Better training means fewer officer-involved shootings

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For the Monitor

In 2016 there were 963 fatal officer-involved shootings in the United States. That number increased in 2017 to 987. While in 2016 New Hampshire was free of officer-involved fatalities, four of those in 2017 were here in New Hampshire. We have seen 32 officer-involved shootings in the state since 2005 (with 15 of those shot being unarmed).

De-escalation training is a part of the training for new officers in the police academy here in New Hampshire. This includes a Prevention-Intervention-Enforcement- Recovery (PIER) De-Escalation Model course that is a one-day course to help de-escalate “acting-out” behavior. It also includes a four-hour defensive tactics instructor course to teach the use of force progression, principles of suspect control, levels of positioning, joint manipulation, pressure points, defensive strikes, searching, ground fighting, weapon retention, and the use of impact weapons and pepper spray. The last course that is included is a four-hour course on mental illness and legal process that is designed to provide officers with an understanding of specific mental illnesses, medications and legal issues surrounding mental illness and de-escalation techniques for those individuals.

However, de-escalation training is not required for New Hampshire officers. They are required to take eight hours of training per year, plus firearms proficiency, use of force, first aid and CPR certificate renewals and defensive tactics refreshers. In places where de-escalation training is required on a yearly basis, officer-involved shootings have dropped considerably. A focus on slowing things down instead of rushing in and yelling the same order over and over does two important things: It brings down the amount of complaints of police aggression and saves lives. This should be a goal that we seek here in the state.

In 2015 Salt Lake City, Utah, police began taking required yearly de-escalation training and brought a high rate of officer-involved shootings to zero. Same city, same officers, completely different success rates. This includes times when they have chased armed suspects. Instead of shooting the victim for running or having a pistol drawn, they used words and got the suspects to lie down. De-escalation and transparency are the two tactics that units who have changed their methods say work.

In light of the unarmed man in Enfield shot, the unarmed man shot in Hopkinton and the man shot in the back while fleeing police in Canaan, I believe it is time to bring this reform to New Hampshire. Let’s not put police in a situation where their only option is to shoot.

Let’s give them the training for better options.

(Jilletta Jarvis of Sandown is a Libertarian candidate for governor.)