

NEWS RELEASE

Arizona Supreme Court
Administrative Office of the Courts



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July 24, 2019

Arizona Firearms and Defensive Tactics Academies Promote Safety and Professionalism

PHOENIX – Pretrial, probation, and parole supervision week takes place each July. Arizona has more than 2000 probation and surveillance officers supervise nearly 85,000 probationers. For officers eligible to carry a firearm, the Administrative Office of the Courts provides a Firearms Academy approximately 15 times each year and in multiple counties. The Academy also conducts an annual train-the-trainer program to develop new instructors. Before being authorized to carry a firearm, judicial branch officers (probation and court security) must first request authorization from their local department and meet all criteria outlined in the Firearms Standards Code section. At a minimum, these criteria include a background check, psychological evaluation, and satisfactorily completing the Defensive Tactics Academy.

Arizona's Firearms Academy originated in 2001, when then-Chief Justice Zlaket established a committee of judges, chief probation officers, juvenile court directors, law enforcement officers, state legislators, probation officers, and surveillance officers to study officer safety issues. The committee developed a comprehensive, statewide Officer Safety Program and three related sections for the Arizona Code of Judicial Administration (ACJA). The approved sections were: Use of Force, Safety Training, and Firearms Standards. An existing code section, Powers and Duties of Officers, was revised to conform to the Officer Safety Program, and a Personnel Practices code section was developed later which included drug testing guidelines.

The first and last days of the week-long Firearms Academy are completed in a classroom. The three days in between are conducted on the weapons range. Officers are tested on both daylight and lowlight qualification courses. After instructor evaluations and a written test on the final day,

participants use an immersive virtual reality simulation for a pass/fail test for participants to show that they possess the proper judgment to carry a firearm. Students who successfully complete the academy can be authorized by their department to carry a firearm. Once armed, officers must complete an annual minimum of 8 hours of training in both defensive tactics and firearms through certified instructors, including qualifying in daylight, lowlight, and judgment scenarios.

Defensive tactics and firearms programs are implemented through trained volunteer instructors. Instructors are primarily probation officers, surveillance officers, and supervisors from throughout Arizona's probation departments. Classes are held regionally to ensure consistency and quality of training to all officers. Typically, a defensive tactics or firearms class has one lead instructor working with four instructors and 16 students. Lead instructors are responsible for maintaining the integrity and statewide consistency of classes.

All adult and juvenile probation and surveillance officers who have direct supervision over probationers must complete a 40-hour Defensive Tactics Academy. The program must address use of force, verbal de-escalation, personal weapons, pressure points, control holds, impact weapons, handcuffing/searching, edged weapon defense, oleoresin capsicum (OC or "pepper") spray, weapons retention, and weapons disarming.

In 2006, Pima County Adult Probation and Maricopa County Adult Probation piloted a TASER program to evaluate the effectiveness and practicality of TASER use. Mohave County Adult Probation joined the pilot program approximately one year later. After successful implementation of the pilot programs, Conducted Electrical Weapons were added to the ACJA in 2013, allowing statewide use of TASERs by probation officers overseeing adult probationers. Arizona's Firearms and Defensive Tactics Academies ensure that judicial branch officers are trained, professional, and receive continuing training to promote professionalism and public safety.

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