

## FULLY COMMISSIONED POLICE FORCES

### What is a “fully commissioned police force”?

The term “fully commissioned police force” means that the law enforcement officers have gone through the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission’s 720-hour Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA) and have been certified and sworn into office as police officers. Commissioned police officers are licensed, can carry firearms and make arrests. They are also sometimes referred to as “sworn officers.”

### Are public colleges and universities in Washington authorized to have fully commissioned police forces?

State law allows only universities — not community and technical colleges — to have fully commissioned police forces.

University police officers are required to go through the same training, and are given the same authority, as any other police officer. They have the authority to conduct investigations, make arrests, issue citations, carry firearms and enforce state laws in addition to their own campus rules.

All six public universities in Washington have police departments. This doesn’t mean every person in the department is a commissioned police officer. Some universities employ a mix of campus police officers and campus security guards.

### If a campus has a fully commissioned police department, does that mean their police officers will carry firearms?

Typically, yes. While state law does not technically require commissioned police to carry firearms, all six public universities in Washington state equip their police with firearms as part of their police duties. Nationally, virtually all university police officers carry firearms.

### What are community and technical college security guards and officers legally able to enforce?

Community and technical colleges have security guards and security officers rather than commissioned police officers. The security staff are restricted to enforcing the college’s own policies and regulations on campus safety and student codes of conduct. For example, they can issue parking tickets, give verbal warnings, respond to conflicts in the classroom, escort people from place to place, and order someone off campus.

Unlike police departments, campus security officers and guards cannot conduct criminal investigations or make arrests. They can look up public record information on convictions, but they do not have access to deep background checks that show police responses to behavioral warning signs. Community and technical college security personnel work with their local police departments to do deeper threat assessments.

## What happens if someone commits a crime on a community or technical college campus? Can the college security staff arrest that person?

No, community and technical college security personnel are not authorized to make criminal arrests because they are not police officers. When it comes to intervening in an incident, security staff follow the expectations and policies of their college. Duties might range from simply “observing and reporting” until the police arrive, to more active intervention – like detaining someone for a short period of time and asking a few questions while waiting for a police response. Campus security have the same authority as any citizen to make a “citizen’s arrest” if the security officer has probable cause to believe that a felony has been committed and/or observes a felony or misdemeanor breach of the peace taking place. In that case, the officer may detain the person until law enforcement arrives.

## Can community and technical colleges contract with a local police department to have a police officer on campus (like a K-12 resource officer)?

Yes. Like K-12 schools, colleges can contract with local police departments to have law enforcement officers stationed on campus. These officers are usually employees of the police department but report to both the department and the college. Colleges can be involved in selecting, hiring, and replacing the officer.

## Can community and technical colleges decide, on their own, to send their officers to the Basic Law Enforcement Academy simply for the training benefits?

No. Only police and sheriff’s departments and universities with commissioned police forces can enroll in Basic Law Enforcement Academy classes. Some local police departments, however, agree to “sponsor” their local community and technical college officers for reserve officer training through the Criminal Justice Training Commission. The officers must individually apply to the police department for sponsorship.

Many community and technical colleges send their campus security guards and officers to a 40-hour basic security officer training hosted by the University of Washington or through an academy hosted by the Western Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (WACLEA). Security staff titles, job descriptions, duties and training vary from college to college.

## Can community and technical colleges contract with private security agencies?

Yes. A few colleges hire unarmed private security guards, typically to monitor the campus after hours.

## What happens if there’s an active shooter situation or another major emergency?

Community and technical college security staff will respond as appropriate, notify police and emergency responders, and serve as incident command until the emergency responders arrive. Mutual Aid Agreements or Memoranda of Understanding between colleges and emergency responders help clarify roles, responsibilities and assets in an emergency.

## Are there collective bargaining implications with establishing fully commissioned police forces?

Like any other position represented by a union, an increase in responsibilities – like turning a security officer position into a campus police officer position – can trigger a change in the collective bargaining status.



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