



**Pineville Police
Department**



Memo

To: Ryan Spitzer, Town Manager
From: Michael Hudgins, Chief of Police
CC: Roxy McMahon, Senior Administrative Assistant
Date: 10/22/2021
Re: Weapons Qualification Scores

Sir, at your request I looked into why and when we moved our weapons qualification score from the state standard of 70% to 80%. In addition, I will provide you with justifications of why it is prudent to move our qualification scores to the state standard of 70%.

To inquire on why and when our department moved our qualifying scores from the state standard of 70% to 80%, I spoke with three senior employees, Detective Hinebaugh, Captain Copley, and Lieutenant Boyter. I received three different responses on why the change was made and three consistent answers on who made the decision.

Detective Hinebaugh stated the change was made by Retired Captain Calhoun under the authority of Retired Chief Merchant. The reasoning for the change was so employees could exceed expectations. Similarly, Captain Copley, stated the change was initiated by Retired Captain Calhoun under the authority of Retired Chief Merchant. However, he could not recall the rationale for the change. On the other hand, Lieutenant Boyter stated the following in an email: *"It has been several years since we changed at least 10 or more. I know one of the reasons was a study on officers involved in a real shooting drop their accuracy down 20% or more from their qualifications score. We felt that increasing the qualification score would help if we had an OIS the officer would have better odds of hitting the suspect stopping the threat sooner and lower the liability of missed shots."*

Taking a similar route to Lieutenant Boyter, I reviewed several peer-reviewed studies to evaluate the efficacy of our weapons qualifications score. A review of the peer-reviewed research shows police officers' firearm hit accuracy during deadly force encounters is very low and has not improved over the years. For instance, a study in 2006 (Morrison) found the hit rate to be around 20% between the 1970s to the 1990s. Another study in 2003 (Aveni) observed a hit rate of 15%. Finally, the Las Vegas Police Department had hit rates of 44%, 30%, 41%, 23%, 27%, 33%, and 52% from 2008 to 2015.

In another peer-reviewed article, the research showed an officers' ability to hit their target in a citizen confrontation is **not correlated with their qualifications score**. For example, the authors in the article "Police Handgun Qualification: Practical Measure or Aimless Activity?" states: *As to the central issue considered herein – the type and degree of relationship between training operationalized as qualification and observed field performance – Alpert (1989, cited in Geller and Scott, 1992, p. 104) found for the Metro-Dade Police Department that, "there is no relation between shots fired that hit their targets and the officer's qualifying score". In basic agreement, McGee (1981) – then chief firearms instructor*

for the New York City Police Department – **was unable to find a “clear connection” between range scores and bullet hit rates** following his examination of field shootings in the 1970s.

As you may recall, several months ago I instructed our trainers to move towards force on force training, which is the “gold standard” for training officers on how to respond to use of force incidents. The rationale for implementing this training is peer research shows this is the best means to improve use of force decision-making and marksmanship of our officers. For instance, in the article “Acquisition of Marksmanship and Gun Handling Skills Through Basic Law Enforcement Training in an American Police Department” the author stated the following: *The Police Training Institute firearms course consisted mainly of shooting at an immobile target, which is a familiar and predictable environment. This training allowed police recruits to acquire and develop the basic skills of marksmanship and gun handling, as has been demonstrated in this study. These skills are necessary but **not sufficient for good performance in an actual shooting situation**. A real-life shooting incident requires four major skills: (1) the ability to handle a ‘shoot/don’t shoot decision, (2) marksmanship and gun handling skills, (3) the ability to shoot at an unpredictable and moving target, and (4) the ability to perform those skills in a potentially life-threatening, high stress, situation.*

In summary, weapons qualifications are good for basic skills of marksmanship, however, peer research clearly shows that weapons qualification scores are not good predictors of who will shoot well in deadly force encounters and weapons qualifications are an insufficient means in developing the skills necessary to perform well in a shooting incident. Internally, we are employing the best practice to improve decision making and marksmanship during use of force encounters, force on force training.

Based upon independent peer-reviewed research, there is not a bonified reason to raise the weapons qualification scores above that of the state. Based upon this, I feel it is justified to move the department’s qualification score to the state standard of 70%.