

Caruth Police Institute At UNT Dallas Receives \$2 Million Gift From The Texas Instruments Foundation To Create Critical Police Training Program

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The University of North Texas at Dallas (UNT Dallas) has been awarded a four-year, \$2 million gift by the Texas Instruments (TI) Foundation. The project focuses on creating an Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) Project™ Center of Excellence at the Caruth Police Institute at UNT Dallas, which will provide peer-to-peer training for law enforcement to handle situations safely before they escalate.

Backed by prominent civil rights and law enforcement leaders, the evidence-based, field-tested ABLE™ Project was developed by Georgetown University Law Center's Innovative Policing Program (IPP) in collaboration with global law firm Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP. The outcome of ABLE training, which teaches ethical decision-making and tactics of intervention, is a healthy police officer – the single most essential and effective resource in public safety.

TI Foundation \$2 million grant to fund expansion of ABLE training in North Texas and across the state

The TI Foundation gift will provide for the expansion of ABLE-approved training opportunities to law enforcement departments across Texas – starting with those in North Texas – taught by ABLE-certified instructors. Grant funds will also be used toward the development of protocol and data collection to quantitatively assess outcomes inside police departments both pre- and post-training and capture best practices to be incorporated into future training materials.

“We are most grateful to the TI Foundation for their faith in us as expressed in this extraordinary gift. Their support will provide significant opportunities to expand transformative best practice law enforcement training locally and throughout Texas,” said UNT Dallas President Bob Mong.

By funding the Texas ABLE Center of Excellence, the TI Foundation is taking a meaningful stance on public safety that goes beyond rule making and policy change and gets to the heart of police culture and community engagement.

“We all deserve to live in safe communities, with public safety systems that are fair and equitable,” said Andy Smith, executive director of the TI Foundation. “We’re excited about how this grant will support our police officers by helping to strengthen the tactics and skills they employ to minimize escalation, misconduct and mistakes made in the heat of the moment. We believe the ABLE program will help to protect both our community and our law enforcement officers.”

The Caruth Police Institute at UNT Dallas: a center of excellence for ABLE training expansion

The Caruth Police Institute (CPI) at UNT Dallas was founded in 2008 through a unique partnership between law enforcement, higher education, and philanthropy. Since that time, CPI has evolved to provide professional police development and training services, policy analysis, program evaluation, technical support, and academic research to Texas police departments. CPI was approved to offer ABLE training in January 2021 and began providing training through ABLE-certified instructors to the Dallas Police Department in February 2021. This gift opportunity from the TI Foundation will increase the reach of the program.

“With this generous gift from the TI Foundation, the ABLE Texas Center of Excellence at the Caruth Police Institute will work intentionally with the ABLE Project at Georgetown Law and law enforcement agencies across North Texas, and the rest of our state, to ensure Texas has the finest and most well-prepared law enforcement professionals in the country,” said B.J. Wagner, Executive Director CPI at UNT Dallas. “We believe – and evidence suggests – that this work will lead to the most substantial transformation of policing culture and practice in modern times, benefitting both our communities and the officers who serve them.”

The ABLE Project’s origins: creating a policing culture that encourages peer intervention and community trust

The ABLE Project at Georgetown Law is a national hub for training, technical assistance, and research, all with the aim of creating a police culture in which officers routinely intervene as necessary to prevent misconduct, avoid police mistakes, and promote officer health and wellness. It is the first nationwide program dedicated to promoting, teaching, and studying “active bystandership” within law enforcement agencies. To date, more than 170 law enforcement agencies across the United States have opted into the ABLE Project because it benefits law enforcement officers and community members.

According to Professor Christy Lopez, co-director of Georgetown Law’s Innovative Policing Program, which runs ABLE: “The ABLE Project seeks to ensure every law enforcement officer in the United States has the opportunity to receive meaningful, effective active bystandership training, and to help agencies transform their approach to policing by building a culture that supports and sustains successful peer intervention to prevent harm.”

Chair of the ABLE Project Board of Advisors, Sheppard Mullin partner Jonathan Aronie, added: “Intervening in another’s action is harder than it looks after the fact, but it’s a skill we all can learn. And, frankly, it’s a skill we all need – police and non-police. ABLE teaches that skill. I’m thrilled we found such a committed partner to help us bring ABLE to the rest of the state of Texas. Thanks to the TI Foundation and the hard work of the ABLE Project team, it is expected that Texas soon will have more ABLE-certified agencies than any other state.”

The ABLE Project builds upon a training developed by Dr. Ervin Staub, the Founding Director of a program on the psychology of peace and violence, to help police officers stop unnecessary harmful behavior by fellow officers. In 2014, Dr. Staub, other consultants, and the New Orleans Police Department developed the EPIC (Ethical Policing Is Courageous) Peer Intervention Program. The ABLE Project leverages Dr. Staub’s prior work with EPIC to deliver practical, scenario-based training for police agencies in the strategies and tactics of police peer intervention. The ABLE Project guides agencies and communities on the concrete measures that must be in place to create and sustain a culture of peer intervention and support. The goal is to intervene *before* a decision harms a community member or officer.

“The ABLE Project is more than a mere training program,” added Wagner. “ABLE reflects a holistic effort to change the culture of policing. It provides a focused framework to support communities and police agencies in realizing the goal of reducing mistakes and preventing misconduct in policing, while enhancing the health and wellness of the law enforcement workforce.” Moreover, since law enforcement agencies must apply to participate in ABLE, the program drives sustainability by requiring letters of support from credible community groups before an agency will even be considered for inclusion in the program.

Georgetown University Law Center and the Caruth Police Institute are in the process of negotiating the specific terms of the ABLE Texas memorandum of agreement and expect to begin implementation effort later this month.

ABOUT THE CARUTH POLICE INSTITUTE

The Caruth Police Institute (CPI) was created by an innovative partnership between the Dallas Police Department and the University of North Texas at Dallas in 2008. CPI was funded with an initial grant of \$9.5 million from the Communities Foundation of Texas, and initially focused on fulfilling the complex research, career advancement, and leadership development needs of the Dallas Police Department. This puts the Dallas Police Department in the unique position of being a national resource for innovative and evidence-based strategies in policing. Today, CPI serves law enforcement and public safety agencies throughout North Texas, offering customized leadership courses, seminars, training, and research design. For more information, visit <https://cpi.untDallas.edu/>.

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