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CONTACT: Mark D. Weinstein
Executive Director of Public Relations
[937-766-8800](tel:937-766-8800) (o)
[937-532-6885](tel:937-532-6885) (m)
Mweinstein@cedarville.edu
[@cedarvilleneews](#)

Ohio's Pathway from College to Law Enforcement Opens with 11 Students

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- The state of Ohio is piloting a new criminal justice program unlike anything the United States has ever seen, and Cedarville University is at the core of this historic development.

The College to Law Enforcement Pathway Program, which accepted its first candidate enrollees in early 2022, exists to create a pool of pre-qualified, college-educated, mentored law-enforcement candidates for law enforcement agencies in Ohio.

The program was first introduced last year by Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, and it is a byproduct of the Governor's implementation of the Office of Law Enforcement Recruitment. DeWine asked Dr. Patrick Oliver, director of Cedarville University's criminal justice program, to serve as the lead consultant to the statewide office and the new academic program.

This elite honors program will pilot at Cedarville University and Central State University during the upcoming spring and fall semesters. The program, which includes 11 students in the first class, will be open to qualifying upper-class criminal justice majors, and participants will be guaranteed a job with a partnering law enforcement agency upon graduation.

"Students who graduate from this rigorous professional development program will have great potential to become Ohio's next generation of law enforcement leaders," said Governor DeWine. "In a time when many law enforcement agencies are struggling to recruit highly-qualified candidates, this program will create a pool of pre-qualified applicants with a strong understanding of criminal justice issues and the know-how to form positive relationships within their communities."

One of the students in the program is Cedarville University's Will Geist.

Geist, from Springfield, Ohio, hopes participating in the program will aid his long-term career goals of serving in law enforcement in his home state.

"I'm excited about all the preparation I'll receive — physical fitness, ride-alongs and mentorship," said Geist. "Knowing that I'm growing professionally and will have a job right after I graduate is such a benefit."

Currently being piloted by Cedarville University and Central State University, the program welcomes qualifying upper-class criminal justice majors with a minimum 3.0 GPA, history of compliance with the program's six core values — integrity, service

orientation, human relations skills, team compatibility, performance-driven and self-control — and professor recommendations to fill out a pre-application.

Candidates who make it past the pre-application phase begin a vetting process that includes a background investigation, polygraph and psychological examinations; physical fitness training and testing; an oral interview; career assessment; medical examination; verification of attendance; and faculty affirmation that the candidate has lived out the program's core values.

Following this vetting process, a student is fully accepted into the program. They will continue with bi-weekly professional development workshops, physical training, police car ride-alongs and officer mentorship.

Students who graduate from the program are guaranteed a position at one of the participating Ohio law enforcement agencies including the Fairfield Township Police Department, Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks, Hilliard Police Department, Lebanon Police Department, and Ohio State University Police Department. Additional agencies are expected to begin participating in the program.

"This program is a win-win-win," said [Oliver](#). "College students are developed, mentored and guaranteed a job; police agencies get top-quality hires, and the participating universities have a distinctive honors program that places their criminal justice majors in jobs after college."

Working with Governor DeWine and Ohio's Office of Law Enforcement Recruitment (OLER) is central to the success of this program.

"We did a survey of over 60 law enforcement agencies around Ohio about recruitment, and a top issue across the board was the difficulty of finding quality applicants, especially women and minorities," Oliver explained.

Responding to this need, Gov. DeWine established OLER to help agencies around Ohio recruit, select, and retain law enforcement officers.

"I thought to myself, 'We cannot run the selection process for law enforcement agencies, but we can identify, screen, and develop candidates that we'll make available for agencies to hire,'" Oliver explained. "That idea led to the program, which we view as filling those needs with leadership development and mentorship."

The program maintains noteworthy rigor throughout its duration — candidates can be eliminated at any point if they fail to meet benchmarks — but the benefits it includes make it attractive to prospective candidates.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including the [Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice](#) program, strong graduation, and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit cedarville.edu.

