Description of Harford County Sheriff’s Office Community Policing Program

The Harford County Sheriff’s Office is committed to adhering to the founding principles of community policing. Those principles have established that for law enforcement agencies to progress and evolve, they must be willing to espouse innovation; particularly when it comes to working with their respective communities to solve problems. This approach to policing insists that in order to flourish, the law enforcement agency must establish, and continue to enhance, an atmosphere of cooperation among those they serve. The agency must strive to continually improve relationships and partnerships with local communities and must foster the inclination among its members to never rest upon past successes but instead to investigate opportunities of working with the community to solve emerging trends. Finally, the agency must foster a willing exchange of ideas between its members and the community while recognizing the importance of community input in creating a better law enforcement agency.

The Harford County Sheriff’s Office strives to stimulate these partnerships between local communities and agency members. The Maryland “Community Policing” guiding principles are practiced at every level of the Harford County Sheriff’s Office and community policing is a mindset that stands at the heart of the Sheriff’s Office’s mission, vision, and values. These community policing efforts are integrated into the policies and procedures followed by every member of the Sheriff’s Office. The Sheriff’s Office adheres to the community policing philosophy and strives to ensure that community members are the means of coping with problems and not merely persons from whom to take a report of an incident. The Sheriff’s Office sees its community partners as allies willing to identify community concerns and allies with whom agency members can work to solve problems.
The Sheriff’s Office recognizes that a county is made up of multiple communities; communities that do not want detached and homogeneous service, but rather are unique areas where the problems differ from neighborhood to neighborhood. Recognizing this diversity, the Harford County Sheriff’s Office has established a specialized unit tasked with establishing committed partnerships with communities and who deliver a wide variety of intelligence led and problem oriented community policing programs. The Sheriff’s Office Community Policing Unit (CPU) continually works to build and strengthen its communications and connections with each community while educating community members and engaging the community in cooperative crime prevention efforts. The outcome of these efforts have proven to reduce crime within these neighborhoods.

Through determined efforts, the Sheriff’s Office has established long-standing partnerships with many communities throughout the county. With their assistance, the Sheriff’s Office CPU, and the agency members practicing the community policing philosophy on a daily basis, work to identify and address both common and unique community concerns while sharing resources and tenaciously working to improve the quality of life for county citizens. These valuable partnerships, which have developed over time and through hard work, have instilled the belief within local communities that together with law enforcement they can make their communities a safer place to live. These efforts have generated substantial “buy-in” from all stakeholders and demonstrate the efficacy of the community policing efforts made by the Sheriff’s Office.

Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler, recognizing the value of the community policing philosophy, established a Community Services Coordinator as a vital link in ensuring communities receive the services they need to flourish as safe and productive parts of the county. The Community Services Coordinator, assigned to the Community Services Division, works as a specialist to coordinate various community and youth activities. These include the “Feed the Hungry” campaign which, with support from local grocery stores, helps feed those in need, the Sheriff’s Office Christmas drive for underprivileged families, and the “Badges for Baseball,” Ripken youth baseball program for disadvantaged youths. Additionally, the coordinator is assigned as advisor for the Sheriff’s Office Law Enforcement Explorer Program which is celebrating its twentieth year of introducing exceptional youths who are seeking future employment in the criminal justice field. Together, these efforts represent only a small portion of the continuing Sheriff’s Office efforts to involve the many communities in the county in their goal of making Harford County a safe place to live and raise a family.

The Agency also developed a position specifically designed for initiating and maintaining external partnerships for the purpose of working collaboratively with other agencies and entities on special projects as assigned by the Sheriff. The Community and Legislative Coordinator is intended to identify, cultivate, and serve as a liaison with community organizations, associations, and boards in furtherance of the interest and mission of HCSO. This position also serves as the HCSO representative to the various local, state and federal government affairs programs and is responsible for drafting legislative policy and position papers representing the interest of the community. Along with these efforts, the Harford County Sheriff’s Office developed, and routinely participates in, numerous outreach programs to provide guidance, mentorship, and education to our community members while building valuable relationships between the agency and the public. The programs
encompass all socioeconomic regions of the county and are designed to incorporate the ten guiding principles of Community Oriented Policing. Listed below are the different programs the Harford County Sheriff's Office offers through its members in our communities to promote safety, involvement and the well-being of the many communities served by the agency. Many of these programs are managed by “frontline” personnel who practice the community policing philosophy while handling daily calls for service. Additionally, some of the programs are offered to the communities by “subject matter experts” from the CPU.

Following, is a list of many of the programs offered by the Harford County Sheriff's Office. These are by no means all of the community policing endeavors in which the Agency engages but they do highlight some of the most insightful work done by members of the Agency in the community policing realm:

1. **Neighborhood Watch**

The neighborhood watch program, begun nationally in 1972, recognizes that the safety of a community, and the health of its members, depends largely upon community members taking action to assist law enforcement. While it does not espouse vigilantes, it does dictate that there is a partnership between local law enforcement and community to deter crime. This partnership exists with the goal of having community members act as the eyes and ears for law enforcement. Community members work with police by pointing out those likely to engage in criminal activity. These organized groups of civilians devoted to deterring crime and vandalism work with police to enhance crime prevention efforts.

The aim of the neighborhood watch programs are to educate residents of communities on security and safety measures while striving towards achieving safer and more secure neighborhoods. This nationally recognized program affords communities the ability to be directly involved with the safety and security of their own communities; as well as enhancing or opening lines of communication with local law enforcement. The Harford County Sheriff's Office actively participates in the Neighborhood Watch program and has assisted neighborhoods to empower their citizens for over 25 years.

2. **HOPE House (Heroin Overdose Prevention Effort)**

The Harford County Sheriff’s Office Heroin Overdose Prevention Effort (HOPE) House is a mobile educational tool designed to raise awareness and inform parents of the warning signs of drug experimentation and abuse. This program is a unique approach by law enforcement to promote education and treatment of the nationwide opioid crisis. The HOPE trailer, set up to simulate a young person's bedroom and bathroom area, offers adults and parents a chance to be educated on some of the places drugs can be hidden in plain sight and other potential signs of drug use. An area near the front of the unit has literature that those going through the trailer can take with them about what they have seen in the simulated bedroom and bathroom. The HOPE House is a project conceived by the HOPE workgroup established by Sheriff Gahler to lead in the fight against Harford County’s spiraling opioid abuse epidemic. The HOPE House was brought to reality as the result of partnerships
between the Harford County Sheriff’s Office, HOPE Workgroup, Harford County’s Office of Drug Control Policy, Harford County Narcotics Task Force, Harford Sheriff Foundation, the Citizens’ Police Academy Alumni Association, and the Harford Fire and EMS Association.

This project, managed by the Community Policing Unit and staffed by trained volunteers, is demonstrative of the unique efforts taken by the Sheriff’s Office to partner with communities to help solve problems. The opioid epidemic has negatively affected all parts of the state and Harford County is no exception. No socioeconomic group can claim immunity from the terrible consequences of opioid addiction. The HCSO CPU and the patrol members of the Sheriff’s Office continually strive to use unique efforts such as the HOPE House to help combat this terrible affliction which directly impacts so many communities.

3. **Drug Take Back Program**

The Harford County Office of Drug Control Policy, in conjunction with the Harford County Sheriff's Office, hosts periodic Prescription Drug Take Back events for the safe collection of unused or expired medications so that they may be disposed of safely and without harm to the environment. No questions are asked of the participants who turn in their medications for proper disposal. This program also supports Maryland’s efforts towards protecting our waterways and specifically the Chesapeake Bay.

Additionally, the Harford County Sheriff's Office also installed and maintains drug take back boxes at both precincts and in front of its headquarters building. These receptacles allow members of the public to discreetly and anonymously drop off unwanted and unused drugs to the Sheriff’s Office for disposal. Without fear of reprisal, community members can dispose of these drugs and thus ensuring that they never reach the street.

4. **Residential and Commercial Security Surveys**

The Harford County Sheriff’s Office CPU offers community members the option to have their residence or business receive a free security survey. A security survey is a thorough physical examination of a home or facility and its operations that looks to helping the community member to safeguard personal or company assets. The Sheriff’s Office members assigned to conduct the survey examine the risks these assets are exposed to, and reviews the measures in place to protect those assets. Members completing the survey will provide suggestions to mitigate liability and improve the all-around safety of the home or business. The focus of these dedicated surveys are to provide timely crime prevention methods geared towards protecting one’s home or business while reinforcing the idea that law enforcement can be proactive in reducing crime and not only reactive in responding to crimes already committed.
5. **Personal Safety**

The Harford County Sheriff’s Office CPU works with community members to help them achieve more comprehensive levels of personal safety. An essential fact taught regarding personal safety is the importance of being aware of your surroundings. Recognizing that personal safety is foremost a personal responsibility, the unit works with community members to educate them on ways of being more cognizant of their surroundings and ways of safeguarding their own welfare. The unit teaches community members that personal crime prevention starts with the use of the common senses, which are easily ignored when one becomes busy completing everyday tasks. These programs are age specific and the unit provides a wide range of topics designed for specific audiences. This partnerships teaches community members to learn to reduce crime through awareness and attentiveness.

6. **Senior Safety**

The elderly are a particularly vulnerable part of society across the nation and in Harford County. Harford County is not immune to the types of crime directed at this at-risk facet of society. Crime and the fear of crime creates special problems for the elderly. Crime prevention is everyone's responsibility and not just a job for law enforcement. The CPU teaches seniors that they can learn to protect themselves from crime. These programs, geared towards not just the elderly but also towards “care-givers” responsible for elderly community members, provide the means to learn to not be a victim simply because of age. These programs are instructed in various senior centers and nursing homes throughout the county and reflect the partnerships developed by the Sheriff’s Office with those entities servicing the senior members of Harford County communities.

7. **Pedestrian Safety**

Pedestrian safety is an issue that affects the all communities regardless of the age of those in the community. Many unnecessary injuries and fatalities occur as a result of intoxication or inattentiveness of either the driver or the pedestrian. The Sheriff’s Office CPU works with communities to address those areas identified as being particularly problematic in regards to pedestrian accidents. Using data supplied by the Criminal intelligence and Analysis Unit, agency members tasked with addressing this issue have the ability to focus on those statistically significant locales wherein pedestrian accidents occur. Together with community members, the Sheriff's Office strives to reduce pedestrian accidents through education and enforcement efforts.

8. **Prepare Because You Care**

Harford County has developed the Prepare Because You Care (PBYC) citizen training class. PBYC is designed to address preparedness for a wide-range of disasters and emergency situations. PBYC classes are free of charge and are offered multiple times each year at different locations around Harford County.
9. **Firearms Safety**

Gun safety rules and practice recommendations are intended to avoid accidental or negligent discharge, or the consequences of firearm malfunctions. Their purpose is to eliminate or minimize the risks of unintentional death, injury, or property damage caused by improper possession, storage, or handling of firearms. The Sheriff’s Office works within communities to promote gun safety and provides education designed to reduce, minimize, or mitigate the likelihood of a negligent weapon use accident.

10. **Robbery Prevention**

The CPU works with local retailers to ensure that their employees are trained in the latest methods of robbery prevention. This is designed to improve the safety of those victimized by the robbery in addition to helping the employee improve their ability to provide information that may aid in the apprehension of the criminal. Additionally, members of the CPU provide education that may help lessen the emotional after effects of being involved in an armed robbery.

11. **Cyberspace Safety**

The CPU works with community members to develop strategies that will reduce the incidents of cyberbullying. The unit strives to increase public awareness of the issues while proactively promoting cyber safety through the establishment of key partnerships between Harford County Public Schools, Harford County Government, local law enforcement agencies, and the community.

12. **Daycare Safety**

The Sheriff’s Office CPU recognizes that the safety of children should be of paramount concern. Whether in childcare centers or in home-based care, providers are responsible for ensuring safety both inside and outside of their child care settings. The unit works with these facilities to ensure that providers are well versed in the requirements to ensure the safety of the children in the facility. Additionally, the unit works with providers to educate them on the means of ensuring the safety of the children when transporting this precious cargo. The unit works with the providers to help them be prepared to prevent injuries and illnesses and teaches them how to handle emergencies.

13. **Active Shooter Awareness**

Active shooters, both in the workplace and in schools, have become a facet of law enforcement that affects every community. No community, including those in Harford County, is immune. The CPU works with community and civic groups to educate all communities on the background and history of active shooter incidents while teaching community members how to respond should an event ever occur in their place of business or their school. Unit members teach communities how to respond and what actions to take that could save their lives in the event of an active shooter incident. This program is offered to both the public and private sectors within Harford County.
14. **Bullying Prevention**

Bullying is often the precursor to high profile active shooter events and bullying can threaten students’ physical and emotional safety at school while negatively impacting their ability to learn. The CPU recognizes that the best way to address bullying is to stop it before it starts. Partnering with schools and local community entities, the CPU educates on the myriad ways school staff can make schools safer and prevent bullying. In the program the unit addresses public school staff and students on methods used to prevent and address bullying which can help sustain bullying prevention efforts over time.

15. **Halloween Safety**

Halloween is a time for children to dress up and walk among their communities. It should be a time of joy and happiness as children gain sweets from their friends in the community. Everyone loves a good scare on Halloween, but not when it comes to child safety. The CPU teaches that there are several easy and effective behaviors that parents can share with kids to help reduce their risk of injury. This program offers suggestions of how to keeps kids safe during the Halloween festivities.

16. **Holiday Safety**

The holiday season is a time of joy; however, law enforcement recognizes that it is also a time of increased criminal activity. Holiday safety is an issue that is particularly prevalent from late November to mid-January, when families gather, parties are scheduled, and travel spikes. The CPU teaches community members basic precautions to ensure their family remains safe and injury-free throughout the season. This program incorporates personal safety and theft prevention during the Holidays.

17. **Shopping Safety**

Malls are not merely a place for persons to shop. They are also a place for criminals to gather to seek out easy targets for theft and robbery. The CPU works with retailers and community members by educating them on how to ensure safety in malls and parking areas.

In addition to the above community efforts, the Harford County Sheriff’s Office Community Policing Unit also offers multiple programs to help mentor and build relationships with youth in Harford County. These represent but a portion of the efforts engaged in by members of the Sheriff’s Office to develop and strengthen the relationship between members of law enforcement and the youth in Harford County.

**McGruff (the “Take a Bite out of Crime Prevention Program”)**

This program promotes positive interactions between parents and children while working together on non-threatening educational information about important social topics. The program provides a section for interactivity between the child and the educational message. It encourages parents to
read to, and be positively involved with their children. This program encourages strong positive experiences between law enforcement personnel, responsible adults, and children.

**Bicycle Rodeo**

A bicycle rodeo is a clinic to teach children the necessary precautions and skills to ride a bicycle safely. This program is a step to teaching children how to safely navigate their bicycles within their communities and includes the proper use of bicycle safety equipment.

**Kid Print**

The “Kid Print” ID program is a high-tech tool that provides law enforcement and other community organizations virtually instant access to pertinent demographic information, including a recent photo of a child. Community members participating in the service receive a CD with photo and fingerprints to help aid law enforcement should they ever need to report the child as missing.

**Badges For Baseball, “The Ripken Way”**

This program is designed to enhance the relationship between law enforcement and children in underserved communities across the county using baseball as the conduit. Law enforcement professionals are utilized as coaches and mentors during the program. The program emphasizes “team” sports and includes lectures on “Healthy Choices, Healthy Children.” The curriculum is designed to instill important lessons such as teamwork, communication, respect, and leadership. These skills can be utilized by participants both on and off the field.

**Sheriff’s Office Law Enforcement Explorer Program**

This program is affiliated with Scouting of America. The program is designed to expose youths between the ages of 13 to 21 years of age, to law enforcement. By interacting with youth in positive settings, they have a better understanding of various components within law enforcement and often become ambassadors for law enforcement among their peers. The Explorers participate in many community events throughout the year. Each year they attend the U.S. National Law Enforcement Explorer Conference. Many of the Sheriff’s Office Explorer graduates have chosen to enter into careers as members of law enforcement and/or corrections.

In addition to the citizen contacts developed during the above listed community programs, the Community Policing Unit is proactive in the community. The unit has regular community contact throughout the year at various functions and events. The following are a list of some of those occasions:

**Ma Pa Trail Patrol**

The MA & PA (Maryland and Pennsylvania) Heritage Trail is located on portions of the former Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad corridor in Bel Air and Forest Hill, Maryland. The nonprofit
organization, The MA & PA Heritage Trail, Inc, strives to make the MA & PA Trail the best place to walk, run, and bike in Harford County. As such, the trail is heavily traveled by members of various communities across the county. Currently, the trail consists of a 3.3-mile section in Bel Air and a 1.7-mile segment in Forest Hill. In order to ensure that the trail continues to be a safe place for community members to enjoy, members of the Harford County Sheriff’s Office CPU conduct proactive patrols throughout the trail utilizing bicycles, ATV’s, and foot patrols.

**Precinct Tours**

To help facilitate a sense of partnership with communities, the Sheriff’s Office provides tours of its facilities for various civic groups. These groups get an opportunity to tour the facilities and learn about the equipment and personnel that protect their communities on a daily basis. Tours are offered to these groups at the Harford County Sheriff’s Office Southern and Northern Precincts by the CPU.

**Farm Fair**

The continuing mission of the Harford County Farm Fair is to promote Harford County’s agricultural heritage and encourage youth involvement in agricultural activities, particularly through 4-H, FFA, and the Ag Magnet Program in Harford County Public Schools. The members of the CPU work at the fair to provide a venue for interactive displays featuring the Harford County Sheriff’s Office Mobile Crime Prevention Trailer and the HOPE House. Efforts include the distribution of educational material and live interaction between the agency members and members of the community visiting the fair.

**Homeless Checks**

Agency members conduct periodic checks throughout the county of those homeless within our communities. Sheriff’s Office members partner with local and state agencies to garner assistance for the homeless population.

**Christmas Drive**

For more than 20 years the Harford County Sheriff’s Office CPU has been the catalyst behind the annual Christmas Drive. The unit members accept and collect donations of toys, non-perishable foods, and personal hygiene for distribution to those less fortunate within our communities. The drive is a demonstration of the community policing mentality fostered within the agency. Agency members can be more than just the enforcement arm of the agency. They also have the opportunity to interact with the community and help those less fortunate while fostering a sense of service and partnership within the various diverse communities.
Development Advisory Committee (DAC)

A member of the CPU is appointed to the Harford County Development Advisory Committee (DAC). The member assigned to the DAC offers crime prevention advice to the Director of Planning regarding major subdivisions and other large-scale developments. Input on ingress and egress, lighting, shrubbery, and pedestrian crosswalks are a few of the items discussed. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principals are employed during the planning process for new communities. The DAC is composed of representatives of county, state, federal and utility agencies.

National Night Out

The CPU spearheads the Harford County Sheriff’s Office efforts for National Night Out. The entire agency is involved in the annual community-building campaign. The campaign promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie to make neighborhoods safer and more caring places to live. National Night Out enhances the relationship between neighbors and law enforcement while bringing back a true sense of community. Further, it provides a great opportunity to bring police and neighbors together under positive circumstances.

Miscellaneous Community Efforts

To help deliver the guiding principles of community policing, the Harford County Sheriff’s Office utilizes several tools and methods to bring home the message and establish partnerships. An interactive pull behind trailer, power point classes and table displays with enrichments such as pencils, spinners, whistles, slap bracelets, mini-badges and educational coloring books are offered to the public to help build the relationship at different events.

The Criminal Intelligence and Analysis Unit (CIAU) developed “Top 10” locations of calls for service. This list allows managers to direct patrol and enforcement efforts on those areas that have statistically been identified as being significant criminal or calls for service locations. This effort, routinely calculated over a 28-day cycle, provides deputies with locations in their patrol areas that they can address to reduce crime in that community.

Summary

The numerous programs mentioned above support collaborative partnerships between local communities and the Harford County Sheriff’s Office. The Harford County Sheriff’s Office works hard with businesses and community partners to develop solutions to issues affecting our neighborhoods. These efforts help to strengthen and enhance community trust in law enforcement while delivering a message of hope of safer communities.

The Sheriff’s Office value statement indicates that “in partnership with our communities we strive to preserve the peace and provide a safe environment for all.” Members of the Community Policing Unit, and the men and women of the Sheriff’s Office work each day to uphold that very statement. Through
myriad partnerships and in many diverse program and efforts the Sheriff’s Office works with its communities to make Harford County a safer place to live, work, and raise a family. The Sheriff’s Office recognizes that they are partners with the communities they serve and that only through diligent efforts working with those partners will those local communities thrive. Sheriff Gahler established the goals to reduce crime in the county with more community policing and "data-driven" strategies and the men and women of the Sheriff’s Office strive to follow that philosophy each day. Community Policing is an integral part of the Sheriff’s Office mandate and will remain a focus of the agency to reduce crime and make Harford County a safe environment for all.

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