

Herndon (VA) Police Department

Officer Wellness

The Town of Herndon is the third largest incorporated town in Virginia, comprised of 4.25 square miles. It is situated in western Fairfax County, just minutes from Dulles International Airport and approximately 25 miles from Washington, DC. The town has 11 parks. HPD is nationally accredited through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. **Under the leadership of Chief Maggie Deboard are 54 police officers and 18 civilian personnel.**

The Herndon Police Department became the law enforcement liaison for a critical public safety mental health survey that was conducted in 2021 and led by the U.S. Marshal's Service and was developed to collect mental health data tailored towards first responder mental health (law enforcement, fire and rescue, corrections, and dispatchers), to assess levels of PTSD, anxiety, and depression among participants. The HPD received an agency summary quickly due to their lead role in the project. The survey results were in line with national and state results that showed a significant number of officers were experiencing moderate to severe levels of anxiety and depression. Also alarming from the survey results was a snapshot of those with levels of PTSD and suicide ideation. HPD has implemented several wellness programs since.

Police psychologist services were contracted to assist Herndon officers and dispatchers who were struggling with exposure to traumatic events, as well as the daily stresses of the job. Having a contract psychologist proved invaluable last year when officers responded to an apartment complex for a welfare check of a family, only to discover the murdered bodies of two young children and their mother. The psychologist, who had her own emotional support dog along with her, met with every officer and dispatcher involved in the incident prior to the end of their shift and upon leaving the station. The psychologist also provided follow up sessions with those who needed it.

Annual wellness educational sessions are mandated for both sworn and professional staff, as well as command staff, as part of HPD's wellness program. Mandating these sessions through policy removes the stigma of having to talk with a mental health professional. These sessions were conducted virtually with the police psychologists and done in complete confidence. Follow up sessions were conducted with personnel as needed or as requested.

HPD has a total of seven officers trained in peer support. A retired police officer is also trained, as is one assistant supervisor in the dispatch center. When incidents exceed the ability of HPD, peer teams from other jurisdictions in the region are called to assist our department.

The department recognizes that poor performance and behavior often has a root cause that can be addressed successfully if discovered early. As a result, the department has established an Early Warning System to identify officers in need of structured intervention measures to address problematic behavior or other potential issues. The objective of an Early Warning System review is to recognize incidents, practices, or patterns of behavior that negatively impact the department's mission or the officer's performance, and provide structured intervention through monitoring, training, counseling, or other productive means to improve performance.

A Restoration and Recovery Room, or "nap" room was established in HPD to provide officers and dispatchers a safe place to take a 20-30-minute power nap, meditate, or otherwise use as a quiet space to decompress.

Officers and dispatchers work long, varied shifts and are routinely working in states of sleep deprivation. Recliners, dim lighting, dark paint, and a sound machine contribute to a soothing environment. Before this room was created, officers would routinely catch short naps in their cruisers when sleep deprived or while waiting to go to court or drive home after an extended shift. This nap room creates a safe place for officers to take a short nap without judgment. Officers also use this room to catch a short nap while waiting to attend court after their shift or after court before they drive home. The room is also used for meditation by our staff and can be utilized as a private space for female employees to lactate after the birth of a child.

A decision was made to add a dedicated facility dog to the HPD family to assist our personnel with daily stress and trauma exposure. A non-profit organization based out of Portsmouth, VA, (Mutts With a Mission), who trained and placed dogs with veterans suffering from PTSD began to place some of their dogs with law enforcement agencies as facility dogs, where they could serve an entire group of first responders as opposed to one individual with PTSD. In April of 2020, Canine Bragg joined the HPD family and had an immediate positive impact on personnel. Bragg and his handler have also visited some of our local schools for various special events, which has helped break down barriers between the police and our community.

HPD has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which offers counseling and support services for personnel at no cost. The EAP can assist with a variety of problems whether personal or job-related. Any employee or family member may initiate a request for help by calling EAP without going through the chain of command and the services provided are strictly confidential. Supervisors also can make employee referrals to EAP when they determine someone needs services. If a work performance problem continues and the employee does not voluntarily consult with EAP, the supervisor can initiate a formal referral for the employee. The department also provides suicide prevention training to their staff.

Department personnel have 24-hour access to a well-equipped gymnasium that contains functional fitness, strength, and cardio equipment and personnel are provided one hour to work out on duty each shift. The Town of Herndon also has its own Community Center with an indoor pool, gymnasium, strength and cardio equipment, tennis courts, and fitness classes. All personnel have free access to this facility and the classes that are offered, on or off duty. In addition, the Town's golf course is free to all employees.

Medical physicals are mandated every 1, 2, or 3 years through the Public Safety Occupational Health Center (OHC), depending on the age of the officer. The physical examination for sworn personnel is conducted only to determine the employee's continued fitness to perform the tasks of a police officer and to inform them of their general physical condition.

In addition to regular medical tests, exams, and blood work provided by the OHC, officers are also given stress tests, vaccines, and chest x-rays at various stages in their career. Officers are encouraged to drop in at the OHC to have blood drawn a week before their scheduled physical so the doctor can go over the results with them at the time of their medical exam.

COVID vaccines and flu shots are made available through advertised locations in the County or are provided free of charge through Town insurance at local pharmacies within our jurisdiction.

The Town offers access to financial planning resources to all personnel for their Town 457 plans. Employees can work with the Town's Investment Advisor or use the online Web Education Portal to get assistance.

**** This summary is only a brief overview of many of the agency's programs. In the actual submission you will see that the agency has other programs and incentives to benefit its members. Please review their entire submission and its associated documents to gain a complete understanding of their program.**