



HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE PERSONNEL POLICY

Face Coverings and Uniform Identification

Distribution:	All Employees		Policy Number:		PER 0706
Responsible Unit:	Administrative Services Division		Rescinds:		N/A
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Required 3-year Review was Completed:		N/A	Next Required 3-year Review		10/31/29

1. Purpose

To establish guidelines for the wearing of face coverings and the required display of identification by Harford County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) personnel while performing official duties. These standards ensure members of the public can readily identify law enforcement officers, promote transparency, officer accountability, and professionalism, and ensure compliance with Maryland Public Safety Article §§ 3-207(p) and (q), 3-535, and 3-536, and the Uniform Policy on Face Coverings and Identification adopted by the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission (MPTSC).

2. Policy

All sworn members of the HCSO assigned to or operating on behalf of the Agency shall remain clearly identifiable while performing their official duties. Face coverings that conceal or obscure the face are prohibited except as expressly authorized in this policy. Identification consisting of the Agency name, the member's last name, badge, and unique employee identification number shall be clearly displayed on the outermost garment of all uniforms.

3. Definitions

CONVERSATIONAL DISTANCE: the physical distance at which two individuals can reasonably engage in an unamplified verbal discussion without straining to hear or be heard, and where eye contact and facial expressions can be clearly observed.

COVERT INVESTIGATION: a discreet investigative method where law enforcement gathers evidence or intelligence of suspected criminal activity without the immediate knowledge of the subject, utilizing tactics such as undercover infiltration, physical or electronic surveillance, and confidential informants.

FACE COVERING: any opaque mask, garment, helmet, headgear, or other item that conceals or obscures the face of an individual.

IDENTIFICATION: a law enforcement officer's agency or department, last name, and badge number or other unique employee identification number.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY: a governmental police force, sheriff's office, or law enforcement organization within the State of Maryland, another state or political subdivision of another state, or the federal government.

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER: a sworn member of a law enforcement agency.

SPECIAL TACTICAL RESPONSE: two or more law enforcement officers who have been specially trained and have the ability to execute strategic responses to resolve critical incidents that may exceed the capabilities of traditional law enforcement officers and investigative unit personnel.

4. References

Public Safety Article, §§ 3-207(p) and (q), 3-535, and 3-536, Annotated Code of Maryland
Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission – Uniform Policy: Face Coverings and Identification (Effective 10/01/2026)
COMAR 12.04.09 – Police Accountability and Discipline
HCSO PER 0701 – Uniforms and Appearance
Senate Bill 1, Chapter 612, 2026 Legislative Session

5. Procedures

A. Face Coverings

1. A deputy is prohibited from wearing a face covering while in the performance of their duties, except as provided in subsection 5.A.2. below.
2. A deputy may wear an Agency-approved face covering under circumstances necessary to protect the health or safety of the officer while performing public safety functions. The following are exempt from the prohibition:
 - a. Translucent face shield or clear mask that does not conceal the face;
 - b. Medical grade or surgical mask worn to protect against the transmission of disease or infection;
 - c. Mask or self-contained breathing apparatus necessary to protect against exposure to toxins, gas, smoke, or other hazardous or harmful environmental condition;
 - d. Mask, helmet, or self-contained breathing apparatus or device necessary for underwater use;
 - e. Motorcycle or bicycle helmet when worn by a deputy utilizing a motorcycle, bicycle, or other vehicle that requires a helmet for safe operation;
 - f. Prescription eyeglasses or standard sunglasses used to block harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation and bright glare;
 - g. Eyewear necessary to protect an individual from the use of retinal weapons or lasers;
 - h. Protective tactical gear worn during special tactical response for the purpose of physical safety;
 - i. Garment worn for religious purposes;
 - j. A face covering designed to protect an individual from inclement weather, provided the item is worn only while actively exposed to extreme weather elements and is removed when inside or when conditions subside; and

- k. Any other item that is worn to comply with applicable health and occupational laws or approved reasonable workplace accommodations.
- 3. This section does not apply to a law enforcement officer working in an undercover capacity, in plain clothes, in a non-uniformed status, on a covert investigation, or while off duty.
- 4. A generalized and undifferentiated fear and apprehension about law enforcement safety is not sufficient to justify the use of a face covering.
- 5. Division Commanders may authorize the temporary use of Agency-approved face coverings for specific operational needs consistent with the exemptions listed above.

B. Uniform and Visual Identification

- 1. The wearing of identification on uniforms promotes public safety while preventing law enforcement impersonation.
- 2. This section does not apply to a deputy working in an undercover capacity, in plain clothes, in a non-uniformed status, on a covert investigation, or while off duty.
- 3. The wearing of identification applies to all outermost garments of all uniforms, including jackets, vests, and weather gear.
- 4. The following minimum mandatory identifiers shall be clearly displayed on the outermost garment:
 - a. Nameplate with the last name of the deputy;
 - b. Unique employee identification number;
 - c. Official Agency badge; and
 - d. Agency name (or approved abbreviation/patch).
- 5. Display of primary identifiers on uniforms shall be consistent with the following specifications:
 - a. Nameplate: Must be worn on the front-facing side of the outermost garment, displaying the deputy's last name in upper-case lettering. The text size, font, and color contrast must be clearly identifiable from a reasonable conversational distance.;
 - b. Identification Number: Must be clearly visible, utilizing a text size and contrast identifiable from a reasonable conversational distance;
 - c. Official Badge: Must be worn on the front-facing side of the outermost garment; and
 - d. Agency Name: Must be legible on at least one prominent uniform element, which may include an Agency shoulder patch, badge, or a designated uniform lettering panel.

6. All uniform classes established in PER 0701 (Uniforms and Appearance) shall comply with these identification requirements when worn as the outermost garment including jackets, vests, and weather gear.

C. Exceptions and Mandatory Reporting

1. If an active field emergency or an imminent, demonstrable threat to the health or safety of a deputy requires identification to be temporarily obscured, a deviation from policy is permitted strictly for the duration of the imminent threat.
2. If a deputy obscures their identification under this section, the deputy or Agency must document the specific type, context, and duration of the threat in a police report, after-action report, or similar document following established Agency protocol.
3. Supervisors shall review any such documentation and ensure compliance with reporting requirements.

D. Compliance and Enforcement

1. The Agency shall ensure all current and newly sworn law enforcement deputies receive training on the face covering and uniform identification requirements of this policy.
2. A deputy who violates this policy, pursuant to Public Safety Article, § 3-535 or § 3-536, Annotated Code of Maryland, is guilty of a civil offense punishable by a fine of up to \$1,500.
3. Any violation of this policy constitutes police misconduct for purposes of disciplinary action, pursuant to COMAR 12.04.09.
4. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy through routine observation and periodic inspections.

5. Summary of Changes

- A. This policy was issued to recognize and implement Statewide requirements effective October 1, 2026.

Approved  JEFFREY R. GAHLER SHERIFF DATE <u>8/26/26</u>
