identify those individuals displaying psychopathology or other psychological limitations which could significantly impair job performance and effectiveness.

The Psychological Screening Program was originally enacted as Chapter 887 of the Laws of 1983. Chapter 887 has subsequently been amended four times. In March 1992, the Psychological Screening Program was again renewed for two years until April 1, 1994. Annual reports of the activities of the Psychological Screening Unit have been generated since 1986.

Since the Department did not anticipate the need to recruit new Correction Officer staff during the balance of Fiscal Year 1990-91 and into Fiscal Year 1991-92, a decision was made to terminate both the Psychological Screening and Background Investigation Units in late 1990 due to the State's fiscal crisis. In December 1991, a group of recruit officers, who had been screened before the program's 1990 disbanding, was hired and trained at the Academy. By March 1992, however, it became clear that the Department of Correctional Services would again need to begin hiring new recruits in order to maintain acceptable staffing levels. Thus, in May 1992, the Psychological Screening Unit was reinstated although in much smaller form. By the end of August 1992, the Independent Advisory (Appeals) Board was also reinstated.

**B. Project Staffing and Budget**

1. Staffing

Project Staffing during this period was kept to a minimum. On a full time basis, there were a Director of Psychological Screening and two Support Staff, a Senior Typist and a Clerk, on loan from other agency locations. For approximately the first month of operation, when candidate interview volumes were the highest, psychological evaluations were performed by six Department psychologists who were temporarily loaned to the Psychological Screening Unit. When the volume of candidates decreased, evaluations were conducted by the Director of Psychological Screening, two full time temporary psychologists and two part time temporary psychologists who worked one day each week. At the close of this period, staffing reverted to the Director and two support staff on loan.

2. Budget

For the period from May through October 1992, a total of \$130,414 in expenditures may be attributed to the program.

- Personal Services	\$ 82,439
- Other Than Personal Services	\$ <u>47,975</u>
- Grand Total	\$130,414

Of the personal services, only the Director of Psychological Screening (M-1), \$28,773, is a dedicated Unit item. The Senior Typist and Clerk are on loan from other agency locations, as were the various other psychological positions.

Of the "Other Than Personal Services" expenditures (\$47,975), the Independent Advisory (Appeals) Board expended \$9,126.

A total of \$25,239 in "Contract Services" covered test scoring services, as well as per diem payments to private psychologists working on a temporary basis with the Psychological Screening Unit.

### **C. Scoring Procedures**

To complete the Psychological Screening Procedure, each Correction Officer candidate appears twice in Albany. On Day One, the candidate is given a psychological test battery consisting of: (1) the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), a widely used and well recognized measure of psychopathology and personality functioning, (2) the Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI), a measure of personality traits relevant to job performance in the fields of corrections and police work and (3) the Correction Officer Interest Blank (COIB) which measures the match between the candidate's attitudes and those of successful correction officers.

Some time after completing Day One, the Correction Officer candidate returns to Albany for Day Two. At that time, the candidate has a face-to-face clinical interview with a staff psychologist who first reviews the candidate's psychological test scores.

Once the interview is completed the psychologist then generates a written report on the candidate. The psychologist also assigns a rating on a five point scale that either "recommends" the candidate for hire (scores of one, two or three) or "does not recommend" the candidate for employment (a rating of four or five). The Director of Psychological Screening reviews all the psychological screening evaluations produced by this unit.

A recommendation against hiring, as indicated by a rating of four or five, is subsequently sent to the Correction Officer candidate as a Department psychological disqualification issued by the Director of Human Resources Management.

### **D. Psychological Disqualification and Appeals Procedure**

Psychologically disqualified candidates are notified in writing of this decision and are informed of their right to appeal. The appeals process begins when a candidate writes to the Director of Human Resources Management of the Department of Correctional Services and states his/her wish to appeal the decision of psychological disqualification. A hearing date is then set for the candidate's case to be heard by the Independent Advisory Board.

The Independent Advisory Board is comprised of three members who were chosen by the President of the Civil Service Commission. The Board consists of a board certified psychiatrist, a licensed psychologist and a representative of the Department of Civil Service, who possesses a doctoral degree in education.

The Independent Advisory Board reviews the decision made by the Psychological Screening Unit and, if a candidate decides to appear in person or with representation, meets with the candidate and/or his/her representative. The Board also reviews any additional data or evaluation provided by the applicant. If the Independent Advisory Board affirms a candidate's appeal, he/she is then deemed psychologically qualified and is eligible for appointment if the background investigation and medical exam are passed successfully. A denial of a candidate's appeal by the Independent Advisory Board constitutes the final psychological decision with regard to this applicant.

### **HOW THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING UNIT EVALUATES CANDIDATES**

Candidates are evaluated by their interviewing psychologists on 11 different rating dimensions which are reflective of overall psychological functioning and adjustment. These areas include:

- Interview Behavior
- Interpersonal Relationships (marital/family/other)
- Employment History
- Arrest History
- Motor Vehicle Infractions
- Military History
- Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) Results
- Inward Personality Inventory (IPI) Results
- Aggression/Violence History
- Alcohol/Drug Abuse
- Psychiatric History

As the interviewing psychologist evaluates the candidate on the above dimensions, he/she is particularly cognizant of the candidate's demonstrated ability to function effectively under stress, to relate effectively to a wide range of people, to relate appropriately to authority and to rules and regulations and to use sound judgment, especially under pressure.

Before the interview begins, the psychologist reviews psychological testing results and information on the candidate developed during the background investigation. The interviewer may then use this information to generate questions specific to any problem areas that may have been thus far identified.

The psychologist then meets with the candidate and conducts a face-to-face semistructured interview during which time the interviewer records his/her impressions of the candidate and asks the candidate about his functioning in the areas outlined above. Concurrently, the interviewer makes a careful assessment of the candidate's current mental status.

At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer then rates the candidate using pre-established criteria on each of the 11 rating dimensions. The interviewer then combines his/her judgments to arrive at a final overall psychological rating for the candidate.

### **CRITERIA FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL DISQUALIFICATION OF A CANDIDATE**

Section Eight of the New York State Correction Law sets forth the conditions under which a correction officer candidate may be disqualified from further consideration for appointment. Paragraph three, in part, states that:

Persons who have been determined by a psychologist licensed under the laws of this state as suffering from psychotic disorders, serious character disorders, or other disorders which could hinder performance on the job may be deemed ineligible for appointment; provided, however, that other components of the employee selection process may be taken into consideration in reaching the determination as to whether a candidate is deemed eligible or ineligible for certification to a list of eligible candidates.

The Psychological Screening Unit uses a five point scale upon which a candidate is given a final psychological rating. Ratings One, Two and Three are findings of psychological qualification. These ratings indicate the relative psychological fitness of a candidate. These ratings generate a recommendation that the candidate receive further consideration for possible appointment as a Correction Officer.

Ratings Four and Five, however, are findings of psychological disqualification. These ratings indicate that the candidate is not recommended for further consideration for appointment. More specifically, ratings Four and Five are described on the Psychological Screening Unit final rating sheet as follows:

- \_\_\_\_ (4) There is evidence suggestive of character disorder, emotional adjustment difficulties or other psychological variables which would contraindicate suitability for employment.  
**DO NOT RECOMMEND.**
  
- \_\_\_\_ (5) There is evidence suggestive of psychosis, severe character disorder or other serious psychological impairment.  
**DO NOT RECOMMEND.**

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF CANDIDATES WHO ARE PSYCHOLOGICALLY DISQUALIFIED FROM FURTHER CONSIDERATION FOR APPOINTMENT AS CORRECTION OFFICERS**

It is obvious that any candidate who is currently suffering from a serious mental disorder e.g. schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, etc. would be considered to be seriously psychologically impaired and thus would not be recommended for further consideration for appointment. However, the vast majority of candidates screened and disqualified by this Unit are not mentally ill per se. This fact should not be surprising since it takes a relative amount of intactness to be able to pass the New York State Civil Service written exam and to complete the rather lengthy and thorough application and background investigation procedures. Who then are the bulk of individuals who are considered to be disqualified by virtue of psychological reasons?

The philosophy underlying the process of psychological screening is one of risk management. In other words, the overriding mission of the Psychological Screening Unit is conceived as one of screening out the candidates who present the greatest possible risk to the security and safety of inmates, fellow officers, other staff members, and members of the public (e.g. visitors, volunteers, inmate families) in the State's correctional facilities.

Personality variables clearly have a bearing on one's level of risk. For example, those candidates who present a history of acting out impulsively in response to stress or provocation or who present evidence of serious flaws in judgment would likely be high risk candidates in a correctional setting. Other risk factors would include a history of antisocial behaviors, inappropriate aggressiveness, poor attitude toward authority, disregard for rules and regulations and tendencies toward alcohol or substance abuse. Also of concern would be a candidate who presents an unusual vulnerability to stress or one who has a history of significant interpersonal conflict.

### **E. Psychological Screening and Appeals Data: May 1992-January 1993**

A total of 708 candidates were psychologically screened from May 1992 through January 1993. The vast majority of these candidates evaluated during the present time period came from Civil Service Lists 21-619 and 21-620 (Spanish Speaking). A small number of candidates (32) came from military and reinstatement lists.

In addition, certain candidates who were evaluated and disqualified in 1990 but not granted an appeal due to the program disbanding in December 1990 were canvassed in 1992. In an effort to provide an opportunity to them that would be equivalent to having been granted an appeal in 1990, those candidates of appropriate rank were offered a new psychological screening evaluation. This cause of action was deemed to be more appropriate than merely

offering these candidates the chance to appeal their 1990 disqualification decisions since their psychological testing results had long ago expired. Thus, 98 such candidates (84 from Civil Service List 21-619 and 14 from List 21-620) were invited to be retested and reinterviewed. Of this number, only 25 candidates completed this process. Of this number, seven candidates (28%) became qualified by virtue of being reevaluated in this manner.

1. Psychological Disqualifications

Psychological disqualifications arising from ratings of "4" or "5" totaled 181 for 1992.

2. Appeals of Disqualifications

The Independent Advisory Board was re-established in August 1992. During this period, the Independent Advisory Board heard 70 cases and sustained the Department's decision 46 times (65.7%) and overturned the decision on a previously disqualified candidate 24 times (34.3%).

As of January 1993, 16 candidates had appeals pending.

**F. Annual Adverse Impact Analysis**

Since its inception, the Psychological Screening Unit has monitored its psychological evaluations for the presence of adverse impact. According to federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines, adverse impact is said to exist when the hiring rate for a protected class is less than 80% of the hiring rate for the largest hired (the non-minority) group. In past years, it has been noted that some adverse impact has occurred for Black males but not for other protected classes. However, when one examines the entire history of the Psychological Screening Program, i.e., 22,096 applicants seen between 1984 and 1991, and when Black males and females are combined into one group, findings of adverse impact disappear.

Preliminary adverse impact data will be reported for the present time period. Such statistics can only be meaningfully tabulated after a sufficiently large number of candidates have completed the psychological screening process and those psychologically disqualified have had a chance to appeal their decisions.

Based on Federal regulations, the available adverse impact data is considered to be preliminary due to the limited number of female and protected class candidates who have final ratings.



Appended Tables 1-3 are reviewed in order to conduct an adverse impact analysis on the psychological screening hiring program on all 665 candidates as well as the 602 male and 63 female candidates separately.

These tables exclude 43 candidates in the following three categories:

1. the 16 candidates whose appeals are pending, and
2. the 25 candidates who were previously disqualified in 1990 and had appeals pending when the program was disbanded in December 1990. These candidates were removed from the present analysis since they are more likely to be again disqualified than the overall pool of candidates, and
3. the 2 candidates whose ethnic status was listed as "other."

It should be noted that those candidates who are now qualified psychologically by action of the Appeals Advisory Board are contained in these tables as psychologically qualified.

### **Total Applicants**

Under the EEOC 80% rule, we take 80% of the White qualification rate in Table 1, which is 80% of 82.2%. This generates an adverse impact threshold of 65.8%. The Black (72.1%) and Hispanic (86.2%) qualification rates exceed 65.8% so there is a failure to find adverse impact on these protected classes of applicants.

### **Male Applicants**

Table 2 focuses on male applicants. Under the EEOC 80% rule, we take 80% of the White male qualification rate, which is 80% of 81.0%. This generates an adverse impact threshold of 64.8%. Both the Black male qualification rate (65.3%) and the Hispanic male qualification rate (84.6%) exceed this 64.8% threshold. As such, there is a failure to find adverse impact on these protected classes of male applicants. However, it is noted that the Black male qualification rate (65.3%) only exceeds the adverse impact threshold by 0.5%. While the Hispanic male qualification rate (84.6%) is higher than the White male qualification rate (81.0%), the number of Hispanic candidates is very limited (26).

### **Female Applicants**

Table 3 focuses on female applicants. Under the EEOC 80% rule, we take 80% of the White female qualification rate, which is 80% of 97.6%. This generates an adverse impact threshold of 78.1%. The Black female qualification rate (89.5%) and the Hispanic female qualification rate (100%) each exceed 78.1% so there is a failure to find adverse impact on these protected classes of female applicants.

In summary, the preceding comparison of the qualification rates of the various subgroups of applicants failed to find evidence of adverse impact based on the EEOC 80% Rule. In reviewing this data, however, the reader is cautioned against drawing definitive conclusions due to the very small number of cases in certain categories.

## **G. Job Performance Validation of the Psychological Screening Program**

### **1. Training Academy Overall Performance**

Work has continued on developing the relationship between training academy performance and pre-employment psychological rating. The overall academic average is based on six modules, each a week in duration, covering the required components of recruit training, with a test at the close of each component. The overall academic average is based on the average of these six module scores.

Of the 296 applicants trained at the Academy in 1992, the vast majority (211 or 71.3%) had overall academic averages in the 90's. Only 82 (27.7%) had overall academic averages in the medium (80-89) range and three (1.0%) had overall academic averages in the low range (70-79). However, due to the limited variation in overall academic averages, statistical conclusions relating academic average to psychological rating (1-3) will not be developed until the List 21-619 data set is sufficiently large. (In earlier Annual Reports with larger data sets, academic average was statistically related to psychological rating).

### **2. Overall Measures of Job Performance: Probationary Year**

Since these appointees have not completed their first (probationary) service year, job performance data on such service is not yet available. This data set will be a focus of the next annual program report.

## **CONCLUSION**

In accord with the statutory requirement, this report concerns the operation of the Psychological Screening Program from its re-establishment in May 1992 to January 1993.

As discussed in this brief report, the program has operated in compliance with the governing statute during this time period and successfully reviewed the pool of correction officer candidates required to meet the Department's personnel needs.

**TABLE 1**

**FINAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING DECISION  
1992 CORRECTION OFFICER CANDIDATES  
BY ETHNICITY**

<b>FINAL PSYCH DECISION</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>WHITE</b>	<b>BLACK</b>	<b>HISPANIC</b>
Qualified	541 (81.4%)	467 (82.2%)	49 (72.1%)	25 (86.2%)
Disqualified	124 (18.6%)	101 (17.8%)	19 (27.9%)	4 (13.8%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>665</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>568</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>68</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>29</b> <b>(100%)</b>

TABLE 2

FINAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING DECISION  
1992 MALE CORRECTION OFFICER CANDIDATES  
BY ETHNICITY

FINAL PSYCH DECISION	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC
Qualified	481 (79.9%)	427 (81.0%)	32 (65.3%)	22 (84.6%)
Disqualified	121 (20.1%)	100 (19.0%)	17 (34.7%)	4 (15.4%)
TOTAL	602 (100%)	527 (100%)	49 (100%)	26 (100%)

TABLE 3

FINAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING DECISION  
1992 FEMALE CORRECTION OFFICER CANDIDATES  
BY ETHNICITY

FINAL PSYCH DECISION	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC
Qualified	60 (95.2%)	40 (97.6%)	17 (89.5%)	3 (100%)
Disqualified	3 (4.8%)	1 (2.4%)	2 (10.5%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	63 (100%)	41 (100%)	19 (100%)	3 (100%)

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