

UTAH DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS' CORRECTIONAL OFFICER  
TRAINING POLICIES AND RELATED COSTS

A REPORT TO THE  
EXECUTIVE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE AND THE EXECUTIVE  
OFFICES AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

OFFICE OF THE LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ANALYST  
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## **SUMMARY**

The Department of Correction (UDC) requires 783 (including 81 vacant positions) correctional officers (COs) to fulfill its mission of protecting the public's safety by securing incarcerated felons. Part of the difficulty of managing the UDC results from a high turnover rate for COs—as much as 13 percent year. At any given time, vacancies for COs may be as high as 90 positions and new officers are being trained all of the time.

New correctional officer trainees are required to undergo 14 weeks of Police Officers' Standards and Training (POST) certification training for COs from the POST academy. In addition, all trainees must pass an examination demonstrating POST skills competency to be certified as a correctional officer. Certified COs have legal jurisdiction in prisons and jails but do not have statewide jurisdiction as does a POST certified officer.

In order to curb turnover, the UDC has instituted a trainee contract requiring the officer trainee to repay the cost of POST certification if they decide to terminate employment within the first two years of service. The employee must pay for the training costs on a prorated basis and within six month of ending employment with the department. In addition the UDC usually handles their own in-service training for their COs. UCA 63-6-201 requires that Utah Peace Officers are required to complete 40 hours of in-service training annually to maintain POST certification.

## **PURPOSE OF UDC CORRECTIONAL OFFICER TRAINING POLICY STUDY**

Over the last few years, UDC has indicated that turnover of COs was most often a result of low pay. The Department notes that competition for COs is fierce and that County Jails are often paying their officers far more than the State resulting in additional high turnover rates in the first few years of service.

The Legislature has been generous to the Department regarding CO pay in the last two years. In the 2006 General Session (GS), the Legislature appropriated \$3,600,000—in addition to COLAs—to raise CO starting pay from \$12.14 per hour to \$13.26 per hour. Also, in the 2007 GS, the Legislature funded \$2,520,000 for all UDC employees, including COs, with three or more years of service for a step increase plus the COLA. Any remaining discretionary funding will be used for additional raises and to address salary compression issues. Despite these CO pay increases, some counties still pay more than the State raising questions on whether these counties use jail reimbursement funds to raise starting CO pay.

The Analyst wanted to determine the facts and make recommendations regarding UDC Human Resources Policy while also addressing the issue of CO pay. This report examines UDC HR policies regarding training and educational assistance and those from other state agencies, details turnover data since 2004, and estimates costs to the Department for CO turnover.

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

The Analyst will examine and analyze the following issues in the Discussion and Analysis Section:

1. UDC POST Training and Education Human Resources' Policies,
2. Comparison of UDC Policy to Other State Agencies' Polices,
3. Correctional Officer Turnover Data, and

4. UDC Costs to Replace Departing Correctional Officers.

**UDC POST Training and Education Human Resources' Policies**

The Analyst has reviewed the Department of Corrections' training reimbursement contract policy and has determined that the current contract may need strengthening to encourage trainees to remain with the Department longer. The trainee contract requires the officer to repay the cost of POST certification (up to \$2,670) if they decide to terminate employment within the first two years of service. The employee must pay for the training costs on a prorated basis and within six month of ending employment with the department. According to the contract, the Department also has the right withhold funds from the terminating CO if necessary. However, the real cost of training a CO is far greater than the \$2,670 training cost reimbursement required by the Department. Training cost estimates will be detailed later in this report.

The Analyst notes that since 2004, 90 correctional officers (40 percent of the total COs that left the UDC) left the department before the two year stipulation in the trainee contract. The Analyst does not believe that the training overhead repayment is sufficient to deter a CO from terminating his/her employment before the initial two-year period and is not effective in retaining staff.

On the other hand, The UDC education assistance policy states: "Members shall contractually agree to repay all educational assistance received, if the member's employment with the state is ended either voluntarily or involuntarily, within 24 months of receipt of educational assistance benefits or reimbursement. The amount owed shall be calculated on a pro-rated basis." The educational assistance policy requires a terminating employee to reimburse all of the funds received if they leave the job before the two-year period after receiving said funds. That said, the Analyst believes that the estimated training policy costs detailed on page 5 should be increased in the trainee contract to reduce CO turnover during the first two years as noted in the chart on page 4. The Analyst considers the POST certification for correctional officers to be much like an educational degree because of the certification's statewide portability and ability it gives to an individual to be gainfully employed.

**Comparison of UDC Policy to Other State Agencies' Policy**

The Analyst has provided the following table to compare UDC training and education policies with other agencies throughout the state.

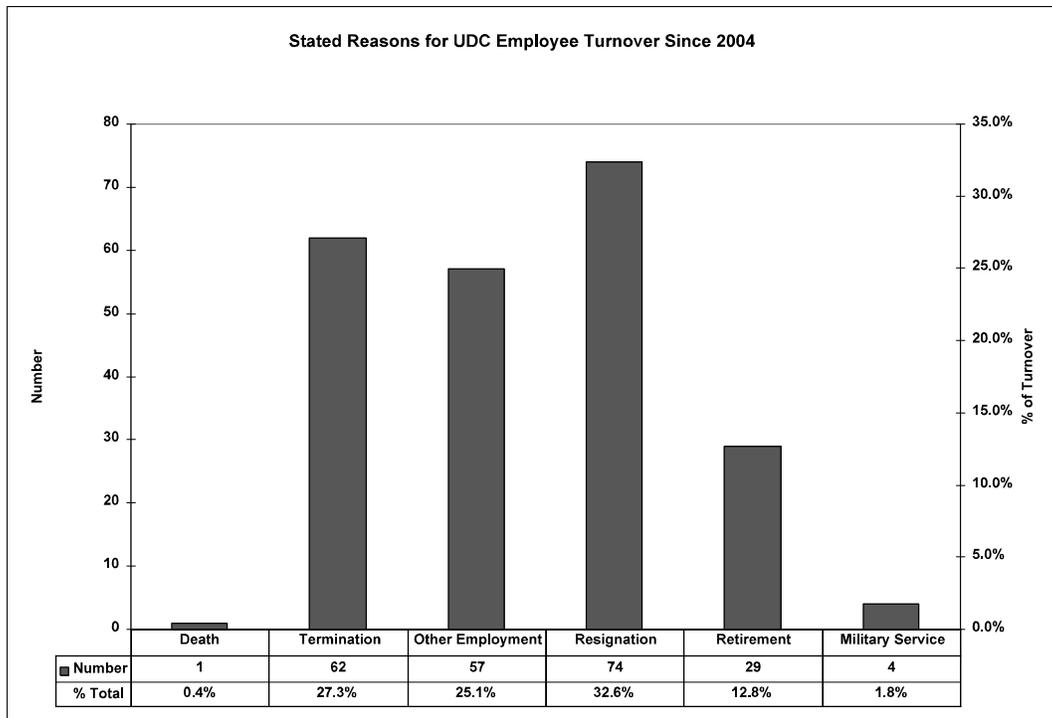
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Comparison of UDC Training and Educational Policies to Other State Agency Policies										Natural	
Agency	UDC Training	UDC Education	Human Services	Public Safety	SITLA	Insurance	Agriculture	Workforce Services	UDOT	Resources	Tax
Prepayment for Training/Education	X			X*							
Tuition Reimbursement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Salary/Wages Paid during Training/Education	X			X*							
Employees Must Use Own Time		X	X	X	Not Stated in Policy	Not Stated in Policy	X	X	X	X	Not Stated in Policy
Maximum Payment Per Year	\$ 2,670	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500	\$ 1,500	\$ 5,250	\$ 5,250	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,625	\$ 3,500	\$ 5,250	\$ 5,250
Executive Director May Approve Funds in Excess of Maximum	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Work Commitment Time Requirement After Training or Course (Months)	24	24	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Pro Rate Repayment of Training/Education Funds if Employee Terminates Employment Early	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Repayment Period (Months)	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Right to Deduct Funds From Check in HR Policy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not Stated in Policy	Not Stated in Policy	Yes	Not Stated in Policy	Not Stated in Policy	Yes

The UDC training and education policies are quite similar to other agency policies except in one major area—the UDC requires employees that are trained or receive educational assistance to stay for 24 months rather than the 12 months in other policies.

## Correctional Officer Turnover Data

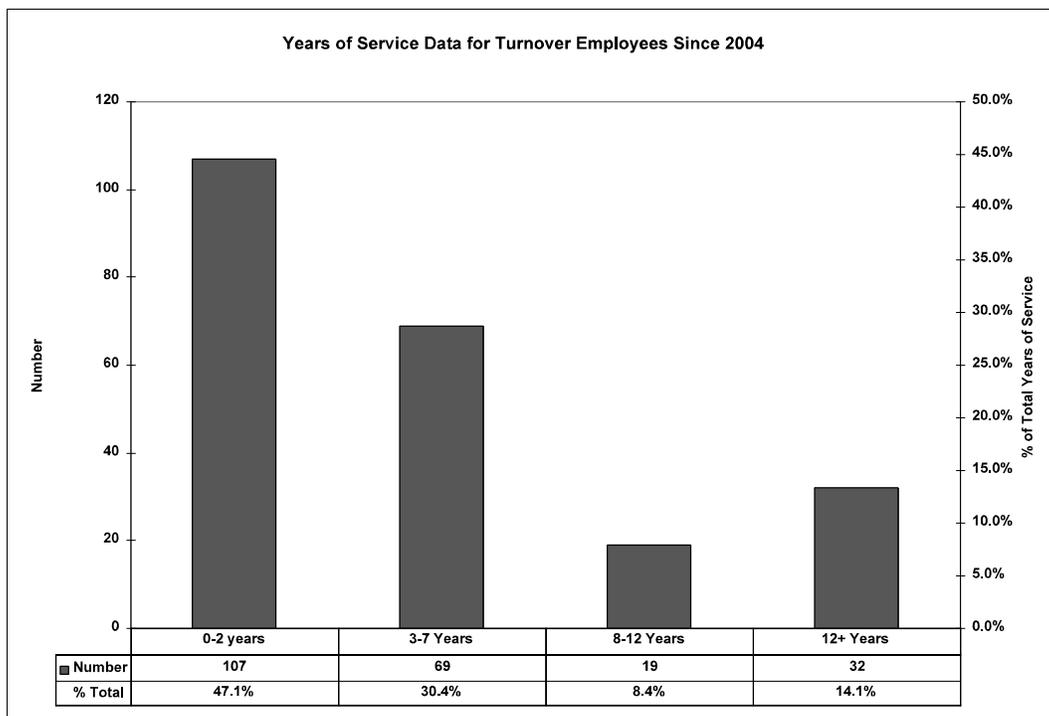
The following graphs detail the stated reasons for employee turnover and when COs typically leave the Department of Corrections. The Department has noted in Legislative meetings that they lose many of their younger COs to the County Jails, Highway Patrol, or other law enforcement agencies. For example, 39 Highway Patrolmen (Out of 470 Total UHP Officers) used to work for UDC as COs.



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As noted in the chart on page three, resignation, termination, and other employment constitute over 85 percent of the turnover since FY 2004. The data provided by UDC Human Resources might suggest that the Department has fired a large number of COs, but this is not the case. Although some of the individuals that UDC HR classified as “terminated” were in fact fired, most of these individuals simply quit without a resignation. Based on discussions with the Department, most COs are leaving to take other employment but the Department’s own data does not support that conclusion well. For example, when examining the turnover data, there were 63 different reasons COs left the UDC which makes it hard to determine the specific reasons why.

The Analyst recommends that the Department of Corrections specify 10 or fewer reasons, define each of the categories, and list them in a drop-down menu for employee turnover data. Also, the Analyst recommends that UDC HR specify where former COs are taking new jobs since the current data indicates only five specific cases of where the officer went. By so doing, the Department’s data will be more consistent and specific.



The UDC has indicated that turnover has been and continues to be a problem. As shown above, UDC Co turnover is greatest within the first seven years. If UDC can keep them past seven years there is very little turnover except for those that retire. The Analyst recommends that the UDC conduct exit interviews with departing COs to determine the primary reasons for turnover. If compensation is the primary reason that younger COs are leaving for other employment, further funding action may be required by the Legislature since training costs can be substantial for the department as noted in the next section.

### **UDC Costs to Replace Departing Correctional Officers (COs)**

The following table estimates overall training costs to the Department of Corrections for the last three fiscal years. Overall costs for FY 2007 will be finalized in June and are fiscal year-to-date. As a reminder, the trainee contract obligates the CO for costs noted in the first row of the table—other real

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costs to the UDC such as the employee's salary and benefits, overtime paid to officers to cover the trainee's shift at the prison, and the annual cost of for training COs for turnover positions are totaled below.

UDC Initial Training Cost Estimate to Replace Turnover Employees*	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007
CO Training Course Cost	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,670
Trainee Salary Cost During Course (14 wks. * \$ Per Hr.)	\$ 6,457	\$ 6,798	\$ 7,426
Salary-driven Benefits while Training	\$ 2,873	\$ 3,025	\$ 3,304
Overtime Costs (\$ paid to staff prison while CO trains)	\$ 7,748	\$ 8,158	\$ 8,911
Per Capita Cost to UDC For Training	\$ 19,578	\$ 20,482	\$ 22,311
UDC Total Cost of Training (# of Trainees per Year * Per Capita \$)	\$ 1,409,623	\$ 2,109,607	\$ 1,160,149

\* Analysis does not include non-salary driven benefits such as health or ANALYST

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Analyst recommends the following changes be considered:

1. The Department of Corrections increase the training cost amount to be repaid by terminating COs within the 24 month contract to further reduce CO turnover.
2. The Department of Corrections improve their HR data so that accurate reasons for CO turnover can be determined as outlined in this report. Exit survey information from departing employees could help the UDC and the Legislature understand where COs are going.
3. If COs are leaving the Department for other law enforcement jobs because of pay (as determined by the improved turnover data in the future), the Legislature may want to consider additional funding. One idea to reduce transfers from the UDC to the Highway Patrol would be to tie starting state Correctional Officer pay with Utah Highway Patrol starting pay in statute.