



# HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE OPERATIONS POLICY

## Citizen Ride-Along Program

<b>Distribution:</b>	<b>All Personnel</b>		<b>Policy Number:</b>	<b>OPS 0102</b>	
<b>Responsible Unit:</b>	<b>Police Operations Bureau</b>		<b>Rescinds:</b>	<b>OPS 0102 (07/19/19)</b>	
<b>Original Issued Date:</b>	<b>02/23/23</b>	<b>Revision #:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Latest Revision Date:</b>	<b>02/04/26</b>
<b>Required 3-yr. Review Was Completed:</b>	<b>02/04/26</b>		<b>Next Review Due:</b>	<b>02/28/29</b>	

### 1. Purpose

The Harford County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) has established the Citizen Ride-Along Program (CRP) to give members of the community, and job applicants for the Agency, a better understanding and appreciation of the law enforcement role in the community.

### 2. Policy

The HCSO recognizes the desire of citizens to ride with deputies to learn the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement officers. The CRP allows citizens and other interested parties to ride with deputies for observational and/or educational purposes.

### 3. Definitions

**PROGRAM COORDINATOR:** manages the daily operations of the program and will maintain a list of persons who are requesting to ride, those who have ridden, and those who have been deemed unacceptable to ride-along. A Program Coordinator for each respective Patrol Precinct will be appointed by the Division Commander of that precinct.

### 4. References

Wilson v. Layne, 526 U.S. 603, 614

### 5. Procedures

#### A. Criteria

1. The Program Coordinators will manage all activities of the CRP within their precinct.
2. Persons participating in the CRP will only be able to ride with personnel from the Police Operations Bureau, Patrol Precinct, unless authorized in writing by the respective Division Commander of the location for the requested ride-along.
3. Persons requesting to participate will be provided:
  - a. A CRP application; and
  - b. A copy of the guidelines for the program.

4. A prospective ride-along candidate must be:
  - a. A resident of Harford County (exceptions are given for applicants and potential law enforcement lateral candidates at the discretion of the Division Commander); and
  - b. At least 18 years of age; and
  - c. Must authorize a criminal background check to be conducted; and
  - d. Must successfully pass the background investigation prior to the ride; and
  - e. Be currently enrolled as a student in an educational facility, college, or university, and able to provide verification of enrollment; or
  - f. A Harford County employee interested in furthering a cooperative relationship with the HCSO with approval in writing by his or her current county supervisor; or
  - g. A family member of a current Sheriff's Office employee who wishes to learn about a deputy's duties and responsibilities; or
  - h. A Harford County Sheriff's Office correctional or civilian employee with written approval of their respective Division Commander; or
  - i. Any other interested person, at the discretion of the Sheriff.
5. All CRP scheduling is subject to manpower availability.

B. Restrictions

1. A prospective CRP candidate will not be permitted to participate in the program if they:
  - a. Are the subject of an active criminal investigation;
  - b. Have an active ex parte, peace order, domestic violence order, or warrant against them; or
  - c. Have a felony conviction.
2. A prospective ride-along candidate may be denied participation in the program if they:
  - a. Have a misdemeanor conviction on their criminal record;
  - b. Have an active summons; or
  - c. If in the judgment of the HCSO, their participation would interfere with law enforcement operations.
3. The decision to include or exclude a candidate from the program based on the above criteria is at the discretion of the respective Division Commander and not subject to appeal.

4. Participants in the program are prohibited from riding with family members or those with whom they have an intimate relationship.

C. Exceptions

1. Joppatowne Homeland Security Program participants and HCSO Public Safety Cadets Post 6600 participants may ride-along at 16 years of age.
  - a. When the ride-along is under 18 years of age, deputies must make personal contact with the participant's parent/guardian to obtain permission for the student to ride.
  - b. A deputy must witness the parent/guardian signing the release and waiver of liability before any person under 18 years of age participates in the CRP.
2. Other exceptions to the policy may be granted at the discretion of the Sheriff.

D. Process

1. Applicants will submit a completed Ride-Along Application/Citizen Participation Program Waiver Claim and Release from Liability ([SO-107](#)) to the precinct Program Coordinator.
2. The application will be reviewed, and a background check will be completed by the precinct Program Coordinator.
3. If approved, the precinct CRP coordinator will:
  - a. Maintain a file of all applications for a period of 3 years; and
  - b. Contact the approved participant to schedule the ride.
4. Shift/unit supervisors will ensure that the applicant is aware of the procedures contained within this policy.
5. A candidate who is approved to ride-along must do so within 90 days.
6. A candidate may ride-along a maximum of four times during the 90-day period. Thereafter, another application must be submitted, and the background investigation updated.
7. A participant riding more than once should not be assigned to the same deputy.

E. Participation Guidelines

1. To ensure deputy safety, participants must be in good physical and mental health in order to participate.
2. No weapons of any kind may be carried by participants (Exception: Certified Maryland law enforcement officers are permitted to carry their firearm) .

3. Participants may not purchase, consume, possess, or be under the influence of an alcoholic beverage or controlled dangerous substance.
4. Proper attire is required.
  - a. Tube tops, bare backs, bare midriffs, t-shirts, torn jeans, tight-fitting clothes, shorts, and short skirts are not permitted.
5. Any supervisor will have the discretion to cancel the ride-along if the candidate's attire is inappropriate.
6. Participants may not display any badge, shield, pin, identification card, shirt, or patch not authorized by the Sheriff or his designee.
7. Participants must report promptly for their scheduled ride-along and present a supervisor with photo identification.
8. Participants must follow all guidelines given to them by any Agency member.
9. Participants are not permitted to leave the patrol vehicle or handle any equipment without permission from the deputy.
10. Participants may terminate their ride-along by requesting to be returned to the respective precinct at the next opportunity.
11. Only one participant may ride in a car at any time.
12. Participants will not interfere in any way with a deputy's investigation.
13. Participants are encouraged to ask questions regarding an incident; however, those questions should only be posed after the deputy and participant have left the scene.
14. A deputy will return the participant to the precinct should the participant exhibit any inappropriate behavior and forward a written Memorandum ([SO-212](#)) to the Division Commander detailing the occurrence as soon as practical.
15. Participants may be called to court to act as a witness.
16. Participants may accompany a deputy on calls for service provided that neither the type of call, nor the situation presented upon arrival, pose a significant threat to the participant's safety.
17. Participants may only accompany a deputy into a private residence with the express permission of the occupant or owner. The participant does not need permission to accompany the deputy into businesses and other public facilities.
18. Participants are prohibited from taking photographs or using audio/visual recording equipment.
19. **Participants must not disclose sensitive information learned during the ride-along. Violations may**

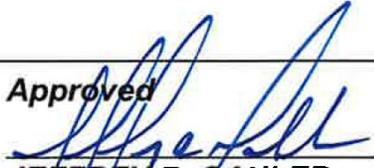
result in legal consequences or future disqualification.

F. Deputy and Agency Responsibilities

1. A deputy involved in the CRP must have completed his probationary period with the Agency.
2. The deputy is responsible for the safety of the CRP participant and should not intentionally involve the participant in a dangerous situation.
  - a. In the event of an arrest, the deputy will have the discretion of weighing the potential danger and the educational value of transporting a prisoner in the same vehicle as the participant.
  - b. HCSO deputies will be responsible for the participant at the Interagency Processing Center (IPC) and will not allow them to move about the IPC unescorted.
3. In the event a deputy receives an emergency call, he may respond with or without the participant. If the call is inherently dangerous the deputy may have the participant exit the vehicle at a safe location prior to responding to the scene.
4. No civilians (Public Safety Cadet, Interns, Ride-Alongs, or Reporters/Media, etc.) are to enter any structure, home, or business of any search and seizure warrant executed by the HCSO.
  - a. An exception to this rule is when the civilian has an expressed duty assignment to aid law enforcement in the execution of said warrant (e.g., Forensic Services Unit, Victims' Services, Computer Forensics, Financial Investigators, Cadet, etc.).

6. Summary of Changes

- A. On July 31, 2025, this policy was revised to replace the reference to "Explorer" with "Public Safety Cadet(s)" at Section 5.C.1, and at Section 5.F.4 accordingly.
- B. On 02/04/26 the 3-year Agency review was conducted, and the following revisions were made:
  1. Under Section 5.E.19 Participation Guidelines, added the following text: "Participants must not disclose sensitive information learned during the ride-along. Violations may result in legal consequences or future disqualification."

Approved  
  
JEFFREY R. GAHLER  
SHERIFF  
DATE 2/5/26