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MITIGATING THE CLAIM: BUILDING EFFECTIVE HR & PUBLIC SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS

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Mitigating the Claim: Building Effective HR and Public Safety Partnerships

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Today's Goals

- Identify cultural and organizational barriers limiting HR–public safety collaboration
- Apply strategies that help build communication, trust, and shared accountability from a pool perspective
- Identify leadership and risk practices that cut fiscal loss and improve outcomes for members and pools







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HR Out of the Loop...



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Cultural and Organizational Barriers

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Barriers to Collaboration

- Culture
- Lexicon
- 24/7/365 Operations
- Legal Perspective



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Two Cultures, One Exposure

Human Resources

- Policy and legal compliance
- Consistency across departments
- Documentation as protection
- Often seen as outside the mission

Public Safety

- Operational urgency and command
- Peer loyalty and internal norms
- Discipline handled in house
- Often sees HR as a barrier

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Understanding Public Safety History



Sir Robert Peel, 2nd Baronet, by John Linnell (public domain), via Wikimedia Commons

Police Departments

1635 – Boston – first "Night Watch" established

1825 – Texas Rangers – first statewide law enforcement agency in the US

1829 – Sir Robert Peel (and his principles)

2015 – 21st Century Policing Report



Image Credit: AI-generated illustration created with Microsoft Copilot

Modern Firefighting

1736 – Philadelphia volunteers

1829 – Steam Powered Engines

1853 – First Municipal Fire Brigade in Cincinnati

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Important Dates for Public Safety Professionals

Encouraging members to honor these events

- Police Week – Observed annually in May, centered around Peace Officers Memorial Day on May 15th
- National Fire Service Day – October 4th
- 2026 National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend: Each year, the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation carries out a responsibility entrusted to it by Congress: to honor America's fallen firefighters at the national level and to stand with the families they leave behind
  - Next year (2027) – May 1, 2
- Hiring, Promotions, Significant Family Events

Do your member's elected bodies recognize these events?

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Why This Matters to Pools

- It matters to the pool because it matters to your members' public safety professionals
- Cultural and organizational barriers — real or perceived — limit HR outreach and pool influence
- Have you or your members' HR staff ever gone on a ride-along?
- Seek to understand (nobody gets us) — credibility is what makes risk recommendations land across member disciplines



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The Properly Disqualified Applicant Never Becomes a Claim



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Strategies

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Linguistic Agility in Four Languages

Multilingual Pool Staff: HR, Law Enforcement, Fire, and Risk Management

Human Resources

- Employment Law
- Policy
- Labor Relations
- Benefits
- Compliance

Law Enforcement

- Use of Force
- Chain of Command
- Investigations
- Patrol Operations
- Officer Safety

Fire

- Incident Command
- Apparatus
- Mutual Aid
- Fireground
- 24/hour schedules

Risk Management

- Claims and Exposure
- Incurred Value
- Coverage and Contracts
- Loss Control



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Some Trends

- In the past 12 months, 69% of legal and HR professionals said their organization experienced claims made by employees alleging discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or other employment-related issues
- 42% of respondents expect the frequency of employment-related claims at their organization to increase over the next year

QBE North America's Employment Practices Liability Report - 2025

Framing the Conversation: Impacts to Officer Safety and Decision



Image Credit: AI-generated illustration created with Microsoft Copilot

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Framing the Conversation: Impacts to Fireground Safety



Image Credit: AI-generated illustration created with Microsoft Copilot

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When HR and Public Safety Work in Silos

- Outdated policies go unchallenged
- Practice drifts from written policy
- Communication fails at critical moments
- Documentation too thin to defend
- Issues escalate before the pool hears

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Why do These Things Keep Happening?

- Hiring shortcuts and thin backgrounds (Because we need someone to answer the 911 call)
- Fitness for duty and ADA missteps (Because we don’t know)
- Discipline applied unevenly by rank (We like you, but not you)
- Complaints investigated by the wrong people (I’ve got your back)
- Records that cannot support the decision (I’ve got a feeling about this)

The Wandering Officer

NEWS

Menasha PD hired a wandering officer. Now he's been arrested and the city could get sued.

April 28, 2026

Deputy charged with murder had previous employment issues

Also discharged from Army for serious misconduct

Fired and hired: KHOU 11 Investigates 'wandering officers' in the Houston area

KHOU 11 Investigates found nearly 200 Houston-area officers who resigned or were fired for misconduct were later hired somewhere else.



UNION COUNTY

Former Salisbury K-9 officer involved in controversial video hired by Union County Sheriff's Office

by: Ciara Lankford
Posted: Aug 11, 2025 / 10:32 AM EDT
Updated: Aug 29, 2025 / 06:18 PM EDT

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What Pools Can Do Next?

- Convene HR and public safety leaders together
- Offer joint training
- Audit hiring and documentation practices within best practices assessments
- Frame risk advice in mission terms
- Encourage or require early reporting
- Upstream interventions
- Tailored grants

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Promoting Organizational Leadership





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Retention

What is the value of retaining public safety personnel who understand organizational culture, unique community and demographic needs, other public safety networks, geography, bureaucracy?

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Call the Pool Early

The cheapest claim is the one prevented

Bring the pool in when the issue surfaces, not after the tort claim notice arrives

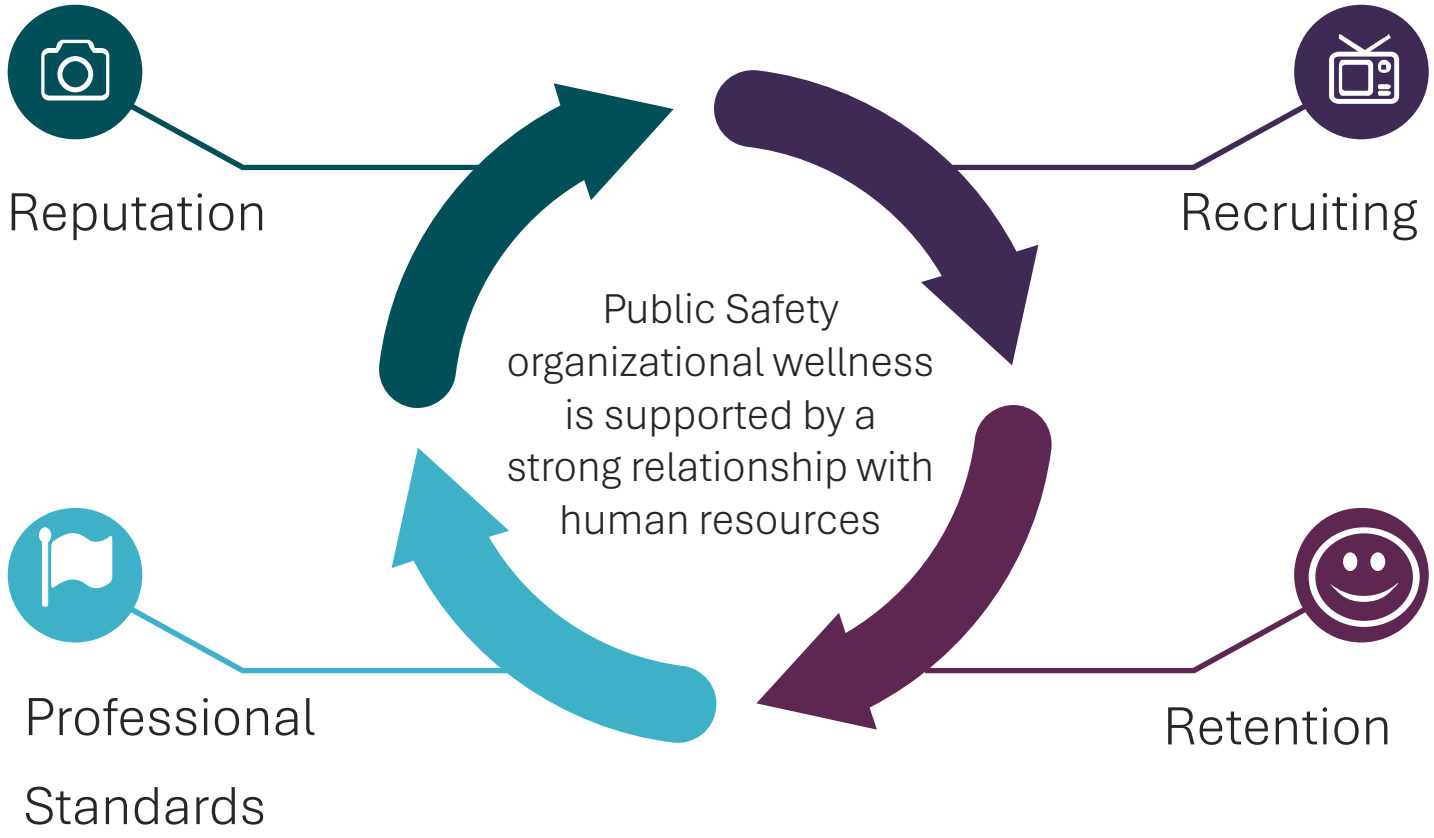
Early involvement preserves options and credibility



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Seeing Things as a Cycle of Public Safety

TIP: Good HR practices help retain the best employees and free up time and resources otherwise spent on recruiting, hiring, and disciplinary matters. Would your chiefs and sheriffs rather focus on their primary operational mission – or everything else?



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Promotion of Wellness Initiatives

- Culturally Appropriate for Public Safety
- Helping with data to support upstream interventions to reduce:
  - Sick Leave Usage
  - Injuries
- Fitness Incentives
- Destigmatizing Mental Health Care
- Benefit Fairs
- ServeStrong!

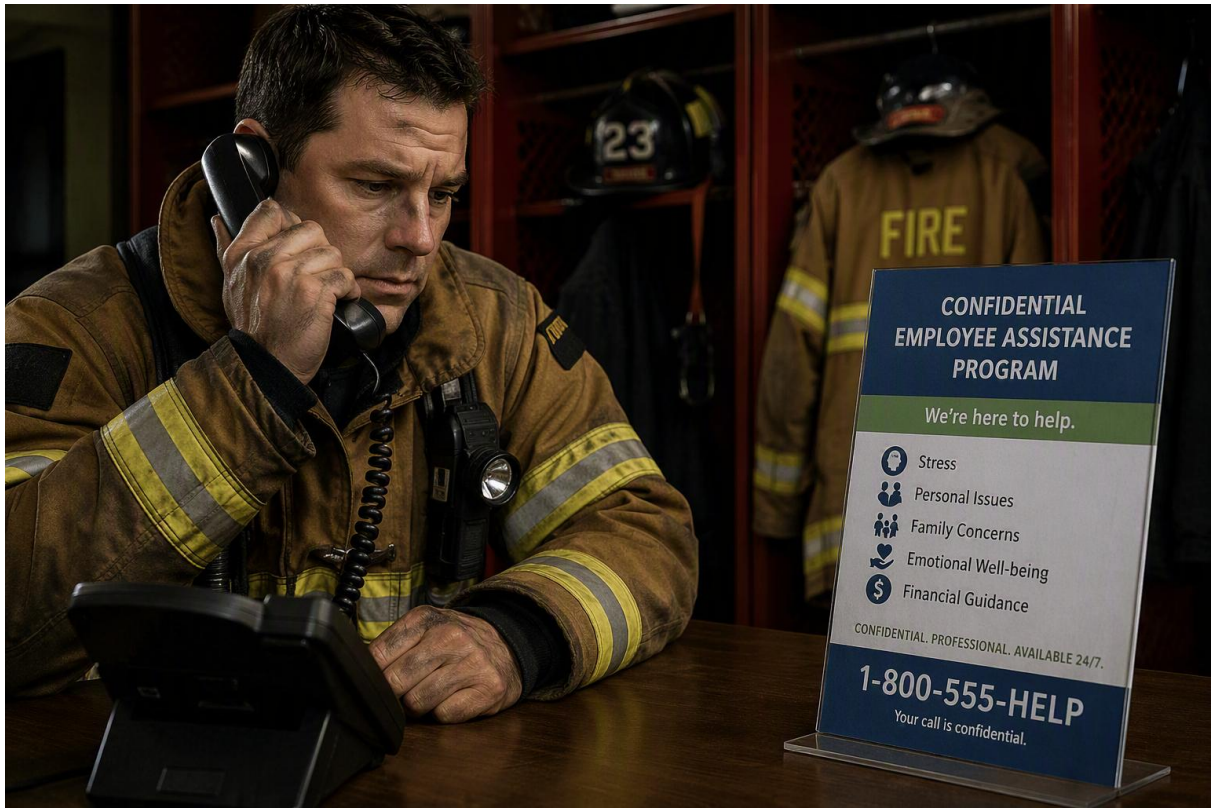


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Staffing Issues



Image Credit: AI-generated illustration created with Microsoft Copilot

- Help with CBA Compliance
- Help with FLSA Compliance
- Planning, Planning, Planning
- Making Fiscal Arguments
  - Straight Time vs. Overtime
  - Sick Leave Data
  - Workers Compensation Data
- Creative Thinking…

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Resources for Staffing

1. *A Performance-Based Approach to Police Staffing and Allocation*
   - This is a U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) guide which provides background on staffing issues and a step-by-step approach for an agency to assess patrol staffing needs
2. *Essentials for Leaders – A Performance-Based Approach to Police Staffing and Allocation*
   - This is a summary of the above document – only eight pages
3. *An Analysis of Police Department Staffing: How Many Officers Do You Really Need?*
   - This is an ICMA white paper on the topic – mostly background on the topic but makes an argument for workload-centric staffing decisions/analysis
4. *Reframing the Police Staffing Challenge: Strategies for Meeting Workload Demand*
   - A January 2022 article reaffirming the workload-based assessment approach to staffing

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Promoting Tabletop Exercise Ideas

- Our staffing drops by 25% (police or fire). What services do we start to suspend, and which personnel can be reassigned to operational duties?
- Sergeant Jones (PD) or Lieutenant Smith (FD) calls the chief at 7:00 a.m. reporting that one of their personnel showed up to work and one of their co-workers “thinks” they smell alcohol on them
- Officer Smith reported to her supervisor that she is getting headaches when looking at the mobile data computer in her patrol car during graveyard shift
- Firefighter Johnson reported to his supervisor that his crew has been engaged in racially-based microaggressions since he was assigned to his shift

TIP: It’s much easier to consider these situations, ground-truth assumptions and actions, identify policy shortcomings, and understand roles and responsibilities long before the event happens. Hoping these do not happen is an ineffective strategy.

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Conclusion

- What matters to your members' public safety employees should matter to HR and to the pool
- Common interests abound - accountability, legitimacy, and fewer preventable claims
- Pools are uniquely positioned to bridge the HR/public safety gap, reduce fiscal loss, and protect both member and pool resources
- HR helps put out fires reducing risk to the member, the pool, and ultimately the communities they serve



Image Credit: AI-generated illustration created with Microsoft Copilot

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