

Public Safety

As interest lags for law enforcement careers, program aims to attract recruits

By [Justin Jovenal](#)
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Priyanka Bose is captain of Unit 1742, helping lead a group of recruits in crisp blue uniforms as they train on how to handle bomb threats, handcuff suspects and testify in criminal cases.

But this is not the police academy, and Bose is not an officer — at least not yet. At 18, she is a recent high school graduate from Arlington who wants to go into a career in public safety. She is taking part in a new program that allows young people to form and guide their own mock police units under the mentorship of real officers.

[Public Safety Cadets](#), which kicked off this month, is the first national program run by law enforcement officers that gives people ages 14 to 21 exposure to what it is like to work in the field. The goal is to prepare teens for careers in law enforcement, as well as teach them skills in leadership, communication and teamwork that they can apply to any job they choose.

“I think the confidence that it builds in young people you won’t get elsewhere,” Bose said.

The launch comes as a number of police departments across the country struggle to find recruits and diversify their ranks. A recent Police Executive Research Forum survey found that nearly 66 percent of about 400 police departments surveyed said the number of job applicants had dropped.

A tighter labor market and controversies in recent years over police shootings may have led to fewer people looking to enter law enforcement.



Fairfax County Police Chief Edwin C. Roessler Jr. and Public Safety Cadet Priyanka Bose at police headquarters during the K-9 Krawl event in October. (Courtesy of Rodrigo Sardan)

Fairfax County police are the first department in the nation to start a Public Safety Cadets program, although applications have come in from departments around the nation and the nonprofit is planning to expand.

Fairfax Deputy Chief Ted Arnn is on the nonprofit group's board of directors and helped launch the three cadet units in U.S. locations.

“Each unit is like their own little police department,” Arnn said. “They elect their own officers and have ranks. They run the program with police officers guiding them.”

The units meet twice a month. They participate in various public safety training sessions, as well as do community service such as cleaning up parks and working parades.

About a dozen Fairfax police officers advise and teach each unit.

“We get to dispel some myths about law enforcement,” said Fairfax police officer Kent Bailey, a mentor. “We spend a lot of time talking about how law enforcement has changed in the recent decade.”

Arnn said program coordinators are finalizing incentives for cadets that will help them should they decide to pursue a career in law enforcement. That might include higher pay if they are hired as a Fairfax officer or giving graduates some priority when they apply for jobs with the department.

Bose said she plans to become a Fairfax officer and has been accepted into the academy, which she will begin at 21. Her goal is to work on the county’s rescue helicopter. She said it is in her blood.

“I’ve known since I was 10 I wanted to go into public safety,” Bose said. “I saw my dad in action as a police officer.”