

COUNTY OF OAKLAND  
**OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF**

**MICHAEL J. BOUCHARD**



Founded in 1819, Oakland County is just a short drive north of the City of Detroit. The Oakland County Sheriff's Office is the largest "full service" Sheriff's Office in the State of Michigan. With a current jurisdictional population of 1.2 million residents, the Sheriff's Office services over 343,000 of those residents through law enforcement contracts in 12 different communities as well as corrective services for up to 1600 inmates. The Sheriff's Office provides court security for the 6th Circuit Court and ten District Courts, including ten additional satellite buildings. Our coverage area also encompasses 450 inland lakes and Interstate 75. Interstate 75 is the second longest north-south highway in the United States and runs from Florida to Canada.

Sheriff Michael J. Bouchard oversees over 800 sworn officers and a total of 1,400 department employees. He also oversees an annual budget of over \$166 million. Those statistics rank the Oakland County Sheriff's office in the top 20 Sheriff's Offices in the United States (16). The Oakland County Sheriff's Office is comprised of two main groups, the Corrections/Courts Services Group, and the Law Enforcement Services Group. Sheriff Michael Bouchard also oversees a large Administrative Services section as well.

**OFFICER WELLNESS, PHYSICAL, AND MENTAL HEALTH**

It is not a surprise that over the last couple years, law enforcement officers have struggled at a level not seen in modern history. Radical changes in the law enforcement environment is having a monumental effect on officer

mental and physical health, catapulting suicide into the number 1 to spot for causes of all duty-related deaths (only behind COVID-19). The causes for this mental and physical health decline can be attributed to societies reaction to police action, the global pandemic, unrealistic criminal justice reform efforts, and a multitude of other issues, including the constant feeling of unpredictability that comes with this profession. Sheriff Michael Bouchard is on the forefront of combating this trend in law enforcement and has established several programs to address a “total officer” wellness approach.

It is well established in the behavioral sciences that repeated exposure to traumatic events, critical incidents, unpredictability, fatigue, the feeling of hopelessness, and the pressure of “wearing the badge”, can have long-lasting mental health impacts on law enforcement officers, their family, their friends, and with citizens they interact with. To address that issue, Sheriff Michael Bouchard has implemented and staffed a fully functioning Peer Support Program. The Oakland County Sheriff’s Office Peer Support Program (PSP) is dedicated to assist agency personnel with Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) services, specifically **confidential peer support assistance**. Recognizing that while performing daily first responder duties, agency personnel become involved in and are exposed to incidents that have the potential to cause various forms of short and/or long-term emotional trauma. The Peer Support Program is designed to help in following areas: peer support during times of personal and/or professional stress, early intervention to help mitigate the impacts of stress, referral to program services, and education-based training. Fortunately, Michigan CISM Laws (MCL 333.20981, 333.20982, and 333.20983) provides Peer Support Program Team Members with the ability to speak to agency employees in a confidential manner. This program is not only open to law enforcement officers under his supervision but is also open to Communications Officers (dispatch) and other staff as well. (What is it...dogs, confidential, etc...) ?

In addition to this Peer Support Program, a Chaplain and mental health professionals are available to Sheriff’s Office personnel. These services were essential in the aftermath of our school shooting tragedy that took place

in Oxford Township, Michigan. Oxford Township is one of our contracted patrol areas and our deputies were first on the scene and apprehended the assailant. Our officers were also the first to encounter the four dead and multiple wounded students. As you can imagine, our deputy's mental health was tested on that day and in the days that followed. Seeing a need, the Sheriff immediately dispatched all of his mental health resources and made them available. The Sheriff also directed, supported, and participated in several critical incident response debriefings with the goal of minimizing and identifying any Post Traumatic Stress.

Another critical aspect to Sheriff Bouchard's total wellness program includes Functional Fitness. His functional Fitness Program is still early in its implementation phase but its positive effects on moral, comradery, safety, and overall health can already be seen. The Oakland County Sheriff's Office has equipped several locations that deputies and dispatchers can use to improve their overall physical health. That includes equipment located at several substations, at the Sheriff's Office Administration Building, and at the Oakland County Jail facility. Additionally, the Oakland County Sheriff's took steps last year to acquire a vacant school and converted that location into a temporary training center. The Sheriffs continues to pursue a fully functioning training center that meets every law enforcement standard, but this current location has given the Sheriff the ability to address training and safety needs immediately. The training center now hosts a fully functional gym, with locker rooms, that deputies can use at any time. It offers deputies the chance to improve physical health, participate in sports, and allows families a place to spend time together. All of these things are critical to officer wellness. In conjunction with the gym, the training center has a robust amount of CrossFit and exercise equipment. It cannot be understated what this equipment means to officer health.

With the approval of the Sheriff, our fully licensed in-house Corrections Academy, implemented a Functional Fitness training regimen that emphasizes officer wellness. The results were undeniable. The feedback we received was positive, and our Corrections Academy Instructors stated that this program has produced the most physically fit, mentally tough, and well-

prepared group graduates in our history. This statement is backed up by data collected after evaluating trainees in Defensive Tactics and during the P.E.S.T. (Physical Endurance Stress Training). Scores at the end of the academy were far better than scores initially. The Deputies were evaluated on day one of the academy, and all their scores improved once evaluated at the end of the academy.

Additional health related programs include offering a voluntary physical fitness test for deputies and command staff. Although voluntary, it is highly recommended. In order to prove its importance, personnel who take the physical fitness test yearly, and pass, are given additional days off or are paid \$100.00 (based on classification and the collective bargaining agreement). Lastly, Oakland County also provides free confidential health screenings yearly and supports that program by paying participants \$100.00.

A final step to maintaining officer wellness includes addressing moral and leadership. To that end, the Sheriff encourages, supports, and maintains a healthy award program. Leadership is encouraged to write award recommendations for deputies and a yearly awards ceremony is held. That ceremony is highly visible, and the Sheriff invites family, friends, legislators, media, and special guest speakers to attend. Those speakers include popular radio personalities to act as the Master of Ceremonies. Officers are recognized in a very public manner. As far as leadership, the Sheriff's Office conducts its own well-established leadership training class that all Sergeants and above must attend. Rounding out this category, the Sheriff has authorized staff to reevaluate and improve the current uniform. We are currently in the wear-testing phase of this **imitative**. Several things are being evaluated to include fit, feel, sturdiness, and appearance. As part of the research, new exterior vests are being evaluated in order to promote back and hip health by moving some equipment when practical. At this point, all wear-testing deputies have given nothing but positive feedback and think this change will improve the health, safety, moral, and culture of the Sheriff's Office.

## **OFFICER SAFETY AND EQUIPMENT**

When we talk about officer safety, I would be hard pressed to find another department that competes with the Oakland County Sheriff's Office. Officer safety is the cornerstone of our office and the Sheriff expects and only accepts nothing but the best. The most critical aspect of this category is the equipment's ability to save lives. That includes the officers themselves and our citizenry.

To start, let's address the portion of deputies who are assigned to our Law Enforcement Services Group. Each deputy is custom fitted soft body armor. Deputies are mandated to wear that equipment while on duty without the ability to waive that mandate. In addition to that vest, every patrol vehicle is outfitted with a ballistic vest for use during critical incidents. Ballistic vests were also provided to individual deputies at their request. Deputies are also outfitted with ballistic helmets, Personal Protection Equipment (including masks), patrol rifles, Taser brand conducted electrical weapons, reflective vests, rain gear, and Glock 17 duty weapons. One of the most critical items carried, includes a tourniquet that every single deputy is issued. All patrol vehicles are equipped with Automated External Defibrillators, first aid kits, and cell-phones as a redundant communication option. To ensure safety, deputies are instructed to wear their reflective vests whenever they are out of their patrol vehicle on a traffic scene for any extended period of time.

All personnel are trained in the deployment of Naloxone and are individually issued NARCAN to carry. This one piece of equipment alone has saved hundreds of lives since implantation, which importantly includes our own deputy's accidental exposure to Fentanyl. As far as officer safety considered, this equipment is essential. NARCAN rapidly reverses an opioid overdose by attaching to opioid receptors and blocking their effect. Without this safety equipment, the results on these officers could have been catastrophic.

In order to remain safe and proficient, deputies are required to conduct monthly Use of Force training. To meet that requirement, the Emergency Response and Preparedness Division develops monthly weapons qualification courses or weapons manipulation exercises that stress

performance and safety. In addition to that monthly firearms training, deputies are encouraged to visit our indoor range whenever available to practice. All ammunition for that training and practice is provided to the officer at no charge. Additional training requirements include three in-services which total 24 hours of training days per year. In-service training covers several topics on a rotating basis to include Emergency Vehicle Operation, Pursuit Termination Techniques, Crowd Control, Reality Based Training Scenarios, and several other training topics.

Like many departments in the recent months, societal police reform initiatives have encouraged us to reevaluate how we train and prepare. What we found is that the Oakland County Sheriff's Office has led the way in these reform efforts, prior to any mandate. The Sheriff has long believed that one of the most important things we can do to promote officer safety, is to be at the forefront of training. Our training philosophy includes the belief that de-escalation, Cognitive Threat Assessment, scenario-based training (using a VirTra scenario training platform), and community policing is valuable and critical to officer safety. We emphasize this training philosophy into all training events, which has led to a far more holistic approach to law enforcement preparation and human performance. When officers utilize proper training, Use of Force incidents are reduced and interactions with the community are not adversarial. Ultimately, making law enforcement response safer.

I firmly believe that officer safety also includes the services and equipment available to respond to crisis events. The Sheriff's Office has a multitude of fully functioning and equipped special units that deputies can call on in the time of need. These resources include specialized units like Auto Theft, Narcotics Enforcement, Computer Crimes, Forensic Crimes Lab, Marine Unit, Mounted Unit, K-9's, Aviation, Special Weapons and Tactics, Search and Rescue, Tactical Air Support (drones), and a Special Investigative Unit. **I am sure I forgot some, but I think you get the point.** This department is a full-service institution and requires that every deputy has access to everything they need in order to promote the ideals of law enforcement and safety.

## **OFFICER TRAFFIC SAFETY**

The Oakland County Sheriffs Office uses its patrol services division, including the Traffic Units, to ensure that several community events are handled safely and securely. In 2021 some of these events included, the Woodward Dream Cruise, the Michigan Renaissance Festival, wreath service at the National Cemetery in Holly, the Motor Bella Auto Show, Roadkill Nights, and Festival of Hills Fireworks Show. In total, our patrol services division responded to over 230,000 calls and made over 5,000 arrests.

Our Traffic Unit also emphasizes the importance of educating the public about safe driving through numerous community initiatives and zero tolerance enforcement programs. The Zero Tolerance Enforcement programs include: “High Visibility Enforcement”, “Click It or Ticket” and “Drunk Driving: Over the Limit/Under Arrest”. The goal of the Traffic Unit is to keep our roadways safe for all motorists in Oakland County.

Just as important is what the Oakland County Sheriffs Office does for its own deputies when it comes to drivers’ safety.

Deputies are required to attend an 8-hour Emergency Vehicle Operations course and an 8-hour Pursuit Termination Technique course on a rotating basis once a year. Every patrol vehicle is equipped with a GPS tracking system which allows dispatch, supervisors, and co-workers to know where every patrol vehicle on duty is located. This is essential due to the innate risk of this profession. Supervisors can pull data and ensure that deputies are actively working and driving in a manner that is safe and consistent with policy.

If a deputy is involved in an accident a supervisor is required to make the scene and to complete all required reporting. All accidents involving patrol vehicles are reviewed by an accident review board and every pursuit is evaluated by command to ensure that policy is being followed. If there is a training gap discovered during any of these reviews, deputies attend remedial training to correct the issue. The Oakland County Sheriffs Office believes it is important to our culture to ensure any training deficiency or safety concern is addressed. We hold our officers accountable to the policy, to the training, and to each other.

