

ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

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WHITE PAPER

Public Safety Workforce Development Policy for Island and Pacific Territory Communities

*Recruitment, Retention, Training Access, and Wellness in
Geographically Isolated Public Safety Environments*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Public safety workforce development in island and Pacific territory communities faces a constellation of structural challenges that mainland workforce development policy frameworks were not designed to address — geographic isolation from training centers, cost-of-living compensation misalignment, cultural stigma barriers to wellness support, and workforce irreplaceability constraints.**
- **These challenges are not individual problems requiring individual solutions. They are a system of interdependent structural conditions that reinforce each other and require integrated policy responses.**
- **The training access gap — the inability of island law enforcement and emergency management personnel to access specialized training concentrated in continental locations — compounds over careers, producing accumulated expertise deficits that affect investigative quality, emergency management effectiveness, and officer safety.**
- **First responder wellness in island communities faces a dual barrier that mainland wellness program designs do not address: geographic isolation limiting behavioral health provider access, and the cultural stigma dynamics of small island communities where help-seeking behavior has social visibility that large metropolitan environments do not produce.**

A detective in a small Pacific Island territory agency identified a pattern of financial crime indicators in a case she was investigating — indicators suggesting a sophisticated money laundering operation beyond her agency's investigative experience. The nearest financial crime investigation training program was offered by the FBI's field office in Honolulu — a flight away, with training that her agency's budget could not cover for the week-long program. The investigation was closed without resolution.¹

I. The Interconnected Workforce Challenge

Geographic Training Isolation

The specialized training that island law enforcement and emergency management personnel most need — financial crime investigation, cybercrime, human trafficking interdiction, advanced emergency management — is concentrated in continental training locations that require multi-day travel, accommodation, and per diem expenses that small island agency budgets cannot routinely absorb.² The accumulated expertise deficit across island law enforcement and emergency management communities represents a significant

public safety capacity gap that no amount of locally available basic training can close — because the expertise most needed in complex cases is precisely the expertise that requires advanced training available only in continental locations.

Cultural Stigma and Wellness Access

First responder mental health in island communities faces two compounding barriers. The first is geographic: behavioral health providers with law enforcement trauma specialization are concentrated in continental locations.³ The second is cultural: in small island communities where professional and personal social networks overlap substantially, help-seeking behavior by first responders has social visibility that large metropolitan environments do not produce. An officer in a 2,000-person metropolitan department who accesses the EAP is one of hundreds who may do so. An officer in a 60-person Pacific Island agency who accesses the EAP may find that their help-seeking behavior becomes known within the agency and community within days.

ISPI's practitioner analysis identifies this social visibility dynamic as the primary barrier to wellness program utilization in small island law enforcement agencies — not cultural attitudes toward mental health care, but the rational assessment that help-seeking in a small community has social consequences that help-seeking in a large, anonymous organization does not.

II. The ISPI Island Public Safety Workforce Development Framework

Component 1: Virtual Training Infrastructure Investment

The training access gap requires infrastructure investment as its primary remedy. Island law enforcement and emergency management agencies need live virtual training delivery platforms, high-bandwidth connectivity infrastructure, and virtual training program development by federal training providers that produces outcomes equivalent to in-person continental training.

Component 2: Shared Training Cooperative

A Pacific Island and Hawaii Public Safety Training Cooperative — modeled on comparable shared services arrangements in other small jurisdiction contexts — can significantly reduce per-agency training costs through bulk purchasing, shared training development, and coordinated training delivery that eliminates duplicative investment across agencies serving adjacent communities.

Component 3: Confidential Wellness Access Architecture

The cultural stigma barrier requires a structural solution — not an awareness campaign. ISPI's wellness access framework routes behavioral health access entirely outside the organizational and community social network — through

external provider relationships with no connection to the agency, the community, or any social network in which the responder's help-seeking behavior could become visible. Genuine confidentiality, not nominal confidentiality.

III. Policy Recommendations

1. Establish a Pacific Island and Hawaii Public Safety Training Cooperative funded through reformed federal workforce development grants.
2. Mandate virtual training delivery options for all federal law enforcement and emergency management training programs accessible to state and local agencies.
3. Fund confidential wellness access architecture for island and Pacific territory public safety agencies through FEMA and DOJ grants specifically designed for small agency, geographically isolated environments.
4. Reform federal public safety workforce development grant allocation formulas to incorporate island cost-of-living premiums, geographic training access barriers, and small agency scale inefficiency factors.

IV. Conclusion

The interconnected structural conditions that produce public safety workforce deficits in island and Pacific territory communities cannot be addressed through isolated interventions. They require the integrated policy response that ISPI's Island Public Safety Workforce Development Framework provides. ISPI accepts commissions for workforce development policy research, training program design, and wellness infrastructure planning. Contact ISPIGlobal@proton.me or visit ispiglobal.com/commission.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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The Island Security Policy Institute (ISPI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Honolulu, Hawaii. ISPI produces practitioner-led research, policy analysis, training programs, and commissioned research on public safety, emergency preparedness, insider threat, and security policy for island and coastal communities worldwide. ISPI is registered as a federal contractor on SAM.gov under NAICS 541720. Warren Pulley, Founder & Executive Director.

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