

FORT FAIRFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT

Standard Operating Procedure

403 – VEHICLE PURSUITS

Effective Date	July 28, 2026
Legacy SOPs Replaced	SOP 41D – Operation of Police Vehicles, Roadblocks SOP 41E – Deployment of Tire Deflating Devices
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Authority	Chief of Police
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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish uniform procedures governing the initiation, continuation, supervision, termination, documentation, and administrative review of police vehicle pursuits. This policy is intended to protect the public, law enforcement officers, and fleeing suspects by balancing the need for immediate apprehension against the risks created by pursuit driving.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of this agency that the preservation of human life and public safety shall be the highest priority during all police vehicle pursuits.

Officers may engage in a vehicle pursuit only when the need for immediate apprehension outweighs the reasonably foreseeable risks created by the pursuit. Every pursuit shall be continuously evaluated to determine whether it remains reasonable, necessary, and consistent with this policy.

A pursuit shall be terminated whenever the risks to the public, officers involved and suspects objectively exceed the need for immediate apprehension.

Nothing in this policy prohibits officers from identifying a suspect, obtaining investigative information, and pursuing apprehension through alternative investigative means when immediate apprehension is not warranted. The decision to terminate a pursuit shall not be construed as a failure to perform law enforcement duties, but rather as an exercise of professional judgment consistent with this policy.

III. DEFINITIONS

Authorized Emergency Vehicle: A law enforcement vehicle equipped with operable emergency equipment as designated by Maine law.

Caravanning: Direct participation in, or following of, a pursuit by emergency vehicles other than the primary unit and authorized secondary unit.

Duty to Drive with Due Regard for Safety: The statutory statement that the operator of an authorized emergency vehicle has a duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all people, and that the operator is not protected by law from the consequences of reckless disregard for the safety of others.

Pursuit-Rated Vehicle: An authorized law enforcement emergency vehicle that is specially designed and equipped for use during high-speed pursuits.

Primary Unit: The law enforcement unit immediately following the suspect vehicle who assumes primary control of the pursuit until primary control is transferred to a supervisor, senior officer, or another authorized unit.

Roadblock: A deliberate obstruction or partial obstruction of a roadway by law enforcement for the purpose of stopping or controlling the movement of a fleeing vehicle.

Secondary Unit: A law enforcement unit authorized to participate as backup to the primary unit during a pursuit.

Serious Bodily Injury: Bodily injury that creates a substantial risk of death, causes serious permanent disfigurement, causes loss or substantial impairment of the function of any bodily member or organ, or requires extended convalescence for recovery of physical health.

Termination: The intentional discontinuation of a pursuit by law enforcement personnel.

Termination Point: The location where a pursuit comes to an end.

Tire Deflation Device: An approved device designed to safely reduce the speed of a fleeing vehicle by deflating one or more tires.

Trail or Trailing: The unauthorized following of a pursuit at any distance, including paralleling, intercepting, or tracking the pursuit.

Vehicle Intervention Technique: A law enforcement tactic intended to stop or redirect a fleeing vehicle through physical contact, positioning, or other authorized means. Vehicle intervention techniques include, but are not limited to, tire deflation devices,

roadblocks, vehicle immobilization techniques, and other lawful methods authorized by agency policy and applicable law.

Vehicle Pursuit: A deliberate attempt by a law enforcement officer operating an authorized emergency vehicle to apprehend a fleeing suspect who is actively attempting to elude apprehension.

IV. LEGAL AUTHORITY

This policy is established pursuant to **25 M.R.S. § 2803-B**, applicable Maine Criminal Justice Academy Board of Trustees mandatory policy requirements, and applicable Maine motor vehicle laws governing the operation of authorized emergency vehicles, including **29-A M.R.S. § 2054**.

Officers are reminded that, pursuant to **29-A M.R.S. § 2054**, the privileges afforded to operators of authorized emergency vehicles do not relieve an officer of the continuing duty to operate with due regard for the safety of all people, nor do those privileges protect an officer from the consequences of reckless disregard for the safety of others.

V. OPERATIONS

A. Authorization to Initiate a Pursuit

An officer may initiate a vehicle pursuit only when all the following conditions exist:

- A. The officer has activated the vehicle's emergency lights and siren unless circumstances make such activation unreasonable or impossible;
- B. The driver knowingly refuses to stop or attempts to evade apprehension;
- C. The officer reasonably believes the necessity for immediate apprehension outweighs the risks created by the pursuit; and
- D. The pursuit is consistent with this policy.

Vehicle pursuits should ordinarily be limited to circumstances involving:

- Violent felonies;
- Serious offenses involving an immediate threat to public safety;
- Situations where the suspect's continued freedom presents a substantial danger to others; or

- Other circumstances specifically authorized by a supervisor based upon articulable facts.

The mere fact that a driver fails to stop shall not, by itself, justify initiating or continuing a pursuit.

B. Risk Assessment

Before initiating and throughout the duration of a pursuit, officers shall continuously evaluate the risks associated with continuing the pursuit.

Factors to be considered include, but are not limited to:

- The seriousness of the offense;
- The threat posed by the suspect;
- Traffic volume;
- Weather conditions;
- Roadway characteristics;
- Population density;
- Time of day;
- Visibility;
- Speed;
- Officer familiarity with the area;
- Availability of alternative means of apprehension;
- Identity of the suspect, if known; and
- The performance capabilities of the pursuing vehicle and officer.

Risk assessment is a continuous process. A pursuit that is justified at its inception may become unreasonable as conditions change.

C. Responsibilities of the Primary Unit

The primary pursuing officer shall:

A. Immediately notify communications that a pursuit has been initiated;

B. Broadcast:

- Location;
- Direction of travel;
- Vehicle description;
- Registration, if known;
- Reason for the pursuit;
- Estimated speed;
- Traffic conditions; and
- Any significant changes affecting public safety.

C. Operate the emergency vehicle with due regard for the safety of all people.

D. Continuously evaluate whether continuation of the pursuit remains justified.

E. Comply with all lawful supervisory directions.

F. Terminate the pursuit immediately when directed by a supervisor, when it genuinely feels unsafe, or when continuation no longer complies with this policy.

D. Responsibilities of the Secondary Unit

The secondary pursuing officer shall:

A. Assume responsibility for communications whenever practical and coordinated, allowing the primary officer to concentrate on vehicle operation;

B. Advise Communications of significant changes in the pursuit when the primary officer is unable to do so;

C. Maintain a genuinely safe following distance from both the primary unit and the fleeing vehicle;

D. Be prepared to assume the primary position if the initiating officer becomes unable to continue; and

E. Assist with the safe apprehension of the suspect following termination of the pursuit.

Unless specifically authorized by a supervisor, no more than two agency vehicles should actively participate in a pursuit.

Only one involved officer should be reporting the general status updates for the pursuit.

Additional units should respond to likely termination locations, establish perimeter positions, or perform other assigned duties without joining the pursuit.

E. Supervisory Responsibilities

Upon becoming aware of a pursuit, the on-duty supervisor shall promptly evaluate the circumstances and determine whether continuation is justified.

The supervisor shall:

A. Obtain available information concerning:

- The reason for the pursuit;
- The seriousness of the offense;
- Whether the operator / occupants have been identified;
- Road, traffic, and weather conditions;
- Speed;
- Experience level of the officer(s) involved;
- Number of units involved; and
- Other factors affecting public safety.

B. Continuously monitor the pursuit.

C. Ensure sufficient resources are available.

D. Limit the number of participating vehicles when appropriate.

E. Direct tactical modifications as conditions change.

F. Order termination whenever the risks outweigh the need for immediate apprehension or the pursuit no longer complies with this policy.

Whenever practical, supervisory oversight should be maintained until the pursuit concludes.

F. Communications Responsibilities

Communications personnel shall:

A. Immediately acknowledge the pursuit;

B. Record all pertinent information;

C. Maintain a continuous documented record of:

- Location;
- Direction of travel;

- Speed;
- Vehicle description;
- Reason for the pursuit;
- Assisting agencies; and
- Significant operational developments.

D. Notify the on-duty supervisor as soon as practical if not already aware;

E. Notify adjoining law enforcement agencies when the pursuit approaches or enters their jurisdiction; and

F. Coordinate available resources to support officer safety.

Communications personnel shall not direct tactical operations except at specific supervisory directions.

G. Pursuit Operations

Emergency warning equipment shall remain activated throughout the pursuit unless extraordinary circumstances justify otherwise or become damaged.

Officers shall operate agency vehicles with due regard for the safety of all people.

Pursuing officers shall not intentionally force another vehicle from the roadway except when specifically authorized under agency policy and when objectively reasonable under the circumstances.

Officers not authorized to participate in the pursuit shall not parallel, intercept, or join the pursuit unless specifically directed by a supervisor.

Officers shall not pass another pursuing unit unless operationally necessary and clearly and specifically coordinated in advance.

When practical, officers should reduce speeds and allow greater following distances upon entering congested areas, construction zones, or other locations presenting elevated risk.

Pursuits should be terminated if it is clear the pursuit is going to enter an active school zone, unless otherwise specifically authorized by a supervisor under extreme conditions.

H. Interjurisdictional Pursuits

Officers may continue a lawful pursuit beyond the agency's jurisdiction when authorized by law and when continuation remains justified under this policy.

When practical, Communications shall notify the law enforcement agency or agencies with jurisdiction.

The pursuit supervisor should coordinate transfer of responsibility whenever practical.

When another agency assumes primary responsibility for the pursuit, agency personnel should discontinue active participation unless continued assistance is specifically requested and approved.

Agency personnel shall comply with applicable mutual aid agreements and interagency pursuit procedures.

I. Tire Deflation Devices

Only officers who have received department-approved training may deploy tire deflation devices.

Deployment shall be approved by a supervisor whenever practical.

Public safety and officer safety shall be the first priority.

Prior to deployment, officers should consider:

- Traffic conditions;
- Available visibility;
- Presence of pedestrians;
- Speed;
- Escape routes;
- Availability of adequate officer cover; and
- The likelihood of safely recovering the device in time.

Communications shall be advised of the intended deployment location whenever practical.

Pursuing officers shall increase following distance accordingly.

Immediately after deployment, officers shall relocate to an adequate position of safety.

Deployment shall be denied or discontinued whenever the risks created exceed the anticipated benefit.

J. Roadblocks and Vehicle Intervention Techniques

Roadblocks, vehicle intervention techniques, and other forcible stopping methods involve a substantial risk of serious bodily injury or death.

These techniques shall be employed only when:

- A. Authorized by a supervisor;
- B. Consistent with agency policy governing use of force;
- C. Officers are trained in the technique to be used;
- D. Objectively reasonable under the circumstances; and
- E. The threat presented by the suspect justifies the level of force employed.

Officers shall not establish an occupied roadblock unless deadly force would otherwise be legally justified.

Whenever practical, less hazardous alternatives shall be considered before employing forcible vehicle intervention techniques.

K. Circumstances Requiring Termination

A pursuit shall be terminated whenever:

- A. The identity of the suspect is known, and immediate apprehension is not necessary;
- B. The risks created by continuing the pursuit exceed the need for immediate apprehension;
- C. Communications are lost and situational awareness cannot be maintained;
- D. The pursuing vehicle becomes unsafe to operate;
- E. The speed or conditions are beyond the comfort level of the pursuing officer(s);
- F. The officer loses visual contact for a sufficient period to make continued pursuit unreasonable;

G. A supervisor orders termination; or

G. Other circumstances make continuation inconsistent with this policy.

Termination does not preclude subsequent investigation, identification, or apprehension through lawful investigative means.

L. Post-Pursuit Responsibilities

Upon termination of a pursuit, officers shall take appropriate action to protect the public, preserve evidence, and facilitate the safe apprehension of suspects when appropriate.

Officers shall:

A. Advise Communications that the pursuit has been terminated;

B. Report the final known location and direction of travel of the fleeing vehicle, if known;

C. Continue to observe the suspect only when doing so does not constitute continuation of the pursuit and can be accomplished safely;

D. Render or obtain medical assistance for any injured person as soon as practical;

E. Protect and preserve the scene of any collision or significant incident;

F. Identify witnesses when practical; and

G. Complete all required reports before the end of the officer's tour of duty unless otherwise directed.

M. Reporting Requirements

The primary pursuing officer shall complete a written pursuit report before the conclusion of their tour of duty unless otherwise authorized by a supervisor.

The report shall include, at a minimum:

A. The reason the pursuit was initiated;

B. The route and approximate duration of the pursuit;

C. Estimated speeds;

- D. Road, weather, and traffic conditions;
- E. Identity of participating officers;
- F. Assisting agencies;
- G. Any pursuit intervention techniques utilized;
- H. Any collisions, injuries, or property damage;
- I. The way the pursuit concluded; and
- J. Any criminal charges resulting from the incident.

Officers operating secondary or assisting vehicles shall complete supplemental reports whenever required by the supervisor.

Body-worn camera, in-car camera, radio recordings, photographs, and other digital evidence shall be preserved in accordance with agency evidence management procedures.

N. State Reporting Requirements

In accordance with Board of Trustees' requirements, the Chief Executive Officer, or designee, shall ensure the current State of Maine Motor Vehicle Pursuit Report is completed and submitted to the Maine State Police Traffic Division following each reportable vehicle pursuit.

Agencies shall use the most current version of the State of Maine Motor Vehicle Pursuit Report prescribed by the State of Maine, which is available through SOP 001 – Official Forms and References Library.

O. Supervisory Review

Every vehicle pursuit shall be reviewed by a supervisor as soon as practical.

The supervisory review shall evaluate:

- A. Compliance with this policy;

- B. Compliance with applicable law;
- C. The justification for initiating and continuing the pursuit;
- D. Supervisory oversight;
- E. Officer decision-making;
- F. Any collisions, injuries, property damage, or use of force;
- G. Equipment or communications issues;
- H. Training deficiencies; and
- I. Whether policy revisions or corrective action should be considered.

When deficiencies are identified, the supervisor shall recommend appropriate corrective action, counseling, additional training, policy revision, or other remedial measures.

Significant incidents may be referred to command staff for further administrative review.

P. Annual Analysis

The agency shall conduct an annual review of vehicle pursuits for the purpose of identifying trends, evaluating policy effectiveness, improving officer safety, and reducing organizational risk.

The annual analysis should include consideration of:

- A. Number of pursuits initiated;
- B. Reasons for initiation;
- C. Duration;
- D. Termination methods;
- E. Collisions;
- F. Injuries;
- G. Property damage;
- H. Use of intervention techniques;

- I. Geographic patterns;
- J. Policy compliance; and
- K. Training needs.

The results of the annual analysis shall be considered when evaluating agency policy, equipment, supervision, and training programs.

Q. Training

Sworn personnel authorized to operate emergency vehicles shall receive training regarding this policy and applicable pursuit driving practices.

Training shall include, when appropriate:

- A. Legal considerations;
- B. Agency pursuit policy;
- C. Decision-making and risk assessment;
- D. Emergency vehicle operation;
- E. Communications procedures;
- F. Pursuit intervention options;
- G. Tire deflation device deployment;
- H. Reporting responsibilities; and
- I. Lessons learned from annual pursuit analyses and significant pursuit incidents.

Officers shall demonstrate familiarity with this policy before participating in vehicle pursuits.

APPENDIX A

BOT & MLEAP STANDARDS CROSSWALK

Purpose, Policy and Legal Authority

Authority

- **25 M.R.S. §2803-B(1)(D)** – Police Pursuit Policy
- **BOT 2-1** – Policy Statement
- **BOT 2-2** – Officer Familiarity with Applicable Statutes
- **BOT 2-16** – Compliance with BOT Standards

Addressed in: Sections I, II, IV

Definitions

Authority

- **BOT 2-3** – Definitions
- **MLEAP 7.15** – Vehicle Pursuits

Addressed in: Section III

Initiation of Pursuits

Authority

- **BOT 2-5** – Conditions for Initiating or Continuing Pursuits
- **MLEAP 7.15A** – Pursuit Initiation and Risk Assessment

Addressed in: Sections V(A), V(B)

Emergency Vehicle Operations

Authority

- **BOT 2-4** – Emergency Vehicle Operations Training
- **BOT 2-7** – Pursuit Operations
- **MLEAP 7.15C** – Pursuit Operations

Addressed in: Sections V(C), V(G)

Communications and Secondary Unit Responsibilities

Authority

- **BOT 2-8** – Secondary Pursuit Unit Responsibilities
- **BOT 2-10** – Communications Responsibilities
- **BOT 2-11** – Number of Pursuit Vehicles / Unmarked Vehicles
- **MLEAP 7.15C** – Pursuit Operations

Addressed in: Sections V(D), V(F)

Supervisory Responsibilities

Authority

- **BOT 2-9** – Supervisory Responsibilities
- **MLEAP 5.5.1** – Supervisory Responsibilities
- **MLEAP 7.15E** – Pursuit Supervision and Termination

Addressed in: Section V(E)

Pursuit Intervention Techniques

Authority

- **BOT 2-12** – Intervention Techniques
- **MLEAP 7.20** – Roadblocks
- **MLEAP 7.21** – Tire Deflation Devices

Addressed in: Sections V(I), V(J)

Pursuit Termination

Authority

- **BOT 2-6** – Termination of Pursuits
- **MLEAP 7.15E** – Pursuit Termination

Addressed in: Section V(K)

Fresh Pursuit Across State Boundaries

Authority

- **15 M.R.S. §§151–155** – Uniform Act on Fresh Pursuit
- **BOT 2-13** – Fresh Pursuit Across State Boundaries

Addressed in: Section V(H)

Post-Pursuit Procedures

Authority

- **BOT 2-14** – Review of Pursuits Involving Injury or Property Damage
- **BOT 2-15** – Maine Motor Vehicle Pursuit Report
- **MLEAP 7.16** – Post-Pursuit Documentation and Analysis
- **MLEAP 5.4.1** – Reporting and Documentation

Addressed in: Sections V(L), V(M), V(N), V(O)

Training

Authority

- **BOT 2-4** – Emergency Vehicle Operations Training
- **MLEAP 3.01** – Agency Training Program
- **MLEAP 7.15C** – Pursuit Operations Training

Addressed in: Section V(P)