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Racine police summit to explore alternative methods to prevent officer-involved shootings

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PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

Training Officer Rene Gonzalez, lead firearms instructor at the Madison Police Department academy, directs a group of recruits through the department's shooting range.

A group of experts in high-risk fields, including policing, aviation and medicine will convene at a summit Tuesday through Thursday in Racine to discuss alternative models to analyzing officer-involved shootings and other critical incidents.

The University of Wisconsin Law School and the Johnson Foundation are hosting the event, which is called Best Practices for Review and Prevention of Deadly Incidents in High-Hazard Professions: Lessons for Police. The summit will take place at the Wingspread center in Racine.

University of Wisconsin Law School Associate Professor Keith Findley called the summit "solution seeking."



"The goal is to explore, with stakeholders in the system, alternative ways of preventing deadly incidents involved in policing, so we can learn from the way other high hazard professions have examined deadly incidents in their own field," Findley said.

Michael Bell is the father of a police shooting victim and has since become an activist on police and community issues since the 2004 incident in Kenosha. He argues that law enforcement officers should use an external learning model that studies all the factors involved in an incident. The goal is to move away from determining fault to identifying the causes involved, including the officer's decision, communication issues or even design flaws in equipment.

"The death of a citizen is such a huge emotional event for the officer and the citizen that most of the people don't get beyond that," said Bell, who was the driving force behind a Wisconsin law that requires outside agencies to lead investigations into officer-involved deaths. "This moves it to a higher viewpoint."

After those causes are determined, Bell said there should be a mechanism to disseminate those lessons to other law enforcement agencies to hopefully prevent similar incidents and a database to track successful methods.

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A city work group on policing highlighted the National Transportation Safety Board's method in its report of 13 recommendations to improve the relationship between the police and community. If the report is approved, the Common Council would direct an ad hoc committee on policing to provide a plan to implement a “root cause analysis process” within the Madison Police Department.

Wisconsin representatives expected to attend the event include leaders from the Wisconsin Professional Police Association, the Wisconsin District Attorneys Association, the Badger State Sheriffs Association, the Milwaukee Police Association, insurance leaders and the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association.

WPPA Executive Director Jim Palmer said no agency is practicing this approach to analyzing critical incidents, including officer-involved shootings. A WPPA staff attorney will attend the conference, Palmer said.



Palmer said Wisconsin could benefit by using a broader approach.

“I think it’s definitely worth exploring seriously because I think again, just using the example of an officer-involved death, they’re very controversial and they impact wherever they occur very deeply,” Palmer said. “Unfortunately, ... very little attention is paid beyond looking at the officer and the individual.”

Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch and four state legislators are also expected to attend the event.

Other expected attendees include representatives from NASA, the NTSB, Harvard Medical School, the Police Foundation, the Police Executive Research Forum, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the California Chiefs of Police Association, the Major Cities Chiefs Association and the Major Counties Sheriffs Association.

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Abigail Becker

Abigail Becker joined The Capital Times in 2016, where she primarily covers city and county government. She previously worked for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and the Wisconsin State Journal.



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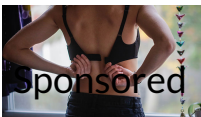
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