



Is The DWI Of Off-Duty Law Enforcement A Blue Wall of Silence Or a Job Related Stress Issue?

By Damon K. Jones

The *News12* report entitled “*The Blue Wall of Silence*” was misleading to the communities of Westchester County. The viewers were left to assume that the four off-duty law enforcement professionals had been stopped by an officer, then let go, to later get in an automobile accident. These officers who had accidents, are accused of DWI and, like any citizen, are entitled to have their day in court.



The pressures of the badge put officers at risk for high blood pressure, insomnia, increased levels of destructive stress hormones, heart problems, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), suicide and alcoholism.

By no means are we trying to say that the off-duty law enforcement professionals in recent accidents are alcoholics. We also can't allow the public to assume that the majority of off-duty law enforcement professionals are driving under the influence, and their comrades are turning a blind eye and endangering the rest of the public. When these tragedies like drinking and driving do happen within the law enforcement community, we have continued to poke fingers at the effect and not look for the true solutions.

Nobody can deny that law enforcement professionals have one of the most stressful jobs in the world and it tends to be regarded

as inherently stressful because of the personal risk of exposure to confrontation and violence and the day-to-day involvement in a variety of traumatic incidents. It is apparent that some officers have used alcohol as a way to numb the pain of work-related stresses.

Law enforcement management cannot wait until officers' drinking problems lead to an automobile accident, domestic violence situation, or a citizen's complaint. To deal with such situations, police agencies must adopt a strategy of getting help for officers at the first sign of problems.

The FBI has found that agencies often use a late-stage treatment strategy because police managers sometimes lack faith in early detection approaches and view them as ineffective. Yet, if agencies intervene before officers get into trouble, they can help officers onto the road to recovery, avoiding damage to both their personal and professional lives.

The FBI also recommends numerous strategies for early intervention for law enforcement departments:

- Help to improve the fitness and well-being of officers;
- Provide education on lifestyle rather than on alcohol itself;
- Initiate stress management programs;
- Shift the responsibility of detection to individuals other

than the affected officer.

In closing, the law enforcement officer is the key to safety and order in our society. Therefore, it is imperative for union presidents to speak out on the mental and health issues of law enforcement professionals. They must hold our elected officials and law enforcement management more accountable to the officer and the community by enhancing policies and procedures and by creating a better workplace that gives the community a better, more efficient, healthy, well trained officer that will give better service to the needs of the community.

The National Black Police As-

sociation has been in existence since 1972 nationally with Chartered organizations in the United Kingdom, Canada and Bermuda. The principal concerns of the National Black Police Association are the promotion of justice, fairness, and effectiveness in law enforcement issues and the effect of those issues upon the total community

In Unity and Peace
Damon K. Jones,
North East Region President

Vincent E. D'Agnillo & Associates, Inc.

Commercial R.E. Financing

Below-market rates on the following property types:

- Office Buildings
- Underlying Coops
- Apartment Buildings
- Mixed Use
- Res. & Comm.

Licensed Real Estate Brokers
Vincent E. D'Agnillo, Pres.

T. 718-997-1085

F. 718-997-6229