



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Police announce plans to expand community outreach

The Howard County Police Department announced plans today to expand its community policing efforts, both internally and in partnerships with other groups in the county.

Internally, the agency is growing its Community Outreach Section to a Division, which adds personnel and resources to focus additional efforts on relationship building, networking and crime prevention activities. The expanded Division includes mental health outreach, a multi-cultural liaison officer, a senior citizen liaison officer, multiple community resource officers, and a new pathway patrol program to continue to keep bike and walking paths safe throughout Columbia and the county.

“Community relations has always been a top priority for me,” said Police Chief Gary Gardner. “Our crime rates in Howard County are at record lows and I not only want to keep it that way, but I also want to maintain a sense of transparency, trust and open communication with all members of our community.”

As part of the effort, the HCPD brought on a full-time Mental Health Community Liaison in partnership with the Mental Health Authority, increased mental health training for recruits and civilian employees, and implemented Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for patrol officers and 911 employees. The agency also provided suicide prevention training for all 911 Center employees and School Resource Officers and has added an additional Mobile Crisis Team in conjunction with Grassroots to provide expanded hours and coverage.

The department also has expressed an openness to in-depth reviews of current practices, model community policing in other jurisdictions and possibilities for enhanced training and technology. As a result, the police department’s Citizens’ Advisory Council will be researching trends in these areas to make recommendations for the agency.

Finally, the police department will be conducting informational forums through the faith-based community and minority organizations to enhance public trust in police and eliminate barriers to open communication. The department also will conduct similar outreach to other groups as the program continues to grow.

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