

## **Herndon, VA Police Department Comprehensive Officer Safety**

This entire document represents Herndon Police Department's submission for Comprehensive Officer Safety. Though the agency has submitted individually for consideration in the categories of Officer Wellness, Officer Safety and Officer Traffic Safety, this submission represents the totality of Herndon's Comprehensive program and should be rated in its own category, while their submissions in the other three award categories should be rated separately and individually.

The City of Herndon Police Department serves a residential population of 24,500 citizens over 4.25 square miles. Herndon is located minutes from Dulles International Airport and is 25 miles from Washington DC. The department employs 54 sworn officers and 18 civilian employees and has been nationally accredited through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement (CALEA) for the past 10 consecutive years.

### **OFFICER WELLNESS**

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.

#### **GENERAL OFFICER SAFETY**

**All officers are issued custom fitted level III soft body armor and required to wear them on duty and while at the range.** The vests were paid for by the DOJ Bulletproof Vest Partnership and replaced every five years as recommended by the manufacturer. Officers also have access to lighted ballistic shields and helmets which are carried in the supervisor's vehicle.

**Officers are issued Glock 9mm handguns with mounted tactical lights.** The department also issues shotguns that include tactical weapon mounted lights and slings. are also provided with patrol rifles and must qualify with them quarterly. The department used to allow officers to carry their personal rifles but discontinued this practice and standardized all rifles so any officer picking up a rifle would be familiar with its operation and capabilities. Officers are also encouraged to carry back-up handguns and must qualify with them. Officers are also issued Tasers, pepper spray and collapsible batons.

**The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services mandates that all peace officers qualify with their firearms once per year and must receive a passing score of 70% or higher. Herndon PD requires their officers to complete two range trainings per year and requires its officer to achieve a score of 75% or higher.** In addition to weapons qualifications, **officers are trained in live fire tactical shooting training which includes low light shooting, shooting while moving, shooting from behind cover/concealment, shooting from behind a shield, shooting with another officer and use of force decision making.**

**The department removed less-lethal shotguns from service, to eliminate the opportunity to mistakenly load them with live rounds, and replaced them with 40mm less lethal launchers capable of discharging foam baton rounds. All patrol officers carry these in their vehicles. Last year the foam launcher was used successfully to subdue a subject in emotional crisis who was armed with a knife.**

HPD has been using body worn and in-car cameras for four and a half years and was one of the first agencies in Northern Virginia to have body worn cameras (BWCs). The officer's BWC has a built in GPS so the officer can be located even when out of dash cam view. Video footage in use of force incidents are reviewed by the commander. When/if appropriate, the video footage of both cameras are played in briefings and trainings, not to criticize the officer using the camera, but to educate other officers of what went right.

**All officers are also issued high-visibility vests** and they are required to wear them when out of their patrol cars for longer periods of time to reduce the opportunities for their officers being struck by other vehicles.

**The department also has two thermal imaging cameras** to search for subjects hidden by darkness. This provides a greater level of safety than officers searching for dangerous subjects in the dark.

**All officers are issued tactical trauma kits referred to as "Go bags"**. Inside these kits are tourniquets, Quick Clot, sucking chest wound patches, bandages, Narcan and an airway tube. All officers are trained in the use of every item in the trauma kit. These bags also include additional pistol and rifle magazines. Each patrol car also contains a smaller first aid kit inside the vehicle.

**HPD conducts biennial active shooter training independently and with local police agencies and fire departments.** During this training, officers must also utilize their trauma bags to provide aid to simulated shooting victims as well as themselves. These exercises have been conducted at the community center and town staff have been trained to react and retreat during an active shooter situation. Officers also have key card access for entry into any town building at any time, as well as high resolution maps of these buildings pre-loaded into the officers' mobile computers as well as printed maps being available in the sergeant's command vehicle.

**HPD has 25 specially trained crisis intervention team (CIT) officers who are available to respond to crisis situations involving mental illness or developmental disability. Officers also receive de-escalation training. As a result of the department's efforts, use of force incidents have been reduced from 21 in 2018 to 12 in 2020 and all but four incidents in 2021 involved hands on use of force only.**

**When the COVID pandemic hit the United States in 2020, the department implemented a thorough safety policy to reduce staff exposure to the virus.** Officers were issued N-95 masks, gloves and hand sanitizer. The front office at the department was closed, minor reports were taken by phone and roll call briefings were

cancelled. **Frequently used locations within the department were disinfected daily by the use of a hydrostatic disinfectant sprayer.** Patrol cars were disinfected after every prisoner transport. If this could not be done, the vehicle was taken out of service until it could be. **Officers were also offered the COVID vaccines, which 80% of staff voluntarily took advantage of.** All officers are also issued personal protection kits with full body suits.

## **OFFICER TRAFFIC SAFETY**

**The department sent two sworn members to the Below 100 training in 2018, which is a sense training program on safety areas under an officer's control, with particular focus on such elements as seatbelts, vests, driving tactics and proper procedures. The officers then returned and conducted training for the entire department. The two officers used the Below 100 template for the training, but also incorporated HPD's own relevant traffic policies into the instruction.**

**Sworn officers attend two weeks of Emergency Vehicle Operations (EVO) training when they go through the academy. After graduation, officers are required to attend EVO training every three years.** Training is conducted at the academy track and officers drive the same vehicles they operate on duty. EVO training involves high speed driving and decision making, pursuit operations and policy review, cone courses and accident avoidance, and inclement weather driving on a specialized skid pan to simulate icy roadway conditions.

**HPD has several trained instructors who assist academy staff in conducting EVO training for the department.** These instructors also assist academy staff several times a year when conducting EVO training for new recruits. This allows the department's part-time EVO instructors to hone their teaching and driving skills in this area. One of their EVO instructors is also tasked with providing classroom-based pursuit training annually for all sworn department members. This training covers our department policy, liability and relevant case law. Videos of police pursuits located online are often used to illustrate the dangers involved in pursuit and response driving.

**All police vehicles are equipped with an automatic vehicle locator (AVL) that provides real-time location and tracking management. This helps dispatchers to effectively deploy officers to calls, maximize efficiency and time, and provides a critical safety feature to assist in quickly locating an officer's vehicle when they are not responding to the radio.** The new Axon body worn camera system currently being implemented in the department will provide an additional GPS tracking device to assist in quickly locating an officer on foot and away from their vehicle.

**The department currently utilizes Panasonic in-car cameras** but is in the process of transitioning to the Axon camera system, with built in license plate readers (LPR). In addition to the forward-facing front camera, HPD's vehicles are equipped with rear-facing cameras and back-seat cameras so officers can safely watch suspects

during transport. In-car cameras automatically initiate when an officer turns on their emergency lights to ensure driving behaviors and citizen encounters are captured on video.

**The department also has dash cameras in each of the department's cruisers are set to automatically turn on when the vehicle reaches 65 mph.** The main purpose of this feature is to ensure pursuits or high-speed emergency response driving is captured on both the violator and the officer. Automatic recording of vehicles traveling at high speeds also serves as an accountability measure. Although these activations are not automatically sent to supervisors, **the video is subject to being randomly selected for audit. Video audits of both in-car and BWCs must be conducted monthly by all squad supervisors. If policy violations are discovered, supervisors have the option of handling them formally or informally, depending on the nature of the violation, severity of the incident and past performance of the officer.**

**All vehicle accidents are required to be formally investigated through the internal affairs process. Over the past 5 years, from 2017-2021, officers have been involved in a total of only 18 at fault vehicle accidents. None of the 18 at-fault accidents were the result of excessive speed. Most of these accidents involved low speeds in parking lots or while slowing or stopped on the roadway.** The department has several officers trained in traffic accident reconstruction. These officers investigate accidents resulting in serious injuries or fatalities, as well as serious cruiser accidents.

**Personnel are required to always wear seat belts while on duty. This applies to both town-owned vehicles and to rental cars being operated by department personnel. Signs were installed on both exit gates to the department's secured parking lot to remind officers to always buckle up and be cognizant of their speed. Officers are also required by policy to wear their yellow, high-visibility traffic vests when working traffic assignments or while working accident scenes on the roadways. Training on the pursuit policy is conducted annually and documented. Training consists of policy review, case law discussion, liability and/or review of video incidents of pursuits that are available for discussion and training.**

**All pursuits are formally investigated and documented through the department's internal affairs process.** When policy violations occur, officers receive discipline in accordance with the seriousness of the violation and past performance. Remedial training is mandated in cases where it is warranted. The department's pursuit policy was changed a few years ago to narrow the circumstances when a pursuit can be initiated, **limiting pursuits to incidents involving crimes of violence or of an immediate threat to public safety. This has resulted in a significant reduction of pursuits over the past three years from 3 in 2018 to only 1 total between the years of 2019-2021.**

**To reduce the chances of our officers being struck, stop sticks were recently removed from all department vehicles and eliminated as an authorized tool to stop fleeing vehicles due to the danger posed to the officer deploying them.** Roadblocks and pit maneuvers are still permitted as tactics to stop fleeing vehicles if the officer has attended the specific EVOG training courses for these tactics and maintained proficiency through retraining.

**Recently, a drone was obtained on grant funding that will allow accident reconstruction to be done from the air, eliminating the need to close roadways or place officers in the roadway to conduct accident scene mapping/reconstruction and photo documentation. This program will be initiated, and training conducted for ARU investigators, once department policy on the drone program is finalized.**

**\*\* This summary is only a brief overview of many of the Herndon, VA Police Department's programs. In the actual submission you will see that HPD 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.**