

Understanding the Culture of Homelessness

Course Description:

This two-hour course provides Virginia law enforcement officers with a culturally informed understanding of homelessness and its intersection with policing. Participants will explore the diverse experiences and backgrounds of individuals experiencing homelessness, including contributing factors such as mental health, substance use, economic instability, and systemic inequities. Through case studies, discussion, and scenario-based learning, officers will examine the roles of law enforcement in both enforcement and outreach, including how to identify homeless individuals as victims, offenders, and vulnerable community members.

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- Define homelessness and describe the diverse populations affected, including youth, veterans, families, and individuals with disabilities.
- Analyze the root causes of homelessness, including economic hardship, mental illness, addiction, domestic violence, and systemic inequities.
- Identify available services and resources for homeless individuals at the local, state, and federal levels, including shelters, outreach programs, and housing assistance.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current services, considering whether they alleviate or exacerbate homelessness, and explore barriers to access.
- Recognize the links between homelessness and human trafficking, including how vulnerable populations are targeted and how law enforcement can intervene.
- Apply principles from the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness ("All In"), including its six pillars: equity, evidence, collaboration, housing and supports, homelessness response, and prevention
- Demonstrate culturally competent and trauma-informed approaches when engaging with homeless individuals, emphasizing dignity, safety, and community trust.
- Collaborate effectively with service providers and community organizations to support long-term solutions and reduce recidivism among homeless populations.

Target Audience: Sworn law enforcement officers in Virginia seeking to fulfill the 2-hour cultural diversity in-service training requirement.

Location: Virginia Highlands Community College, 160 Opportunity Lane, Abingdon, VA. OTC Building, Room 112

Time: 11/6/25 from 12:00 noon until 2:00 p.m.

Training Fee: Free

Course Registration: Complete the highlighted areas on the attached form and forward to the academy.