

Introduction

Julia: Hi, welcome to the NCDPS Safety Scoop, a podcast sponsored by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety. There are great people, programs and resources within this department. In each episode of the Safety Scoop, we'll share how NCDPS employees prevent, protect and prepare North Carolinians and help enhance safety in our state. We hope you'll listen along and learn something you may not have known about the largest state agency in North Carolina.

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Julia: Hi, I'm Julia!

Kirsten: And I'm Kirsten!

Julia: And you're listening to the NCDPS Safety Scoop, a podcast sponsored by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

Kirsten: NCDPS is the largest department in the North Carolina state government with some amazing programs and resources...

Julia: ...as well as phenomenal personnel and volunteers.

Kirsten: Listen along as we take you behind the scenes and dive into how the people, programs and resources within this department enhance the safety of the people of North Carolina—give you the scoop, if you will, of all things NCDPS.

Julia: NCDPS's mission is to safeguard the people of North Carolina through prevention, protection and preparation. As you listen to this podcast, we hope you'll learn something you may not have known about the ways the people of NCDPS are working to keep our state safe.

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Season 1 Episode 14

Kirsten: Today on Safety Scoop, we're talking about the diverse professions and abundant career opportunities found within the Department of Public Safety. As you can imagine, our mission to preserve and protect the lives and property of North Carolinians encompasses a wide spectrum of occupations and opportunities from law enforcement to planners, court counselors, teachers, doctors, engineers, dietitians, meteorologists and countless others. Joining us today to discuss the various employment opportunities within public safety are

four of our DPS recruiters: Kevin Whitaker, Stephanie Bridgers, Joy Brown and Melissa Thames.

Kevin has led DPS's recruiting team for the past three years. He previously spent 15 years as a recruiter for the North Carolina Army National Guard. Stephanie has worked in human resources for more than 20 years with stints in both state government and the private sector. At DPS, she is the recruiter who works primarily with community colleges and universities. Joy's recruiting efforts for DPS focus mostly on the central region of the state. She joined DPS two years ago after working nine years in the private sector. Melissa brings more than 17 years of experience to the team and is responsible for helping veterans move into civilian careers which includes translating military skills into civilian terminology. It's so great to have a large group with so many years of experience joining us today. Thank you all so much for coming on the podcast.

Julia:

And before we get started, allow me to provide a quick DPS 101 so our listeners can have an idea of the scope and magnitude of who and how many are being recruited. First of all, the Department of Public Safety is North Carolina's largest state agency with more than 26,000 employees. There's a wide variety of roles and careers that are included in that because within the Department of Public Safety we have prisons, community corrections, Juvenile Justice, Emergency Management, National Guard, multiple law enforcement groups such as State Highway Patrol, State Capitol Police, Alcohol Law Enforcement and we also have Victims' Services, disaster recovery and several other programs.

So, with that such a huge agency, as you can imagine, we are constantly recruiting for new employees just due to the number of retirements, people having job changes and moves and that type of thing. In fact, last year our recruiters talked to more than 65,000 potential applicants. In any given year, with such a big scope, Department of Public Safety is typically a very busy agency. This past year in 2020, it was even more so because of the COVID pandemic and our response to the COVID pandemic as well as numerous storms. So, with that quick background, let's dive in.

Our first guest today is Kevin Whitaker. Kevin is going to talk with us about why work for the Department of Public Safety.

Kevin Whitaker:

You know state government work seems to have, uh, better benefits. For example, a competitive salary, medical and vision and dental insurance, 14 days of paid vacation, 12 days of paid sick leave with unused roll over, 12 days of paid holiday time. There's a defined state benefit retention program for working with the state as well, so you have more stability within the state government jobs. For example, during a recession or like the pandemic that we're facing now, the state government is less likely to lay off. Benefits from the state positions are almost always going to exceed the private sector benefit packages, and, um, often the state benefit healthcare plan they have lower costs and those favorable retirement plans with a vacation. So, it just makes, uh, it makes for a good reason to want to work withinside state government.

Julia: So, why state government? Why DPS?

Kevin: To answer that question, I'll start with the—the mission. It was stated earlier, our mission is to safeguard and preserve the lives and property of the people of North Carolina through prevention, protection and preparation with integrity and honor. So, one of the reasons that I like working for DPS, it gives me that same sense of satisfaction and doing something bigger than myself. Serving with the military, it's the same thing. And if you look at our positions withinside the Department of Public Safety, you can kind of see how they feed into one another and our professions of correctional officers, engineers, healthcare professions, IT professionals, court counselors. There's so many of these positions, and when you look at those positions, and then you look at the statement and the purpose of DPS, then you can see that these positions are very rewarding careers to have.

Julia: You mentioned some of the types of jobs available within DPS, so tell us, what are some of the jobs that you are most frequently recruiting for or those for which you are hiring most often?

Kevin: The ones that we seem to recruit for most often or on a daily basis are the correctional officers, probation and parole officers, probation/parole assistants, your LPNs, your RNs...

Julia: LPNs and RNs being registered nurses and licensed nurse practitioners.

Kevin: That's correct. Maintenance and tradesmen, admin staff positions, those are probably the ones that we—we see the most applicants come through on a daily basis, but we have so many other positions that we hire for with your special agents, your social workers, juvenile court counselors. I think I mentioned before IT professionals. But the ones that seem to come in most often are those that I mentioned.

Julia: What are some of the more unusual positions that DPS recruits for? So, perhaps positions that people may not normally associate with the Department of Public Safety.

Kevin: No unusual. I don't know if any of our professions are unusual, but I think exciting, or they're harder to fill possibly. Like, uh, right now, one that we're really trying to—to look for the psychological program manager positions or any of our clinical positions, our psychologists, our psychiatrists. A meteorologist was—was mentioned earlier. Those are some of the ones that I guess you would say are unusual.

Julia: So, perhaps positions that people would not necessarily associate with the Department of Public Safety?

Kevin: That's correct. I would say we have many more professions within the Department of Public Safety than anybody would ever realize. Most people, I think when they think of the Department of Public Safety, they think of your correctional officer positions. They might think of some admin staff, but I don't know if they really process and put together that we're looking at law enforcement, adult corrections, Juvenile Justice, Emergency Management, the State Bureau of Investigations, the National Guard, Homeland Security, so we have hundreds of different professions that are available through the Department of Public Safety.

Julia: A very broad scope indeed. With all of those different types of positions, it sounds like there are a wide variety of schedules and shifts. Tell us a little bit about the type of hours or shifts available, and do any of the positions have flexible schedules?

Kevin: The flexible hour positions I would tell you would probably be more so in our medical fields with floating shifts and things of that nature with our LPNs and our RNs and... But you said it, we are not a 8:00 to 5:00, 9:00 to 5:00 type of job, the positions that we have. And you know, the security and the protection of the state, that's 24/7, so there are DPS employees working 24/7. So, you have your first, second and third shift positions. You have your 8:00 to 5:00 and your 9:00 to 4:00, just every type of work environment and hours to work exist withinside the Department of Public Safety.

Julia: We mentioned earlier some of the changes due to the global pandemic. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the changes that have been made in the past year or so to keep employees safe from COVID-19?

Kevin: Some of the things that we have accomplished over the past year: we've provided PPE, the personal protective equipment, to all the employees with masks, hand sanitizers. There's been plastic barriers and different types of barriers put in place in the places where we have to, like, say if you're going into a facility, there could be a plastic barrier put up to help reduce the direct contact. There's been a big process on reducing face-to-face encounters when possible.

We've allowed telework whenever possible within the Department of Public Safety. They staggered schedules for the staff to reduce the density of people that are inside the facilities. They've implemented screening protocols for anyone entering a worksite on a daily basis. They severely restricted visitors entering the work sites. We have implemented virtual meeting capabilities and virtual recruiting events to include drive-through events. And this is an ongoing thing. We're continuously trying to figure out how to keep the employees and those people that are inside the facility safe.

Julia: And Kevin, with such a wide agency, um, or wide-reaching agency, I imagine these positions are kind of scattered about. Can you give us a better idea of where Department of Public Safety employees are?

Kevin: Department of Public Safety has a footprint in all 100 counties in North Carolina. We have different regions, but we have Department of Public Safety positions in every single county all across the state. We have nine recruiters that are out there working right now, and they all are assigned counties, and they're ensuring that 100% of all the counties are covered so we can find a Highway Patrol or a facility or Emergency Management has a footprint in some of the counties, but there is not one county in the entire state of North Carolina that does not have the presence of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, and we hire for all of those positions.

Julia: As you mentioned, this is an agency that touches people all across the state, so where are the positions located both geographically and in what type of environment are employees working?

Kevin: As far as the areas in which people are actually working law enforcement, we can look at the Highway Patrol as an example. You have those that are working withinside the facilities. You have those that are on the road working. With the adult corrections, we have people that are working withinside the facilities. Emergency Management are out and about within the communities and different-different ways they could be out in the community. They might have a building or office that they work out of. And the North Carolina National Guard is an example of the Department of Public Safety, and if you look there's a North Carolina National Guard footprint in all the 100 counties as well. They have the jobs from driving vehicles to maintenance, so I really believe we have almost every profession somehow covered one way or another through all of these different sections withinside the Department of Public Safety.

Look, we have the training academy, uh, the Samarcond Training Academy. So, that's a classroom environment. And they've had to do some changes, obviously, with, uh, with COVID, the distant learning, but in some cases they're still the on-hands, physical learning, and we are all over the place when it comes to how we conduct our business. Whether it be in a classroom, on the roadway, inside a facility or sitting from their home, North Carolina Department of Public Safety probably covers every aspect of the different types of ways we conduct our-our work.

Kirsten: So, Joy, where can our listeners who are interested in a career within the department find out more about the opportunities that are available?

Joy Brown: Yes, they can go onto our website, our careers website, at ncdps.gov forward slash careers, and it will provide information about who we are. And you can also review a recruiter who is in your region and contact them if you have any questions, uh, further questions, about career opportunities.

Kirsten: And can applicants apply on that site, or will they have to apply elsewhere?

Joy: They can use, uh, that website to apply. It will essentially take you to our careers, and then if you're looking for, like, other support positions, it will take you to the main government website. But either way, that website will take you to where you would need to go.

Kirsten: Awesome! Can you take us through the timeline and the hiring process for new members of our public safety teams? What is the typical timeframe of an application, and when can applicants expect to hear back?

Joy: So, it varies for different positions within DPS. For corrections, if you're interested in a correctional position in—in the prisons, they can typically take 90 to 100 days from the time you apply to when you start your new position. A lot of divisions depend on different training whenever, you know, new classes are ready, such as ALE or SBI, so they may be recruiting six months before, uh, you would even have a start date. So, a lot of times, it will show that on the job description, and it will give details to the applicant on the job description on what the timeline is for those specialty divisions.

Kirsten: These specialty positions you mentioned, Joy, are mostly sworn positions with ALE, SBI or Highway Patrol which require special certifications or extra training. Is that correct?

Joy: Absolutely.

Kirsten: And as you mentioned, all these requirements are laid out on our DPS careers page on our website and in the individual job descriptions, but if any applicants have questions, they can contact a recruiter. What about civilian or non-certified positions in DPS?

Joy: So, um, if you're looking for a non-certified position, it can vary from 28 to 60 days. Uh, that's from the time you apply to the time you get started. It just depends, a lot of times, too, so if there are a lot of applicants that apply for that position, it takes time for the screener to review those applications. And then once they review the most qualified candidates, then it will be sent over to the hiring manager for their review. Then it's up to the hiring manager to review those qualified candidates and decide how many people he wants to interview.

Once the interviews are coordinated, then it will be a decision that will be made for the selected candidate. But then that also takes time for a lot of different approval processes, such as budget approvals. Uh, we have to go through Office of State Human Resources approvals and other salary approvals, uh, before we can get a start date. But just know that our teams do our best to keep in communication with the selected candidates, and we do our best to give all information via email or either on the phone on what we make decisions on for those particular positions.

Kirsten: That's great to know! Do you have any other tips or advice that you can share for people interested in working for the Department of Public Safety or maybe applying soon?

Joy: You have to remember that the state is on a merit-based system, and that simply means that we have to choose the most qualified candidates using the application process. So, a lot of external candidates think that "Oh, it's my resume that I have to use. I need to focus more on my resume," and that is not the case. It's focus more on your application. Always want to attach your resume, but you don't want to focus so much on your resume.

When I say, "focus on the application," that means in the experience part of your job you always want to list your duty summaries, and in the duty summary, you always want to make sure that that is tailored as much as possible to the job that you are applying for. If you are claiming Veterans' Preference, you can always add your DD214 into the application. You always want just to remember that when you submit an application, there's no application or one size, I would say, fits all. You always have to change it up, no matter what job you apply for. Once it saves your information and you go in another day, and you sayin', "Oh, well, it's the last application that I submitted saved my information. I don't need to make any changes if I'm applying to this job." That's not really a good thing. So, always make sure that you have added all of the relevant duties in your duty summary and your job experiences, um, and make sure that those line up to the job description you're applying for.

Kirsten: Great points. Like any application, it's very important to take the time to read the description and pick out those keywords, like you said. So, switching over a little bit to benefits, can you take us through some of the benefits offered to DPS employees, and are there any differences among the roles in our public safety teams? If so, why is that?

Joy: Sure, I will give, you know, our benefits package that we typically give out to all employees. I'll start with that. We try to do a competitive salary. We try to make sure that we're giving you what your experiences and your education is based off of, so that's one piece to it. We also offer medical, dental and vision insurance. There's also 14 days of paid vacation and 12 days of paid sick leave. Then if the sick leave or vacation leave is unused, that is also rolled over to the following year. We have 12 paid holidays that you will get. You also receive a retirement program, state defined pension plan which is, uh, one of the number one things employees look for because a lot of organizations or, you know, private sector don't offer pension plans anymore.

Healthcare, independent care, flexible spending accounts; we also offer military leave, training opportunities for advancement, supplemental life insurance, supplemental retirement benefits and additionally, if you are in the law enforcement divisions, you also may be offered another state law enforcement retirement plan. You also may be offered a state vehicle *and* also uniforms if that is required.

Kirsten: Thank you for walking us through those. What opportunities for advancement exist within the Department of Public Safety?

Joy: I would say training. I would also say that if you're in a role for at least two years, and you have an opportunity to share with your manager one of your goals after you have completed being in a role, there are other opportunities. So, if you come in, say for instance as a correctional officer, and you are interested in becoming a correctional case manager or a youth counselor technician or even maybe a training specialist, you will have that experience as a correctional officer already under your belt, so you would basically have the advantage because you have that experience under your belt to get a promotion or be advanced in another opportunity.

Kirsten: Can you take us through the diversity and inclusion initiatives that are currently in place within DPS?

Joy: Absolutely. You know, it's important that your organization shows that you have a diversified and inclusive environment, and some of our initiatives that DPS has implemented is the Governor's Task Force which is a task force for racial equity in criminal justice. Uh, we also have strong recruitment efforts in our Hispanic/Latino community. We also have women in leadership that have progressed over the years, um, that are continuing to progress. We also have majority of our application pool are minorities, especially in our, um, correctional opportunities.

DPS has rolled out a new online Americans disability form so that we can capture all of our ADA applicants and make sure that we are also recruiting for more applicants who have disabilities. We also provide cultural awareness trainings to all of our employees, and we have different cultural recognitions each month. And then we also have a new 2020 HBCU internship program that Stephanie Bridgers will be talking about, but that has been rolled out last year, and we're very excited about it.

Kirsten: And one more thing before we move over to Stephanie to talk about internships. Are there any roles or regions in the state that your team is particularly focused in hiring in right now?

Joy: Yes, we are. Um, I will definitely say that I have been focused lately on, um, healthcare positions with our central region hospitals such as our Central Prison Healthcare Complex and our Women's Prison. We are always looking for healthcare professionals such as CNAs, LPNs and RNs. And a lot of people aren't aware, you know, that the state does hire for healthcare professionals, and we definitely do. You, uh, will receive a great benefit package. You will come in as a state employee, but you're working as—at a hospital, working for the correctional hospital, and you're working to help and support inmates who have been hurt or sick within the hospital. So, a lot of people, you know, know of your traditional—once you graduate—your traditional roles in the hospital or

doctor's office, but we also do offer that here with the state. And like I said, they—mostly we're looking for all sorts of healthcare professionals, but CNAs, LPNs and RNs are what we're looking for.

Kirsten: And those are certified nursing assistants (CNA), licensed practical nurse (LPN) and registered nurse (RN).

Joy: And then with the RNs, we also have supervisory positions available as well.

Kirsten: Sounds like there are a lot of available roles across the state in healthcare. Thank you so much for taking us through all of those topics, Joy. Now, we're going to switch gears and learn more about the developing internship program within the Department of Public Safety. Internships are a great way to gain professional experience and make connections within a specific field. Stephanie, what are the current internship opportunities available within the department?

Stephanie Bridgers: The Department of Public Safety offers a variety of internships to college-age students from some programs offered include adult correction and Juvenile Justice, Alcohol Law Enforcement (or ALE), Emergency Management, probation and parole, the State Highway Patrol and the State Bureau of Investigation.

Kirsten: What are the schedules like for interns?

Stephanie: These are, um, semester-long programs consisting of a rotating two-week block. The weeks typically consist of four days focusing on an area of specific interest, and then an enrichment program is typically held on Fridays. Most of our programs are available each semester throughout the year, although some program's availability may differ from the schedule, and a good example of this would be the State Highway Patrol and the State Bureau of Investigation. These programs are typically held, um, three times a year during the spring, summer and fall semesters.

Programs are currently located or available in the Raleigh and Wake County area; however, I will say that our agency, um, has plans of expanding these programs. We're dedicated to that right now. We want to accommodate interest and increase participation. Expansion of our areas will vary depending on the program, however. I would encourage any department chairs who may be listening, instructors, university advisors to please contact us if they are interested in coordinating and developing a program in their area if one is not currently offered. As we said, we are expanding, so any input from that aspect would be very beneficial.

Kirsten: Are there any enrollment requirements?

Stephanie: Students, um, must be enrolled in and classified as either a sophomore, junior, senior or graduate student and must be enrolled in a college, university or community college within North Carolina. And that would be at the time of application and throughout the duration of the program as well. While all

majors are welcome to apply, some programs do have some specific requirements such as a specific program degree—a degree program or a GPA.

Kirsten: I know DPS ran a Historically Black College and University, also known as HBCU, internship program in 2020. Can you tell us about the pilot program and what you heard from participants?

Stephanie: Absolutely. In June of 2020, Governor Cooper signed in Executive Order 145. This was to establish a paid internship program for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or the HBCU. Their philosophy in that was they wanted to recruit a workforce that was more reflective of the entire community. Um, initially during the—during the pilot program, there were ten interns who participated in the program. They were able to rotate through, I believe, six divisions of the agency to learn about career opportunities in both law enforcement and public safety.

Um, some of the feedback we did receive from the interns included comments regarding the transparency of our agency and the culture, the welcoming culture of our agency, as well as the fact that they noted that the challenges presented were comparable to real world experience, and they felt that they're prepared for the real world and practical world applications. So, I thought that was very, very positive feedback received.

Kirsten: Speaking of college and university relationships, you mentioned that applicants must be a student enrolled in a North Carolina school. So, what other partnerships or relationships does this program have with educational institutions within the state?

Stephanie: We currently have relationships with all colleges and universities across the state of North Carolina. It is our goal, however, we want to continue to expand this pipeline of communication and collaborations between each of these universities and educational institutions. What we're currently doing now is building our foundation of pipelines, building a contact foundation and making sure that our career opportunities, careers, our internships, as we mentioned, and our volunteer programs are shared with all of their students, their faculty, even their alumni as well. We feel that by doing this and building upon that foundation, we can better help students prepare more successfully as they enter into the workforce and with their career with our agency.

Kirsten: As you mentioned earlier, there were internship programs running last year. I just wanted to get some insight on how these internships have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic and what's different now for the students who are participating in these internships.

Stephanie: Well, obviously, out of an abundance of caution and safety, our agency did temporarily suspend the internship program. However, as schools begin to reopen and some sense of normalcy returns to our everyday environment, we do have plans to reopen the internship program and resume those

responsibilities. Of course, we're going to implement safe protocols and precautions following the CDC guidelines which would include, of course, you know, wearing the masks and proper social distancing as well.

Kirsten: We appreciate you giving us some background on this developing internship program. So, for students who are interested in applying for a program right now, where can they go to find more information and apply?

Stephanie: Students can download an internship application directly from our website, um, by visiting ncdps.gov. In the top section, there is a "careers that matter" section, and from there they can, um, click on the internships piece. They will need to complete the application in its entirety along with submitting references, a letter of interest and their sealed official transcript. Um, these can be submitted to internships@ncdps.gov. Also, that email address can be used to address any questions, concerns.

Each program has specific requirements. Some may be a specific GPA. Some may be specific to a degree program. So, if they visit our website, um, bring up all of our programs that are available in each piece, each component will show the program requirements, um, and specific criteria for each program in which they're interested.

Julia: Now we're going to shift our focus from interns to veterans. Melissa, can you tell us how DPS supports the employment of veterans?

Melissa Thames: Absolutely. DPS supports the employment of veterans, really, by focusing recruiting efforts which is implemented with the goal of adding more veterans to our DPS team. And when I say veterans, I would like to also include reservists, transitioning military and also family members. So, North Carolina has a large veteran population due to the numbers of military bases throughout the state and also National Guard armories. So, DPS is working with these military bases, the career centers and also the National Guard to bring opportunities to these veterans and their families.

Julia: With the National Guard part of the DPS family, we realize how valuable veteran employees are. Does DPS offer any extra help, steps or resources, say, for veterans?

Melissa: Absolutely. So, I actually help veterans, um, with the application process. The state government application process can be a little tricky, and a lot of our veterans are used to the federal application processes, and ours is different, so I give instructions and tips to the veterans and their family members for our applications. And I also offer to review the applications just to make sure that they have included all the information, their DD214 or any pertinent information, you know, that could help them get considered for the position.

Julia: That's great to know. Are there any specific steps veterans need to take to become employed with DPS?

Melissa: Actually, veterans, uh, they need to go to the state site just like other applicants and create a profile. And from there, they can actually call me, and I can help them focus their career search. I can also help them translate their military skills into civilian terminology, so they can put this into their application, into the work experience, so they can get credit for their military service.

Julia: And Melissa, how can they best contact you?

Melissa: My contact information is available. It's best for them to contact me by email, and I will respond that way. They can also call or text whichever they prefer. My email address is Melissa (m-e-l-i-s-s-a) dot Thames @ncdps.gov, and my phone number is 984-239-4598.

Julia: Tell us a little bit about the benefits veterans would have as Department of Public Safety employees.

Melissa: We have a variety of benefits. Again, the state government application, um, career search assistance. We also have an apprenticeship program for correctional officers. For veterans who are hired as COs, they may be eligible to receive additional payments based on their GI Bill eligibility while they are in training, and DPS has a dedicated staff member that can assist the correctional officers/veterans with this benefit.

Julia: What makes Department of Public Safety a great career choice for veterans and those transitioning from the military? Why DPS?

Melissa: I would say the mission of DPS is very similar to the military's mission which is basically to protect and serve. Veterans wish to continue their service by serving the state of North Carolina and its citizens, and this kind of fits into that objective. So, Department of Public Safety's missions, goals and values aligns with the value system of a lot of our state's veteran community.

Julia: Are there any changes, differences that you want veterans to know about due to COVID-19?

Melissa: I would say I get asked most of the time, "Are you still hiring? Is there any hiring freezes?" And I would tell everyone we are still hiring. DPS is continuing with its mission while also being safe and making sure that its employees are protected. They make sure that everyone has a mask. There's also the safety distancing, um, that they have implemented. So, while DPS is being safe, they're also continuing with their mission. So, we're definitely hiring, so please contact us.

Conclusion

Julia:

If you'd like to talk with any of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety recruiters, you can email them at recruiters@ncdps.gov. That's r-e-c-r-u-i-t-e-r-s @ncdps.gov.

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Kirsten:

Thanks for listening to this episode of the Safety Scoop. To learn more about NCDPS, go to ncdps.gov. Tune in next time on your favorite podcast app to hear more behind-the-scenes stories from the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

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