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GENERAL NEWS

Training, screening efforts gain steam

NASCO outlines landscape of state, federal initiatives for private security industry

By Elizabeth Beaulieu

WASHINGTON - A 10-year battle to require training and screening standards for private security officers came to an end in Connecticut on Oct. 1. On that date, a law went into effect requiring all security officers to take a state-approved, eight-hour course on basic safety and criminal justice issues. The law also requires security officers to undergo national background checks, in addition to state background checks.

The National Association of Security Companies, whose members employ more than 350,000 security personnel, is at the forefront of efforts like these, on both a state and national basis. Here's what Gail Simonton, executive director and general counsel for NASCO, had to say.

Security Director News: How many states have training standards for private security officers?

Simonton: There are 19 states now that have set some requirements for training unarmed and armed officers. Fourteen states address armed officers only, and 17 states don't address it at all. Ten of those 17 states don't even regulate the private security industry.

SDN: How many states have screening standards for the industry?

Simonton: Forty states regulate the industry, and of those, 60 percent provide for a check of the federal criminal history database, in addition to the state's database. The others require only a state check, or nothing at all. In some instances, it's a matter of doing FBI checks on armed officers and state checks on unarmed officers.

SDN: Where is the industry at on a federal level in requiring standards?

Simonton: S.1743, a bill introduced by U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., and four other bipartisan co-sponsors, has passed the Senate unanimously and is now before the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, awaiting markup. That bill uses existing infrastructure for background checks - the state criminal justice services offices - instead of a clearinghouse, which is what past bills have proposed. This bill has our support, as well as the support of ASIS International, the International Association of Security and Investigative Regulators and other private security and law enforcement organizations.


SDN: Why has implementing standards for training and



A law in Connecticut that requires training and screening for private security officers went into effect on Oct. 1.

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screening been a slow process?

Simonton: It has been gaining more steam recently. One of the things that has contributed to the forward movement of S.1743 is that it goes to great lengths to address each of the stumbling blocks of previous bills.

SDN: What's one of those stumbling blocks?

Simonton: In the early 1990s, predecessor versions of the bill made the screening standards mandatory. Some members of Congress who are strong advocates of state rights objected to a federal mandate. S.1743 respects these concerns, and allows states that do not want to participate to opt out.

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