

Let me begin by stating that we (HPD) stand with those that are peacefully protesting injustice. The Harrisonburg Police Department does not condone racism or excessive force at the hands of police officers. As your Chief, I want to thank those that have taken up this cause and have been spreading this message peacefully.

In light of the recent tragic events culminating in the killing of Mr. George Floyd, the Harrisonburg Police Department has received quite a few questions and I want to provide you with information regarding those frequently asked questions.

Q. Does the Harrisonburg Police Department use chokeholds?

A. *Chokeholds are only allowed in a deadly force situation. You can review the Use of Force Policy (300) on the department website for more information.*

Q. Does HPD have military equipment and if so, will you demilitarize your organization?

A. *We currently have an Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV) that is a military-style armored personnel carrier. It has not been deployed in any tactical incident since we acquired it. It has been deployed for displays but not in a tactical situation. We have also had it ready to deploy during a severe snowstorm or weather-related issues in case rescue is needed. We hope we never have to deploy this vehicle tactically, but there could be a situation, i.e. Terrorist situation, school shooting, etc., where this could be used but it is not a vehicle that would be used unless the situation is necessary.*

Q. Does HPD have and use tear gas?

A. *We do have tear gas in our toolbox of weapons. There has been legislation put on the table to ban it from all police departments. I would just ask, what is the alternative, to remove or maintain order on an “unruly”, “violent” crowd? These are tactics for just that and at this time are needed in order to keep the peace and prevent harm to citizens (which includes HPD officers) and property. Again, I hope we do not encounter a situation that these tools are needed.*

Q. Are there parts of policing that you believe should be handled by someone else or another agency?

A. *Yes, and yes. The first two that come to mind are mental health and homelessness. HPD responds to its share of mental health calls each year. Some mental health calls are people in a crisis seeking help and others may be the individual has become violent and/or is armed with a weapon. All HPD officers go through Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) which teaches great de-escalation tactics. And overwhelmingly HPD officers do a tremendous job in their response to mental health calls. However, I have never felt that police departments were the best option in dealing with this issue. We respond to someone in a crisis wearing a bullet proof vest, gun, taser, etc. and the optics of that is probably not the best response. But mental health has been thrust upon law enforcement agencies and it is time consuming for HPD. There are many instances where officers must stay with the person at the hospital for 5+ hours and sometimes we must transport the person to a facility that may be in Petersburg or Williamsburg. That is practically the officer’s entire shift. So that is the first one.*

Secondly, HPD is caught in the middle of the homeless issue. Everyone understands that if you are homeless you literally have nowhere to stay. However, property owners also have a right to remove anyone from their property that they do not want occupying their space. HPD is constantly having to remove homeless citizens or arrest them for trespassing. Because HPD is not equipped to handle the underlying issues of homelessness, this creates a division many times between our officers and the homeless population. These are the two areas where other agencies would be more adept to handling these issues.

Q. Should HPD Officers be in schools and what is their role in the schools?

A. I believe we should be in our schools. Our role is to build relationships with the students, keep them on the right path, ensure they have a safe environment in which to learn and the administrators have a safe environment to teach. Our School Resource Officers rarely make an arrest in our schools. SROs as well as school administrators look for alternative ways to handle situations in school unless it is something serious. Secondly, we can't be complacent and think that things that have occurred across the country regarding school incidents, school shootings, etc., cannot occur here and having that presence in schools goes a long way for deterrence and response.

Q. Are HPD Officers required to intervene if they see an officer using unnecessary or excessive force?

A. That is one element that we just included in our Use of Force policy from the question received at the Protest Rally. This is important and we must hold each other accountable. Our staff is aware of this policy and understand that the sanctity of life is paramount in any use of force encounter.

Q. Is HPD familiar with 8Can't Wait and do you believe in those principles?

A. Yes, we agree with those principles. We don't have a chokehold policy, nor do we teach strangleholds. We teach and require de-escalation in our trainings. If feasible a warning is required, but most situations evolve very rapidly in deadly force shooting incidents. It is impossible to provide a warning in **ALL** deadly force situations. The sanctity of life is important, and all alternatives should be utilized before having to use deadly force. We just included the duty to intervene in our Use of Force Policy. Our policy already bans officers from shooting at moving vehicles. We have a use of force continuum but understand that not every officer responds to each situation with the exact same method. Officers are not all the same, built the same, have the same strength, etc. Our policy indicates the proper situations for each police weapon. We agree that comprehensive reporting and transparency is important. We are self-reporters of use of force and require reporting anytime we have a "show of force".

Q. What is HPD's discipline policy regarding officer behavior?

A. *Our agency responds to citizens' complaints via telephone, in person, email, text, in writing and anonymously. Just know that anonymous complaints may be more difficult due to not having anyone to follow up with. Discipline for HPD officers range as follows: counsel, reprimand, suspension, demotion, termination. HPD follows a progressive discipline model and there is not a certain number of infractions that would lead to dismissal. That is determined by the severity of the violation(s) and the final determination lies with the Chief of Police.*

Q. Can you explain your hiring process and how you ensure you are bringing in the right candidates for the job?

A. *Candidates must go through a written exam and a physical agility test. They also go through a pre-screen interview and a panel interview. A background investigation is conducted to include credit, DMV (driving record) and criminal records checks. We also review public internet sites. A psychological examination is administered by a licensed professional to all potential candidates. Finally, all candidates must complete drug testing as an element of employment.*

Q. How do you determine if an officer used the appropriate amount of force in any use of force situation?

A. *All use of force cases is reviewed by our Use of Force Review Board. This board is comprised of a Captain, Lieutenant, Sergeant, an employee peer and two (2) civilian members of Harrisonburg that have attended our Community Police Academy. The Professional Standards Sergeant also sits in on those meetings but is not a voting member. The board reviews the written report, the body worn camera video along with HPD policy to make the determination of whether the officer was within department guidelines. While the determination may be made that they were within policy the board can also make recommendations on how the incident could have been handled better.*

Q. What has HPD done differently since the current incident that took place in Minneapolis?

A. *We have included our Use of Force Data and Arrest Data on the department website. We are looking to make crime data available as well, but this is a work in progress. We are currently forming a Community Relations Board that will have diverse members of the community meeting with Deputy Chief Camacho and myself to discuss issues related to 21st Century Policing, policy, discipline and concerns from the community. We have also tweaked a couple of policies via recommendations from the public that we concur with. We have also met with city administration to discuss the activities of HPD to ensure we are providing the proper training for our officers and providing the proper service to our citizens. We are in the final stages of updating our MOU with schools to ensure roles and responsibilities are clarified. We are looking to capture more demographic data as it relates to arrests, use of force, summons, citations. Lastly, we are reviewing our training manual to increase the amount of de-escalation training along with cultural diversity and bias training.*