

CIVILIAN EXECUTIVES IN LE

“Making up-front investments in closing operational knowledge gaps will help build a cohesive and high-functioning team.”

The hallmark of success for law enforcement is the commitment to maintaining a low crime rate, increasing community satisfaction and sustaining a high rate of organizational and individual compliance with all laws and policies. To meet these goals in our increasingly complex operating environment, law enforcement agencies may recruit and retain civilian professionals who are specialists with diverse skill sets. The keys to hiring and effectively integrating civilian executives are education and alignment.

To integrate civilian executives who are experts in fields like law, project management, media affairs, data science and crime analysis, agencies must first ensure those leaders have access to a holistic education in both organizational operations and the art and science of police work. I spent the first nine years of my career representing the City of New York and its police officers and officials in federal civil rights cases. That experience gave me a deep understanding of law enforcement policy, training, tactics, management and strategy. It also gave me the opportunity to understand and defend police officers and the policing profession. This background made for a smoother transition into non-attorney senior leadership roles in two of the nation’s largest law enforcement agencies.

Additionally, there are foundational relationship questions the uniformed command staff should discuss with a potential executive hire to ensure alignment with the agency’s needs and goals. It is important for everyone in a paramilitary organization to understand title, rank integration and span of control. In New York, we have commissioners who can either be former sworn or civilian professionals. In other jurisdictions, civilians hold titles more common in the private sector, like chief of staff, chief operating officer, chief technology officer or executive director. Once an agency has identified a title that is commensurate with a scope of responsibility, the title should have a rank equivalent so uniformed members understand if they are working with a subordinate, peer or senior leader.

Lastly, it is important to be clear about whether the new hire will be in an advisory role (e.g., a general counsel, advisor to the chief, etc.) or if they will have a staff and span of control within the organization. A high level of communication and clear expectations to foster alignment are prerequisites to a successful leadership team. Civilian executives may be uniquely suited to partner with sworn leaders to ensure your law enforcement agency is as innovative, efficient, effective and equitable as we are in Suffolk County, New York.

Elizabeth M. Daitz is the assistant commissioner of police for the Suffolk County (New York) Police Department. She previously served as executive director, civil litigation and executive director, strategic initiatives for the NYPD. From 2019–2020, she served as a White House Fellow in the Office of the Chief of Staff to the President, during which she drafted and implemented the president’s executive order “Safe Policing for Safe Communities.” She began her career at the Office of the Corporation Counsel of the City of New York, where she handled multiple high-profile federal civil rights cases.

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