

State Patrol may move training center to G.I.

By Carol Bryant

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Several officials agree with a report prepared for the Legislature that the State Patrol's training academy in Lincoln should be moved to the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center in Grand Island.

In a letter included with the report, Allen Curtis, director of the Nebraska Crime Commission, and Col. Ron Tussing, who heads the State Patrol, support relocating the academy.

"In conclusion, it appears the most supportable alternative for all of law enforcement and the best bang for the buck for taxpayers is to collocate the Nebraska State Patrol Academy at the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center and to upgrade the facility to handle all of law enforcement's needs now and in the foreseeable future," Curtis and Tussing wrote.

The study was prepared by Bruce Prenda of the Legislative Research Division's Program Evaluation Unit. It gives three solutions for the academy:

- Renovating its Lincoln location for about \$115,000.

- Relocating the school to Grand Island. Estimated cost for that option is \$4.9 million.

- Building a new school for \$6.2 million, which does not include the price to purchase land.

If the academy moves to Grand Island, the facility there would have to be modified, the report says. Dorm rooms to accommodate an additional 50 to 60 people would be needed. More cafeteria staff would probably be added, but with proper scheduling, the cafeteria could serve both schools. The academy could use the center's gym, obstacle course, weight room, swimming pool, driving range and firing range.

On Tuesday, Curtis said the academy is not yet definitely coming to Grand Island.

"It's premature to say that will happen," Curtis said. "It is possible by having one quality facility to provide better training to all. It winds up costing the taxpayer less money."

Curtis said the report by the Legislative Research Division is only half of what's needed to decide the academy issue. The other half, a program statement, would include cost estimates, architectural studies and financing concerns.

The earliest the situation could be presented to the Legislature would be in 1997, Curtis said.

"I don't think it can be dealt with in this session. It's too early," he said. "Generally, the law enforcement community is supportive of the concept."

The program statement should be submitted by Sept. 15, 1996, according to a letter in the report from Sen. Jerome Warner, who heads the program evaluation committee for the two schools.

Tussing was unavailable for comment Tuesday. Jeff Hanson, the State Patrol's public information coordinator, said Patrol letters in the report represent its stand on the issue.

Capt. Bryan Tuma, who heads Troop C based in Grand Island, favors the move. Tuma was training director at the academy for six years before being assigned to Troop C in January 1994.

"This concept they're looking at is the most viable concept available. It appears this is the concept they're going to approve," Tuma said. "It's been studied from a number of different perspectives. I think everybody's come to the conclusion this is an opportunity to improve the training plant for the State Patrol."

One advantage of moving the academy to Grand Island is its central location, Tuma said.

Tom Miller, LETC director, said moving the academy should have been recommended sooner.

"It's overdue," he said. "It's in the mutual interest of the entire law enforcement community. It should foster greater cooperation. ... It breaks down a lot of barriers."

"I would have liked to see this idea studied some time ago," Miller said. "We've got to do a better job of conserving resources and using what we have."

Each school has instructors who could teach courses for the other school, Miller said.

"They have to cover the same areas we cover. They may do more, or they may do less hours than we do," he said. "If you can avoid duplication today, it's going to save money."

Miller said the two schools could share features of the Grand Island facility. Having most of the state's law enforcement officers trained in one location would allow them to make contacts with other officers throughout the state.

Even though the report for the Legislature has been completed, Miller said more research is needed.

"I think the biggest challenge is they need a study done by some professional entity that has experience in this area," he said.

The report offers as options for financing expansion of LETC:

- Increasing court costs for criminal proceedings.

- Having the city of Grand Island establish a bond issue.

- Appropriating money from the state's General Fund.

"Correspondence with the city of Grand Island indicates the city's willingness to consider the same type of bond issue financing arrangement for an addition to the center as Grand Island originally entered into with the state for financing the center," the report says.