

Holden Police Department is Awarded “Certification” Status

On April 5, 2007, the Holden Police Department was 16th in the state to receive state certification from the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission.

Certification is a self-initiated evaluation process by which police departments strive to meet and maintain standards that have been established *for* the profession, *by* the profession. These carefully selected standards reflect critical areas of police management, operations, and technical support activities. They cover areas such as policy development, emergency response planning, training, communications, property and evidence handling, use of force, vehicular pursuit, prisoner transportation and holding facilities. The program not only sets standards for the law enforcement profession, but also for the delivery of police *services* to the citizens of the commonwealth.

“Achieving Certification from the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission is considered a very significant accomplishment, and is a recognition that is highly regarded by the law enforcement community,” said Donna Taylor Mooers, Program Administrator.”

Under the leadership of Chief George R. Sherrill the Holden Police Department was assessed in October by a team of Commission-appointed assessors. The Assessment Team found the Department to be in compliance with all applicable standards for certification.

“Going through the process initially requires intense self-scrutiny, and ultimately provides a quality assurance review of the agency,” said Mooers. To conduct this self-assessment and prepare for the on-site review of the 151 standards by the Commission, in 2004, Chief Sherrill appointed Lieutenant Donald Ball to serve as the Department’s Accreditation Manager. Lieutenant Ball’s job is not done, however, since Chief Sherrill’s ultimate goal for the Department is to achieve the Commission’s highest award: *Accreditation*.

Certification has been granted for a period of three years. Participation in the program is strictly voluntary.

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission consists of an eleven member Board of Directors. Six members are appointed by the **Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association**, two by the **Coalition of Accreditation Managers of Massachusetts**, one by the **Massachusetts Municipal Association** and one by the **Massachusetts Police Association**. The eleventh member is left for the Board to elect; that member must be affiliated with an academic institution. According to Mooers, “the Commission’s primary role is to establish and administer both the standards and the assessment process by which departments meeting certification standards can be publicly recognized for their achievements.”

Massachusetts is one of twenty-two states that offer an accreditation process for its police departments.

BENEFITS OF CERTIFICATION

The standards for certification impact officer and public safety, address high liability/risk management issues, and promote operational efficiency throughout the agency. The benefits of Certification are therefore many and will vary among participating departments based on the *state* of the department when it enters the process. In other words, the benefits will be better known when the department quantifies the

changes that it had to make as a direct result of achieving certification. Generally, these changes involve policy writing, facility improvements and equipment purchases. Listed below are some of the more common benefits.

Certification:

- provides a norm for an agency to judge its performance.
- provides a basis to correct deficiencies before they become public problems.
- requires agencies to commit policies and procedures to writing.
- promotes accountability among agency personnel and the evenhanded application of policies.
- provides a means of independent evaluation of agency operations.
- minimizes an agency's exposure to liability, builds a stronger defense against lawsuits, and has the potential to reduce liability insurance costs.
- enhances the reputation of the agency and increases the public's confidence in it.

Mooers added, "Police Certification and Accreditation work to reassure the general public that the law enforcement profession is prepared, trained and ready to handle future emergencies and calls for service. Agency *preparedness* begins with having a formal and current Written Directive System that incorporates best business practices into agency policies and operational plans."