

Proposed Changes to Physical Agility Standard Testing

Recently, a review of the physical agility test components of the Peace Officers Professional Standards Act has led to a recommendation to revamp of test score measurements without diluting the overall requirements for physical strength and stamina, according to Daviess County Sheriff Keith Cain, chairman of the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council (KLEC) and co-chairman of the subcommittee on physical standards.

“In the ten years since the enactment of the POPS legislation, Cain noted, “the only change in the original physical agility tests for potential Kentucky law enforcement officers has been the elimination of the vertical jump component..

“The unfortunate result of a strict adherence to those standards has been a lack of female recruits passing the initial physical tests in order to be accepted in the academy,” added Alexandria Chief Mike Ward, co-chairman of the subcommittee and immediate past president of the Kentucky Association of Chiefs of Police. “Maintaining validated testing standards ensures every officer’s ability to perform essential functions of the job. The committee’s direction and recommendation will affect policing for the next decade.”

KLEC along with the Department of Criminal Justice Training initiated a review of the physical agility testing in mid-summer. The review and subsequent recommendations were coordinated by Dr. Bryant A. Stamford, the consultant, author and principal investigator for the original 2001 study, along with Dr. Robert J. Moffatt.

As part of the evaluation, KLEC subcommittee members charged with reviewing the standards focused on protecting the advantages POPS provides Kentucky law enforcement while assessing modifying the standards in hopes of ultimately expanding the applicant pool, Dr. Stamford explained.

“The purpose of the overall study is to bring more applicants into the pool rather than keep applicants out,” Dr. Stamford noted.

However, Sheriff Cain added, “we also feel there have been strong, positive results with the current standards. There is a need for improvement, but not compromise.”

Two elements of the standards could in no way be compromised added Chief Ward. one, qualified applicants who pass the physical agility test under its new structure must be capable of performing training duties at the Basic academy and, two, all must meet the exit standard, which remains unchanged, upon completion of academy training.

Under current physical agility protocols, all potentials offices must meet five criteria:

- bench press 64% of their body weight
- complete 18 sit-ups in one minute
- finish a 300-meter run in 65 seconds,
- perform 20 push-ups

- run 1.5 miles with 17 minutes, 12 seconds.

Each agility standard is rated at 10 points for successful completion within the time allotted. Acceptance of potential officers into the academy requires a total of 50 points, which translates into the successful completion of each of the five standards. In short, there is no flexibility within the scoring system.

Following the review, Dr. Stamford and Dr. Moffat have recommended an alteration in the scoring standards, but no changes in the test itself.

“An analysis of our test groups who have passed successfully through the pre-test for physical standards as well as the post-test led to a realignment of scoring weights for each of the five physical agility components,” Dr. Stamford explained.

To simplify a complex formula, each component will now be weighted as 11 points, rather than the current 10, with successful completion holding its grounds at 50 points.

An applicant could, for example, perform exceptionally well on one testing component and earn either 10.5 or 11 points. In turn, that could balance subpar score of 9 or 9.5 points on other components.

“By extension,” Dr. Stamford explained, “an individual could score 9.5 on the bench press, but score an 11 on the 300-meter run. If the individual completes the test with the requisite 50 points, they qualify for the academy where – based on our analysis of 66 female graduates -- internal physical training will more than increase their ability to pass the exit physical standards test without problem.”

The change in physical agility standard testing must be approved by the KLEC, Sheriff Cain said.

“I feel comfortable,” added Dr. Stamford, “that the proposed changes, if implemented, will improve pass rates as well as the blend of male and female applicants entering the academy.”