

Report Highlights

A Program and Operational Review of the PA State Police's Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement

Study Background: Act 1987-14 transferred responsibility for liquor law enforcement from the PA Liquor Control Board to the PA State Police. To obtain an assessment of liquor control enforcement activities in the state, the LB&FC directed its staff to conduct a review of the current programs, operations, staffing, and expenditures of the Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement (BLCE). The BLCE has an authorized personnel complement of 160 civilian liquor enforcement officers (LEOs), 17 State Troopers, and 71 support staff.

Study Findings: (See pp. S-1 to S-19.)

- **1. BLCE Program and Activities.** The BLCE is (a) aggressively implementing several programs and initiatives targeting the reduction of underage drinking including the University/College Underage Drinking Enforcement Program and the Age Compliance Check Program; (b) operating a nuisance bar program through which 52 problem establishments have been closed since 2000; (c) spending an excessive amount of time and resources investigating bad checks written by liquor licensees; (d) not conducting required audits of liquor licenses or performing routine inspections of all licensees; (e) conducting extensive gambling-related work focusing on video gambling and small games of chance; and (f) conducting fewer border patrols than are required by internal policy.
- **2. Nature of Enforcement Efforts.** BLCE enforcement activities are largely complaint-driven and reactive in nature; relatively few LEO efforts can be characterized as “proactive enforcement.”
- **3. BLCE Management Information and Statistical Data Systems.** Numerous problems and deficiencies in the BLCE’s statistical reporting and management information systems call into question the validity and reliability of much of the BLCE’s existing statistical data.
- **4. BLCE Staffing.** The Bureau has historically had difficulty maintaining its enforcement officer force at full authorized complement strength. There is also an under-representation of minorities and women in the LEO workforce.
- **5. Law Enforcement Officer Police Powers.** Liquor law enforcement work is performed by “civilian” BLCE officers who have limited police powers. Although some are not interested in additional powers, more stated that not having full police powers hampers their enforcement efforts and negatively impacts morale.
- **6. Agency Operations and Morale.** In addition to the lack of full police powers, the absence of career advancement opportunities, an “us versus them” working relationship with State Troopers, and officer burnout among some segments of the LEO workforce are just some of the factors that have contributed to morale and turnover problems in the agency.
- **7. BLCE Expenditures.** Annual expenditures, which are paid from the State Stores Fund, totaled \$17.2 million in FY 2004-05; \$2.3 million was lapsed. Adequate expenditure controls appear to be in place.
- **8. Other Related Matters.** The report also analyzes liquor control enforcement approaches in other states and other pertinent BLCE-related program and statutory issues.

Recommendations: (See pp. S-20 to S-27.)

- 1. The General Assembly should consider making amendments to the Liquor Code to:** (a) provide that the BLCE’s liquor law enforcement function be performed primarily by State Troopers. The existing civilian LEO workforce could then be assigned to a special “regulatory and compliance unit” to conduct nonlaw enforcement regulatory and administrative duties (e.g., routine inspections and audits) and (b) further define, focus, and expedite BLCE operations, including amendments to eliminate the requirement that BLCE officers conduct bad check investigations, expedite the disposition of gambling devices and other seized assets, and clarify Bureau responsibilities related to auditing and routine inspections.
- 3. The State Police should work with the pertinent legislative standing committees to:** (a) conduct a further analysis of the feasibility, cost considerations, and implementation details of the organizational and staffing change proposed above and (b) arrive at an acceptable format for annually submitting BLCE expenditure information to the Legislature.