Introduction

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Kirsten: You're listening to the Safety Scoop, a podcast that dives into the stories of the people, programs and resources within the North Carolina Department of Public Safety. Each episode, we'll give you the scoop from department personnel on how NCDPS enhances the safety of the people of North Carolina.

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Season 2 Episode 11

Kirsten: The North Carolina Department of Public Safety has several boards and commissions under its purview. One of them is the Private Protective Services Board. This 14-person board meets throughout the year and is responsible for administering the licensing, education and training requirements for persons, firms, associations and corporations engaged in private protective services within the state. In other words, if you are out working security in North Carolina, they are making sure you are doing it properly.

In this episode of Safety Scoop, I had the opportunity to speak with Paul Sherwin, director of the Private Protective Services Board, or PPSB, as you'll hear us refer to it throughout. With the board celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, I wanted to get his input on how the board has evolved and what he envisions the coming years will be like. Paul brings a diverse professional background of law enforcement, security and public safety to his role as director. Throughout the interview, he shares details that may be unknown to people outside the private security industry on how the board provides oversight and regulatory functions within the space. Here's Paul Sherwin.

Paul Sherwin: My name is Paul Sherwin, and I'm the director of Private Protective Services. I've been with DPS since November of 2019 when I was hired as the deputy director of Private Protective Services, and then I became the director in June of 2020.

Kirsten: So just so we can learn a little bit more about you, can you take us through your career in law enforcement and what led you to your role with DPS as director of Private Protective Services?

Paul: Yeah. My career in law enforcement began in 2009 when I was hired as a Sheriff's deputy in Washington County, Oregon. That was a job that I transitioned to after I got out of the active duty army, and I ended up there because I kind of had a lifelong mentor who was a police officer who had been the school resource officer at my middle school and high school where I grew up, and he recommended that I'd be a good fit for law enforcement when I got out of the army. And so, that's where I ended up. A few years later, my wife and I moved to Durham, and I worked for Durham County Sheriff's Office for a couple years there, and then I had the opportunity to go work for the Norfolk

Southern Railway Police Department as a special agent, and that was a very unique subset of law enforcement that gave me a lot of cool experiences.

And then one thing led to another, and it was time to look for a new position, and I was trying to get back into the government sector. And I…at the time, a gentleman by the name of Brian Jones was the director of Private Protective Services, and I had worked with him back when I worked with Durham County Sheriff's Office. So, I reached out to him and said, "Hey, I'm looking to come back. Let me know if you have any opportunities available," and he said, "Well, actually, I'm expecting my deputy director to retire here pretty soon, and we're going to be posting a position, and you should apply." And so, I did, and thankfully I was hired. And so, that was kind of my transition from law enforcement into these civilian sector within government, but still they share a lot of commonalities in terms of my role as a law enforcement officer and my role here on the regulatory end.

Kirsten: And so, is there any specific thing that really interested you in kind of making that transition that you just spoke about?

Paul: Yes. I think what most interested me was the number of similarities that–that there are between the private security sector and law enforcement. Ultimately, those two groups have the same objective which is to protect the public, just in slightly different ways. And a lot of the duties and responsibilities of the security officer or the private investigator are similar to that of a law enforcement officer, just with different authority, of course. But it was a comfortable transition for me because many of the people who work in private security have backgrounds in law enforcement or in the military, so I can speak a lot of the same language as those folks. We share a lot of commonalities, so it was a real smooth transition. Once I learned the technicalities of our regulatory environment, it became a pretty easy position to manage.

Kirsten: What does being in this kind of leadership role mean to you?

Paul: It means a lot. Being in leadership is challenging, but it's also rewarding, and I realize how fortunate I am to have been given this opportunity. And I just value the opportunity to try to help people succeed in their jobs within state government and at private protective services and support them as best I can. And then also, in my role as the director of the board, I have the opportunity to work with so many people across North Carolina who work in a private protective industry, and it's–it's nice to be in a position where I can have some influence and impact on so many people.

Kirsten: What is the Private Protective Services Board? How do they act in, like, ways that maybe our listeners may not realize? That you know, it's–it touches so many aspects of their everyday lives.

Paul: So, the Private Protective Services Board was established in 1973, and it's funny how many people have never heard of the board or Private Protective Services

or what we do, yet every day we go through life, and we interact with people who are most likely and hopefully credentialed in some way by our board. So, that may be an interaction with a security guard at a grocery store, maybe an interaction with a private investigator that you hire to work on a case for you personally. Those people who are out doing work in that field are regulated by our office. And so, each year we credential probably about 30,000 people who are working in the private security industry in North Carolina. That's of course security guards, private investigators, armored car operators, guard dog service providers. We just recently started regulating digital forensics examiners and close personal protection professionals which you might think of as a bodyguard. And so, we have the opportunity to make sure that the people who are out protecting others have been at least minimally trained and vetted by my office to make sure that they are suitable to be out doing that.

Kirsten: Why is it important for the Private Protective Services Board to exist?

Paul: Its primary mission is to enhance the professionalism of the security industry, and in doing so, we're ultimately trying to help protect the public health, safety and welfare. Again, by making sure that the people who are out in the community in these public safety roles, though they're not law enforcement, they serve a critical role in protecting the public, especially in today's environment where law enforcement agencies are terribly short on staff. They're relying real heavily on security guards and other security personnel where they may not have before. So, we're seeing security professionals out in the community in areas that we have not seen before, and it's important to make sure that they're properly trained and have been background checked by my office and are suitable to be in that position and authority role.

Kirsten: How many license companies are there across North Carolina?

Paul: License companies is hard to say because we really track people as an individual. So, I would say license *holders* in North Carolina, we have about 5,000, the majority of which are private investigators, and the second largest group would be security guard and patrol companies. There's probably about 500 of those, and then the remaining small minority groups are some of those other ones that I've discussed like armored car, digital forensic examiner, close personal protection, polygraph examiners. Those people, particularly in the security guard and patrol industry, that license holder who the board has given authority to--to run a security guard business is then the person who's going out and hiring those security guards. So, the board actually issues several types of credentials to security professionals.

If you think of it as a hierarchy, the top of it would be the license holder. They're responsible for running the company. They're given the authority by the board to do so. And then the people that may work for them are what we call registrants. Those people are most often armed and unarmed security guards. And then you also have another type of credential the board issues which is a trainer certification. There's about 500 board-certified trainers across the state,

and their job is to train these security guards that are coming into the industry. The board itself and our staff, we don't actually train anyone. What we do is we train the trainers. So, we say, "these trainers have to come through our course to learn how to instruct these security guards," and then the industry gets to pick which trainers that they send their guards to.

Kirsten: And then, can you tell us a little bit about the legislation that governs PPSB?

Paul: Yes. Our enabling statute is North Carolina General Statute 74c. That's the private Protective Services Act that, again, came into effect in 1973. And it's gone through several changes in the last 50 years. Most notably, the biggest change it's gone through in a while was just last year with the creation of those two new license types, and I think as the industry has continued to grow and expand, that that statute has had to be updated throughout the years to make sure that it's keeping pace. I can only imagine where it's going to go in the next–in the next 50 years with the advent of artificial intelligence and technology like drones. There's probably stuff out there that in 50 years the security industry will be using to protect the public that we don't even know about yet and haven't even considered. And I think, ultimately, the board will end up regulating some of that in the future.

Kirsten: And so, speaking of that, I mean, where do you see the industry going? What kind of threats could be faced, and how does that impact your training–you said you train the trainer–or your oversight of things in North Carolina?

Paul: I really see the security industry going more digital. I think where a security detail maybe used to take, say, five people to cover a certain area, perhaps now that area could be covered with one or two people and maybe a drone or a series of cameras that are using artificial intelligence algorithms to identify potential threats. And that's really an unregulated space both in North Carolina and nationally that I think people are watching very closely is…this technology has a tremendous potential for good, but, of course, it could also be abused. And so, the government has to consider how it's going to regulate that appropriately because it is a tremendous tool.

Kirsten: If someone wants to get into this industry or a related public safety industry, I mean, any advice or things that they should know about these different processes?

Paul: So, if you want to work in a private security industry in North Carolina, and odds are if you do you're probably going to work in one of the areas that we regulate, such as, most commonly, private investigators or what we call security guard and patrol–if you want to be out you want to be a private investigator, there's two routes that you can take. One, if you meet the experience requirement, which in order to do that you need at least three years of investigations experience. You can acquire that by being a private investigator in another state, by being a former law enforcement officer. You can even come to us from the military if you had a job in the military where you specialize in

investigations, like, say, criminal investigations division in the military. That requires three years of experience to be a P.I.

And then, on the security guard and patrol side, there's kind of two ways that people come in. One, if they're going to hold a license, they need that three years of experience, also. Most people get that by coming up through the private security industry where they have held some supervisory roles. They've been a manager or a site supervisor or something like that because the experience that they need has to be in a supervisory capacity in order to qualify for the license. Then the other part of that security guard and patrol component is the people who want to work as security guards, and we regulate two types: armed and unarmed. And you don't need any experience to come into that role, but in order to be registered with our office you do have to complete the required training which for an unarmed security guard is a 16 hour course, and for an armed guard, it's the 16 hour course plus an additional 20 hours of armed security guard training which includes lots of firearms courses and a live fire qualification.

There are some other licenses such as close personal protection which is one of the new ones where a person can come in with that experience. Same thing: they kind of need three years coming from some other aspect, or they can take a course. So, depending on the license type, you may only be able to make it if you have the experience from somewhere else, or you may be able to take a board-approved course that qualifies you for the license. But I would just say that if you're working in private security, odds are you need some type of credential from the board. And there's a lot of people out there who are just not aware of this requirement, and they're out working, and eventually they get caught, and we have to bring before the board and–and kind of sanction them to explain, “You were doing this wrong and here's how you can do it right.” But if you're out doing security, and you're being paid for it, and you’re contracting your services, you're going to need the board's authorization to do it.

Kirsten: And you guys are celebrating your 50th anniversary this month. It's August right now as we're recording this, and so what does that mean? I mean, a lot can change in 50 years, and I know you haven't been with the board the entire time, but in speaking with previous employees or just through your experience, how have you see–seen things progress? And I know we've already talked about what you look forward to for the future, but how have things changed in the past 50 years?

Paul: I think they've changed quite a bit. It's amazing to me, we have several employees at Private Protective Services who have been there…I have two that have been there for more than 30 years, and I have several others that have been there for 20 plus years. I mean, they're the ones who have really seen the changes. For example, the board itself has grown. When it was first created, it was either six or seven members, and now the board consists of 14. They come from various appointing authorities within state government. The governor has several appointments. The Speaker of the House has a couple. The senate

president has a couple, and then the Secretary of Public Safety has one appointee to the board. So, the board itself has grown in size. The number of people that the board regulates has also grown dramatically. In total, I'd say we credential close to 30,000 people, and along the way we've had to increase the number of staff members to do that.

So, at Private Protective Services, we currently have an authorized staff of 22 people which basically are broken down into a couple different divisions. One is registration. Those are the people who are receiving and processing the registration applications, most commonly for security guards, and then we have a licensing section, and those are the folks that are handling the license holders. So, the licensed private investigators or licensed close personal protection professionals. They're helping people renew their license every two years. The board–there are also the board secretaries that do a tremendous job making sure that the board has all its documents and everything's ready to go for the meetings. They take and write the minutes for the meeting. And then, we have our investigation section which can–consists of seven investigators that are positioned throughout the state. And they're the ones who are out in the field following up on complaints of alleged violations of the board's laws and rules, and they're also doing the background investigations on new license applicants to see if they qualify for the license.

In terms of other changes, the pandemic, like so many things, forced the board to change how it did things. I mean, since its inception in 1973 through even its meeting in February 2020, that board met in person all the time. It had never even considered having a virtual option or–or some other way to attend the meetings and the pandemic, kind of, for better or worse, forced that upon the board. And now, we have equipment where we can–we livestream these meetings. And so, people can come and attend in person, or they can watch online. And I think that's a tremendous opportunity because we serve a vast state, and the board meets in Raleigh, but yet we have people who are credentialed by the board who may live in the western part of the state that they just don't have the time or the resources to drive out three plus hours to attend a board meeting. But yet they want to be involved and be aware of what's going on in the industry, and so now they can just jump online and watch and participate in these meetings from their desk at work or at home. So, I think that was a real shift, and I must commend the board that they did a great job adapting to that because it was a significant change and it came upon us very quickly.

Kirsten: Any recent significant changes to the board?

Paul: Yes. The board at its meeting here in August elected for the first time a female chairperson. So, in the board's 50 years, she will be the first. Her name is Tamara Rabenold. She's a licensed private investigator and runs her own company called Vaudra International. It's a tremendous achievement. I mean, 50 years is a long time, and I'm proud of her, and I'm proud of the board for electing her. And I think she's going to do an excellent job leading the board,

and it really speaks to how far not only the board has come but the industry. There are several professions, law enforcement's one of them, I mean, public safety professions in general tend to be more heavily dominated by men, and the security industry that we regulate is no different. And so, the board itself and the authorities that appoint members to the board have done a great job keeping it diverse both racially and gender diverse. And it's great that the board has a female chair.

Kirsten: At this point in our conversation, I had already learned so much about PPSB and how they operate within North Carolina. However, Paul had alluded to the board's unique composition amongst regulatory bodies, so I asked him to tell me more.

Paul: In terms of board structure, I mean, at its core is 14 members that make up the entire Private Protective Services Board, but within that it also has several committees, and the committees is where the real work of the board is done. The first committee is called the grievance committee, and they're responsible for hearing complaints of alleged violations of the board's laws and rules. So, when a complaint comes in, the first thing it is vetted by our investigation supervisor to see if the board has jurisdiction over it. Sometimes we get complaints that, while we may not like the behavior that's mentioned in the complaint, we just don't have any jurisdiction over the activity. But if we do, we will conduct an investigation, and it ultimately goes to the grievance committee where the investigator presents their case; the person who is complained against most often shows up, and they get to tell their side of the story. The committee hears both sides, and that committee is responsible for making a decision about a) did a violation occurred, and b) if so, what's to be done about it in terms of discipline or no discipline. And so, that's the grievance committee.

The other hard-working committee is called screening, and these folks are responsible for reviewing all new license applicants that come before the board. The board meets six times a year, every other month, and recently we've had anywhere between 75 to 85 new license applicants for each of those meetings. So, that committee is reviewing these detailed background investigation reports that our investigators have prepared, and they're making a decision about whether or not this person should be licensed. Some of the other committees include the board's training and education committee, and they're responsible for reviewing continuing education courses that people may submit. They also ensure that the training the board is offering in terms of what training security guards are receiving or other courses that the board oversees, that that training is up-to-date. And they're making sure that the training is up-to-date and current and that it's providing some benefit to the industry.

Then we have the laws and rules committee. This one, though it may sound boring, is very important because the laws and rules are what we operate by. The board has its statute, 74c, and then it has its administrative rules which it can also enforce. And the administrative rules are where the details lie. The statute's kind of a big umbrella, and then in terms of the real details about how

things are to be done are in the administrative rules. So, that laws and rules committee is responsible for making sure those rules and laws are well-written and always being updated as the industry changes. And then finally, there is an emerging technologies committee. This one doesn't meet often, but I expect that to change here in the next couple years because, as we've seen, there is a lot of new emerging technology in our world, including in security, with artificial intelligence and all the things that–that we can do now with security cameras and drones and GPS technology.

So, those committees meet every other month, usually a day or two prior to the big board meeting, and then once they're at the board meeting, the chairperson of that respective committee reports out to the full board what they did and why, and there's a discussion among the board members if there's any questions about the decision that was made within the committee or the recommendation that it gave. And then the full board will vote to accept that committee recommendation or–or turn it down, but that doesn't happen very often.

Kirsten: Wow, and 14 people did all that. All right.

[Pause]

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Safety Scoop. If you're looking for more information on the Private Protective Services Board, go to ncdps.gov and type the board's name in the search bar. As Paul said, the board strives to increase the integrity, competency and performance of private protective services professions to safeguard public health, safety and welfare.

[Pause]

Conclusion

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Kirsten: This is the Safety Scoop, a podcast written, produced and edited by the NCDPS communications team. The mission of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety is to safeguard and preserve the lives and property of the people of North Carolina through preparation, prevention and protection with integrity and honor. Follow the department on social media for a closer look at ongoing initiatives and resources. We're on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at NC Public Safety. If you enjoyed today's episode, be sure to subscribe to the Safety Scoop on your favorite podcast app. I'm your host, Kirsten Barber. Thanks for listening.

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