

RCW 43.101.095 Peace and corrections officer certification—

Background investigation. (1) As a condition of employment, all Washington peace officers and corrections officers are required to obtain certification as a peace officer or corrections officer or exemption therefrom and maintain certification as required by this chapter and the rules of the commission.

(2) (a) Any applicant who has been offered a conditional offer of employment as a peace officer or reserve officer, offered a conditional offer of employment as a corrections officer after July 1, 2021, or offered a conditional offer of employment as a limited authority Washington peace officer who if hired would qualify as a peace officer as defined by RCW 43.101.010 after July 1, 2023, must submit to a background investigation to determine the applicant's suitability for employment. This requirement applies to any person whose certification has lapsed as a result of a break of more than 24 consecutive months in the officer's service for a reason other than being recalled into military service. Employing agencies may only make a conditional offer of employment pending completion of the background check and shall verify in writing to the commission that they have complied with all background check requirements prior to making any nonconditional offer of employment.

(b) The background check must include:

(i) A check of criminal history, any national decertification index, commission records, and all disciplinary records by any previous law enforcement or correctional employer, including complaints or investigations of misconduct and the reason for separation from employment. Law enforcement or correctional agencies that previously employed the applicant shall disclose employment information within 30 days of receiving a written request from the employing agency conducting the background investigation, including the reason for the officer's separation from the agency. Complaints or investigations of misconduct must be disclosed regardless of the result of the investigation or whether the complaint was unfounded;

(ii) Inquiry to the local prosecuting authority in any jurisdiction in which the applicant has served as to whether the applicant is on any potential impeachment disclosure list;

(iii) Inquiry into whether the applicant has any past or present affiliations with extremist organizations, as defined by the commission;

(iv) A review of the applicant's social media accounts;

(v) Verification of immigrant or citizenship status as either a citizen of the United States of America, lawful permanent resident, or deferred action for childhood arrivals recipient;

(vi) A psychological examination administered by a psychiatrist licensed in the state of Washington pursuant to chapter 18.71 RCW or a psychologist licensed in the state of Washington pursuant to chapter 18.83 RCW, in compliance with standards established in rules of the commission;

(vii) A polygraph or similar assessment administered by an experienced professional with appropriate training and in compliance with standards established in rules of the commission; and

(viii) Except as otherwise provided in this section, any test or assessment to be administered as part of the background investigation shall be administered in compliance with standards established in rules of the commission.

(c) The commission may establish standards for the background check requirements in this section and any other preemployment background check requirement that may be imposed by an employing agency or the commission.

(d) The employing law enforcement agency may require that each person who is required to take a psychological examination and a polygraph or similar test pay a portion of the testing fee based on the actual cost of the test or \$400, whichever is less. Employing agencies may establish a payment plan if they determine that the person does not readily have the means to pay the testing fee.

(3) (a) The commission shall allow a peace officer or corrections officer to retain status as a certified peace officer or corrections officer as long as the officer: (i) Timely meets the basic training requirements, or is exempted therefrom, in whole or in part, under RCW 43.101.200 or under rule of the commission; (ii) timely meets or is exempted from any other requirements under this chapter as administered under the rules adopted by the commission; (iii) is not denied certification by the commission under this chapter; and (iv) has not had certification suspended or revoked by the commission.

(b) The commission shall certify peace officers who are limited authority Washington peace officers employed on or before July 1, 2023. Thereafter, the commission may revoke certification pursuant to this chapter.

(4) As a condition of certification, a peace officer or corrections officer must, on a form devised or adopted by the commission, authorize the release to the employing agency and commission of the officer's personnel files, including disciplinary, termination, civil or criminal investigation, or other records or information that are directly related to a certification matter or decertification matter before the commission. The peace officer or corrections officer must also consent to and facilitate a review of the officer's social media accounts, however, consistent with RCW 49.44.200, the officer is not required to provide login information. The release of information may not be delayed, limited, or precluded by any agreement or contract between the officer, or the officer's union, and the entity responsible for the records or information.

(5) The employing agency and commission are authorized to receive criminal history record information that includes nonconviction data for any purpose associated with employment or certification under this chapter. Dissemination or use of nonconviction data for purposes other than that authorized in this section is prohibited.

(6) For a national criminal history records check, the commission shall require fingerprints be submitted and searched through the Washington state patrol identification and criminal history section. The Washington state patrol shall forward the fingerprints to the federal bureau of investigation.

(7) Prior to certification, the employing agency shall certify to the commission that the agency has completed the background check, no information has been found that would disqualify the applicant from certification, and the applicant is suitable for employment as a peace officer or corrections officer. [2024 c 330 s 10; 2023 c 168 s 3; 2021 c 323 s 8; 2018 c 32 s 5; 2011 c 234 s 2; 2009 c 139 s 1; 2008 c 74 s 8; 2005 c 434 s 2; 2001 c 167 s 2.]

Finding—2008 c 74: See note following RCW 51.04.024.