



The IADLEST National Decertification Index
Ensuring Integrity in Law Enforcement Hiring and Employment

A Serious Matter of Law Enforcement Professionalism and Integrity

In law enforcement, the badge is a symbol of trust and authority. Along with the uniform, it implies that the person wearing it exemplifies the highest standards of policing and can be depended upon to maintain professionalism in even the most challenging and dangerous situations.

This is why accounts of police misconduct shake the very foundations of law enforcement integrity, everywhere. One such account is that of Sean Sullivan, once a trusted officer, who attempted to work around the requirements of state peace officer certification, designed to uphold the highest standards of conduct. Sullivan traveled across states, seeking employment as an officer, after being stripped of his certification in Oregon for grave misconduct. Just three months after leaving Oregon, Sullivan showed up in Alaska and falsified his application to indicate he had no convictions or prior misconduct. Later that very month, Sullivan arrived in Kansas, making the same claims. This time, he was actually hired – however his employment was terminated within a few months.

What prevented Sullivan from gaining or maintaining employment in law enforcement while continuing to conceal his past misconduct? The credit goes to the diligence of the state agencies of Oregon, Alaska, and Kansas, who are responsible for peace officer certification in their respective states – and more importantly, due to an important law enforcement employment intelligence tool at their disposal. That tool is the **National Decertification Index or NDI**. More on the NDI in a bit – but first some background information on the organization responsible for its existence.

The International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training



The International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (**IADLEST**) is an association of standards and training managers and leaders. Its primary focus is criminal justice standards and training. To the extent that the focus and the values promoted thereby can be furthered and shared, all training professionals are welcome as members, and among the most influential members are POST organizations.

The term “POST” refers a state’s certifying authority for peace officers – those with state-sanctioned law enforcement, investigative, and arrest powers within its jurisdiction. “POST” stands for Peace Officer Standards and Training. Although these organizations may go by different names (e.g., Commission, Council, Board), each is responsible for setting the standards of character, conduct, training, and performance required to earn and maintain peace officer authority in their jurisdiction – what is required to be certified.

The National Decertification Index

The NDI, developed by IADLEST, represents a landmark innovation in law enforcement hiring and employment practices. By creating a centralized, national database of officers decertified due to misconduct, the NDI significantly enhances the integrity and accountability of police forces across the United States. This whitepaper examines the genesis, evolution, and pivotal role of the NDI in promoting a culture of professionalism within policing, and ensuring that individuals with a history of misconduct cannot undermine public trust in law enforcement.

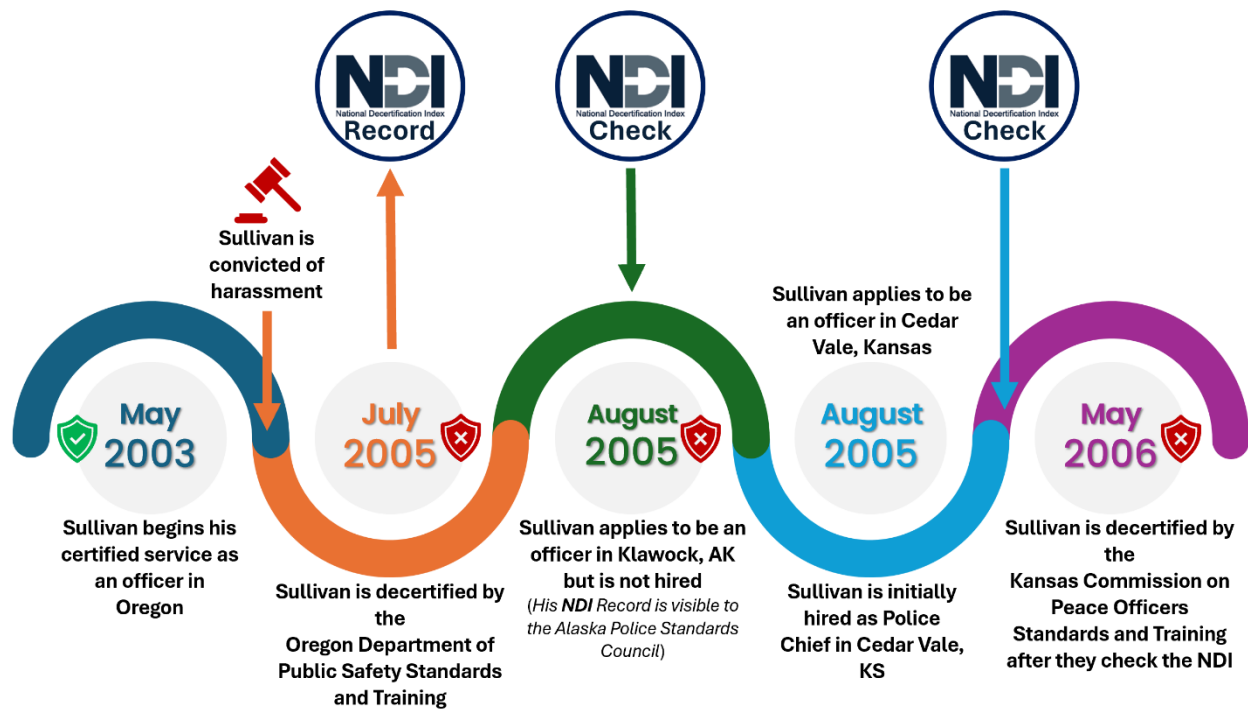
To better understand the significance of the NDI, it is important to understand the working definitions of “decertification” and “misconduct”

Decertification. Persons granted the authority to enforce laws, conduct criminal investigations, and to make arrests, are certified by POST agencies. When a POST organization determines that an individual no longer meets the requirements for continued certification, they then initiate a process of decertification which usually includes an investigation, a finding of fact, due process of response or appeal if the individual so chooses, and the formal suspension, revocation, or removal of peace officer authority – decertification. Decertification for failing to meet POST requirements for continued certification may occur for several reasons, including the inability to maintain skills proficiency, lacking the required number of annual continuing training hours, or a loss of law employment due to administrative reasons. But most often, decertification is due to misconduct.

Misconduct. Misconduct occurs when a certified officer is found to have engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, illegal or criminal activity, unnecessary or excessive use of force, improper use of police authority, or actions which violate moral or ethical provisions of agency policy or POST rules. Misconduct may also be termed as “misfeasance” - a lawful action performed in an illegal or improper manner, “malfeasance” - an intentional improper or illegal action, or “nonfeasance” - the failure to act, resulting in harm or damage. Regardless, misconduct is a clear departure from the professionalism expected of law enforcement officers, and a serious violation of public trust.

To clarify, the NDI is intended to contain data on cases of misconduct, and not decertifications based on administrative reasons which are not as concerning should the decertified officer seek future employment in law enforcement.

Simply stated, the NDI is a pointer system – a database containing basic information, sufficient to inform its users where to look and who to contact for more detailed information. Here’s how it works. Let’s use the Officer Sullivan example from before.

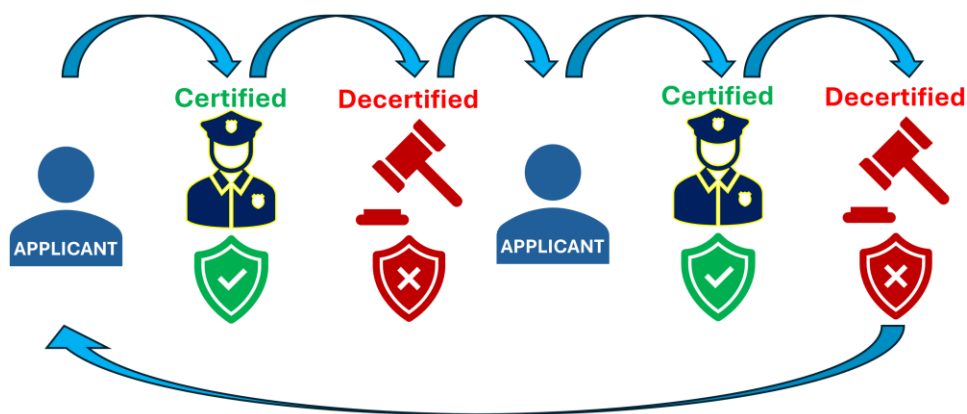


As you can see from this general timeline, Sullivan’s conviction for harassment resulted in decertification by Oregon’s POST agency, the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST). DPSST entered a record of the decertification into the NDI. From this point on, the NDI record was available to any future hiring police agency, or any POST, through a simple search of Sullivan’s name and date of birth by a registered NDI user.

Because of the NDI, Alaska was able to make an informed decision not to hire Sullivan, and Kansas was able to prevent Sullivan from continuing to serve as Police Chief of Cedar Vale, where his conduct was already being investigated after just nine months of employment there. All any agency or POST needs to do in the future is to check the NDI, which will direct them to contact DPSST and/or the Oregon court system to discover the details of Sullivan's past misconduct and decertification.

Pre-NDI

Before the NDI, the responsibility of monitoring decertified officers was fragmented among states, leading to an inconsistent and unreliable patchwork of information. This lack of a unified system allowed officers dismissed for misconduct to easily escape their past by moving to another state, posing a direct risk to public safety and eroding trust in law enforcement.

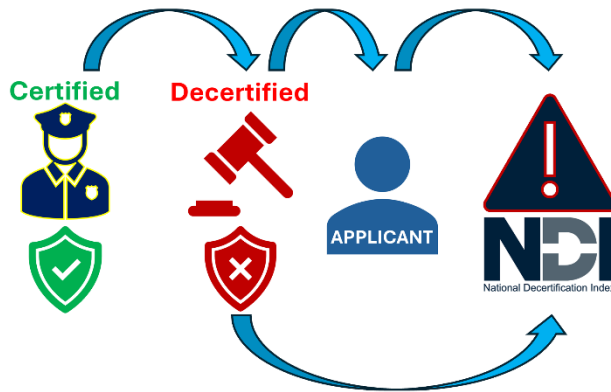


The core issue to be addressed was the absence of a national mechanism to prevent decertified officers from being employed in law enforcement elsewhere. This loophole not only compromised public safety but also challenged the credibility and integrity of the policing profession. The absence of a national registry for decertified officers highlighted a critical gap in law enforcement's accountability and professional standards.

NDI Past

During the 1990's, as noted by various researchers, POST organizations were increasingly decertifying officers for behaviors which constituted misconduct. These behaviors included sex on duty or with arrestees or inmates, theft, assault, improper or excessive use of force, and illicit substance use. But case studies from this time indicated that fired and/or decertified officers continued to seek employment in other departments, frequently with the new hiring agency having no knowledge of their past misconduct.

IADLEST began developing the NDI in 1999, and by 2000 it was online and in use, populated with decertification records as far back as 1973, provided by the initial participating states' POST organizations.




The NDI provided an important new tool to disrupt the cycle of rehiring unworthy officers, which had been perpetuated by a lack of interagency information sharing. The NDI was a centralized, reliable, cost-free, clearinghouse of basic decertification information – enough at least to alert police hiring officials of potential problems with their applicants. Thus the creation of the NDI filled a crucial gap in employment accountability, and the future integrity of the law enforcement profession.

The NDI is not a “Blacklist”

With due regard to each state’s POST organization’s statutory and administrative authority, and each officer’s right to an expectation of fairness and due process, the NDI is not a blacklist. That is, the NDI database includes only verified cases of decertifications due to proven misconduct, and the names, dates of birth, dates of service, and relevant employer and certifying/decertifying authorities. **An individual with an NDI record is not banned from future employment in law enforcement.** Every POST organization has unique criteria by which they conduct their decertification process, and what constitutes serious misconduct in one state may not amount to decertifiable behavior in another. A crucial part of the law enforcement hiring process is a timely and thorough investigation which includes background and criminal history checks. In the case of a previously decertified officer, that investigation should also include a review of the detailed records and circumstances surrounding the misconduct; information which is held by prior employing agencies and the certifying POST organization. The NDI serves as tool for background investigators to verify an applicant does not appear in the database, or to follow up on applicants who appear in the NDI in order to make an informed hiring decision.

NDI Present



NDI
National Decertification Index

National Decertification Index
The National Decertification Index (NDI) is a national registry of certificate or license revocation actions related to officer misconduct as reported by participating state government agencies.

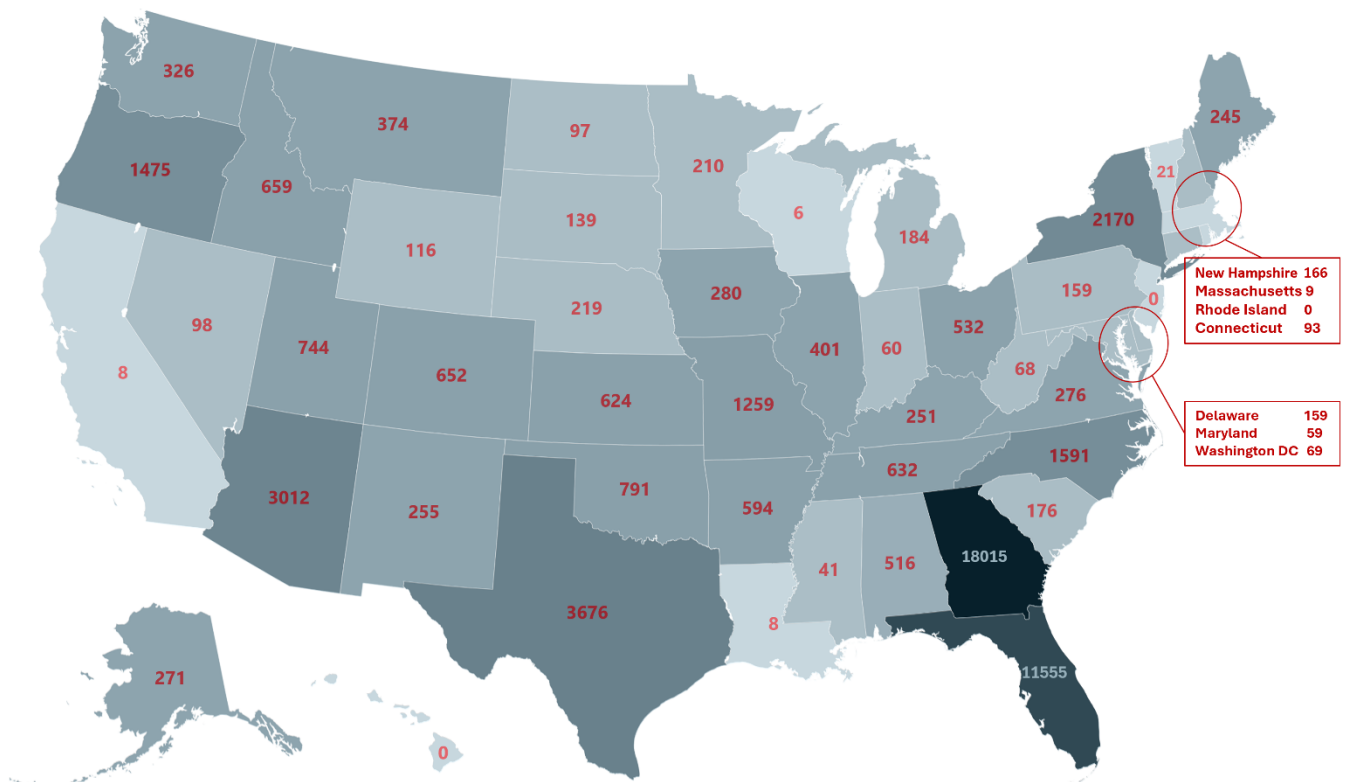
[Learn More](#)

The NDI is a straightforward web-based platform which consists of a database, dynamic web pages which interact with the database, and static web pages which are simply informational.

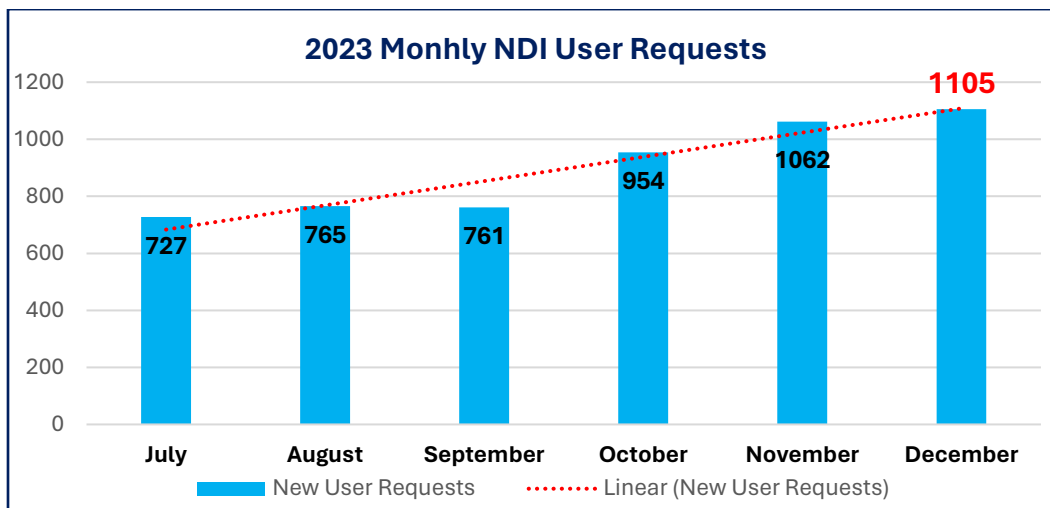
Today, 49 participating POST agencies (states and Washington DC) contribute records to the NDI. The State of Hawaii is in the process of developing a POST organization as of 2024, with pending legislation mandating the use of the NDI in hiring. At present, the Rhode Island Police Officers Commission of Standards and Training does not have decertification authority.

With NDI records entered by authorized POST agencies thus far, the system currently houses over **53,500 records**. At the time of this whitepaper, over **11,000 users** from various U.S. law enforcement agencies access the NDI and perform over **5,000 searches monthly**.

The US heat map below shows the distribution of NDI records from each state available to search as of January 5, 2024.



The NDI is growing in numbers of records available for search, monthly searches, and users. In the last half of 2023, monthly requests for new user access to the NDI grew to an all time high of 1,105. NDI access is granted to requesters working for, or on behalf of, authorized POST or law enforcement agencies.



NDI Future

The NDI has profoundly impacted law enforcement hiring practices, significantly reducing the risk of rehiring officers with histories of misconduct. Future directions for the NDI involve expanding its capabilities, enhancing its interface and usability for all police agencies, and ensuring continuous updates and improvements in data accuracy and security.

Key planned developments in the NDI include:

- **Technical Innovations:** Implementing advanced security protocols and database technology to ensure the integrity and reliability of the data.
- **Privacy and Security Measures:** Developing measures to protect the personal information listed in the database, balancing transparency with privacy rights.
- **Widespread Adoption:** Overcoming logistical challenges to encourage adoption by law enforcement agencies across all 50 states. Efforts include extensive outreach, education, and collaboration with state and federal law enforcement entities.

Call to Action

IADLEST calls on law enforcement agencies, legislators, and community leaders to unite in incorporating the NDI into hiring practices, promoting integrity, professionalism, and trust in policing. By leveraging a collective approach to decertification and employment, we aim to elevate policing standards and nurture a culture of accountability.