

## **Why We Need to Make It Easier for DACA Recipients to Serve in Law Enforcement**

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The Green Bay Police Department first became involved in the national conversation around the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in late 2018. At the time we had 11 open positions and were forecasting an additional 50 retirements over the course of the next three years. This was clearly an opportunity to make positive changes to our organization and lay the foundation for addressing future community challenges.

As we began to formulate a strategy we focused on our organization's responsibility to the community's well-being and our law enforcement mission. Next, we examined all the challenges facing our community. One of those challenges was our ever-changing demographics. This demanded that our future responses to traditional and newly emerging crimes be as varied as the community we serve. Success would require a re-evaluation of our hiring practices and a robust commitment to hiring not only talented police personnel, but those who more closely represent the makeup of our community.

Our mission is to provide a service through a partnership with the community that reduces crime, builds trust and creates a safe environment while enhancing the quality of life in our neighborhoods. In order to accomplish this, we need access to a wider range of talent, representing diverse backgrounds and experiences. We need access to the same talent available to every other industry in the state of Wisconsin.

The City of Green Bay currently has one of the largest Hispanic populations in the state. Many of these immigrants came to Wisconsin in the mid to late 1990s, bringing with them unique cultures and various challenges for local law enforcement. Now, a couple of decades later, our community finds itself with a growing second generation of Hispanic families. In many cases, these are DACA recipients or those who were originally brought to Wisconsin by their parents when they were young children. These individuals have become rooted in our communities. Many have become gainfully employed, pay taxes, own homes and have now started families of their own, with children and spouses who are American citizens. The language skills and cross-culture community connections these men and women bring to law enforcement would enhance our ability to meet our mission.

However, in Wisconsin, our DACA registrants and noncitizen green card holders, while legally allowed to work in the United States and serve in the United States military, are currently prohibited from serving in a sworn law enforcement capacity. The problem is an

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archaic state statute ([66.0501](#)) that requires United States citizenship to be sworn as a municipal or county law enforcement official.

Our position on DACA is one part of a larger commitment to integrate our department and meet our community challenges, and we needed to have a much larger conversation. At the community level, we sought out support from community organizations, churches groups and locally owned multi-national businesses. We also sought commitments from state and local law enforcement groups, chiefs and sheriffs associations, and various labor groups. Finally, we needed political support from state senators and assembly representatives if we were to have any legitimate chance of legislative change.

In a day and age where local law enforcement is clearly at a crossroads in many communities and the political rhetoric seems to cloud the national conversation, our coalitions' local focus has seen wide-ranging and positive support. However, that support hasn't been without challenges.

For example, in 2018, State Senator Dave Hansen met with our coalition to discuss DACA and the possibility of his office sponsoring a bill to modify 66.0501. Senator Hansen and his staff attempted to craft a bill and bring it to the floor for debate, but the timing and political climate seemed to quickly stifle any attempt to move it forward.

Fast forward to 2020. The pandemic, civil unrest, law enforcement reform and an election year have converged to help bring life back into the movement. State Representatives John Macco and David Steffen, along with State Senator Andre Jacques, agreed to meet with us to discuss our law enforcement challenges and listened to our concerns regarding the current state law and the handicap it places on our industry.

By mid-2020 Representatives Macco and Steffen and Senator Jacques had embraced the idea and were fully championing the DACA/law enforcement case. They have co-sponsored a [Law Enforcement DACA bill](#) that appears to be headed to the Senate floor for debate soon. The bill will need bipartisan support for a swift passage through both state chambers, but we remain confident it can pass.

The Green Bay Police Department is in close contact with many talented individuals who are highly motivated, qualified and are ready to be sworn in the day the bill passes by both state chambers and is signed by the governor.

