



Fire and Police Commission

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Memorandum

To: Board of Fire and Police Commissioners

From: Leon W. Todd
Executive Director

Date: May 1, 2026

RE: Minimum Requirements for the Police Sergeant Position

In this memo, I recommend two changes to the minimum requirements for the sergeant position. First, as discussed briefly at the FPC's regular meeting on April 16, 2026, I am recommending that the continuous service requirement be reduced from seven years to six. A communication file on this recommendation was referred to Testing and Recruiting Committee, which will meet next on May 12, 2026.

Second, I am recommending that eligibility requirements related to discipline be modified so that members are ineligible when they have either (1) five or more cumulative days of suspension within the last two years, or (2) fifteen or more cumulative suspension days within the past six/seven years. Currently, members with five or more cumulative suspension days within the past seven years are ineligible.

BACKGROUND

Since 2019, the FPC's job announcements for the sergeant exam have contained the following minimum requirements:

Applicants must have served continuously as a sworn member of the City of Milwaukee Police Department for at least seven years or have a combination of experience as a Police Officer and Detective equivalent to seven years immediately prior to [the application deadline]. Continuous service includes:

- Time spent on military leave or duty disability will count toward the actual years of service requirement.

- Police Officers who have had leaves of absence related to physical disabilities, including maternity leave, sick leave, or education leave or leaves which qualify under the Family and Medical Leave Act.
- A break in service of 30 cumulative days or less for other non-disciplinary reasons.
- A break in service of 4 cumulative days or less for disciplinary reasons will be considered to have continuous service but must have seven years of actual service.

I. Continuous Service Requirement

As noted above, I am recommending that the seven-year continuous service requirement be reduced to six years. The Milwaukee Police Department is in support of this recommended change.

The change would bring MPD more in line with the national average for the sergeant position. As noted in an October 31, 2023, FPC memo prepared by Research and Policy Analyst Barbara Cooley, the national average is five years.

While **length of service** requirements for promotion vary among police departments, promotion to the sergeant level typically follows an average of at least 5 years of officer experience. Enough time is needed for practical on-the-job learning but not so much as to leave officers feeling “stuck” and becoming discouraged.

See FPC Memo, 10/31/23, at 1, 6 (emphasis in original).

The memo further notes that:

Waiting 7 years before applying for promotion to sergeant may cause potential future leaders to become discouraged and lose motivation. It can negatively affect retention of those who wish to lead. Five years of experience (which is the norm) may be adequate to learn rules and procedures.

Presumably, the length of service is intended to ensure maturity before promotion. A more effective way to develop and assess maturity in officers could be to require training in leadership and mindfulness, as described above, or alternatively to give additional credit to candidates who have sought out such training.

Id. at 6.

While this memo notes that five years may be adequate, MPD leadership has indicated that they would be more comfortable with six years, to better ensure members have the adequate experience and/or maturity before promotion.

In addition, as noted in the memo, leadership training may be a more effective way to develop and assess maturity. MPD should therefore consider expanding its training for newly appointed sergeants (which could be done regardless of whether the FPC Board ultimately adopts this recommendation). FPC staff are also planning

to add a new component to the sergeant exam in 2026—an additional written test specifically designed and validated to better assess a candidate’s leadership abilities and qualities. Together, these steps—reducing the minimum service requirement to six years rather than five, expanded leadership training, and new leadership testing—should sufficiently mitigate potential risks of reducing the continuous service requirement. At the same time, the change will hopefully have a positive impact on retention and morale.

As of April 21, 2026, there were 814 MPD police officers and detectives with at least seven years of service. Reducing the minimum service requirement to six years would result in an additional 64 members being eligible for the sergeant exam this year (those who joined the department in 2020). In subsequent years, additional eligibility numbers would roughly track with the number of officers who joined MPD six years earlier. The following chart lists the number of members who joined MPD as new police officer recruits from 2020 through May 1, 2026.

Year	Recruit Class	Budget #	Actual # Appointed	Actual # Graduated	%
2020	Class 1 - 2020	65	65	62	95%
2021	Class 1 - 2021	30	30	26	87%
2022	Class 1 - 2022	65	59	50	85%
	Class 2 - 2022	65	62	51	82%
2023	Class 1 - 2023	65	65	51	78%
	Class 2 - 2023	50	51	41	80%
2024	Class 1 - 2024	65	46	37	80%
	Class 2 - 2024	65	35	25	71%
	Class 3 - 2024	65	29	25	86%
2025	Class 1 - 2025	65	31	25	81%
	Class 2 - 2025	65	45	35	78%
	Class 3 - 2025	65	35	30*	-
2026	Class 1 - 2026	65	40	34*	-

* Currently remaining in the Academy

II. Disciplinary Requirements

I am also recommending that eligibility requirements related to discipline be modified. Again, under recent past practice, members with five or more cumulative suspension days within the past seven years have been deemed ineligible. While this is certainly appropriate in many cases, in some situations it can result in members being ineligible for excessively long periods of time.

For example, a member who receives a five-day suspension in their sixth or seventh year of service would not be eligible to take the sergeant exam until thirteen or fourteen years into their career. This could effectively amount to more than half of their entire career. Especially in cases where the suspension does not involve an integrity-related violation or other misconduct that reasonably calls their leadership

fitness into question (for example, damaging a squad car), this could amount to an excessive second “punishment.”

I therefore recommend that this rule be modified so that members with either (1) five or more cumulative suspension days within the preceding two years, or (2) fifteen or more cumulative suspension days within the preceding six/seven years, be deemed ineligible for the sergeant exam. Members with five or more cumulative days within the last two years (but fewer than fifteen), would then still be ineligible for the sergeant exam, but not continuously so for another six or seven years. Instead, they would be ineligible for the next exam, but would become eligible again for next round of promotional testing, which would presumably be at least two years later.

At the same time, members who receive more substantial discipline (in excess of 14 cumulative days) within the preceding six or seven years would be ineligible for a longer period of time. Such discipline could restart their “promotional clock” entirely, if they were suspended for fifteen or more days for a single violation. In that case, they would be ineligible for next six or seven years. On the other hand, if they were suspended in separate incidents that totaled 15 or more days over a rolling six or seven-year period, their promotional clock would restart once they had fewer than fifteen days within the preceding six or seven years. This could be less than six or seven years in total and would vary depending on individual circumstances.

The FPC Board would, of course, retain its discretion to review and deny any individual promotion, even if the candidate otherwise met the minimum requirements. Modifying the rule in this manner would therefore not guarantee that any members with five or more suspension days within the minimum service period would necessarily be promoted.

For these reasons, I recommend modifying the minimum requirements for the sergeant exam as follows:

Applicants must have served continuously as a sworn member of the City of Milwaukee Police Department for at least **six (6) years** immediately prior to the application deadline. Continuous service includes:

- Time spent on military leave or duty disability will count toward the actual years of service requirement.
- Members who have had leaves of absence related to physical disabilities, including maternity leave, sick leave, or education leave or leaves which qualify under the Family and Medical Leave Act.
- A break in service of **thirty (30) cumulative days** or less for other non-disciplinary reasons.
- A break in service of **four (4) cumulative days** or less for disciplinary reasons within the **two (2) years** immediately preceding the application deadline, provided the member has at least **six (6) years** of actual service:
- A break in service of **fourteen (14) cumulative days** or less for disciplinary reasons, provided the member has at least **six (6) years** of actual service.