

## Persons Experiencing Homelessness

### 428.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that personnel understand the needs and rights of the homeless and to establish procedures to guide officers during all contacts with the homeless, whether consensual or for enforcement purposes. The Northfield Police Department recognizes that people experiencing homelessness are often in need of special protection and services. The Northfield Police Department will address these needs in balance with the overall missions of this department. Therefore, officers will consider the following policy when serving the homeless community.

### 428.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Northfield Police Department to provide law enforcement services to all members of the community while protecting the rights, dignity and private property of people experiencing homelessness. Homelessness is not a crime and members of this department will not use homelessness solely as a basis for detention or law enforcement action.

### 428.3 FIELD CONTACTS

Officers are encouraged to contact people experiencing homelessness for purposes of rendering aid, support and for community-oriented policing purposes. Nothing in this policy is meant to dissuade an officer from taking reasonable enforcement action when facts support a reasonable suspicion of criminal activity. However, when encountering a person experiencing homelessness who has committed a non-violent misdemeanor and continued freedom is not likely to result in a continuation of the offense or a breach of the peace, officers are encouraged to consider long-term solutions to problems that may relate to the homeless, such as shelter referrals and counseling in lieu of physical arrest. Officers should provide people experiencing homelessness with resource and assistance information whenever it is reasonably apparent such services may be appropriate.

#### 428.3.1 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

People experiencing homelessness will receive the same level and quality of service provided to other members of our community. The fact that a victim or witness is homeless can, however, require special considerations for a successful investigation and prosecution. Officers should consider the following when handling investigations involving homeless victims, witnesses or suspects:

- (a) Documenting alternate contact information. This may include obtaining addresses and telephone numbers of relatives and friends.
- (b) Document places the homeless person may frequent.
- (c) Provide homeless victims with victim/witness resources when appropriate.
- (d) Obtain statements from all available witnesses in the event a homeless victim is unavailable for a court appearance.

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- (e) Consider whether the person may be a dependent adult or elder and if so proceed in accordance with the Adult Abuse Policy.
- (f) Arrange for transportation for investigation-related matters, such as medical exams and court appearances.
- (g) Consider whether a crime should be reported and submitted for prosecution even when a homeless victim indicates he/she does not desire prosecution.

#### **428.4 PERSONAL PROPERTY**

The personal property of people experiencing homelessness must not be treated differently than the property of other members of the public. Officers should use reasonable care when handling, collecting and retaining the personal property of homeless persons and should not destroy or discard the personal property of a person experiencing homelessness.

When a person experiencing homelessness is arrested or otherwise removed from a public place, officers should make reasonable accommodations to permit the person to lawfully secure his/her personal property. Otherwise, the arrestee's personal property should be collected for safekeeping. If the arrestee has more personal property than can reasonably be collected and transported by the officer, a supervisor should be consulted. The property should be photographed and measures should be taken to remove or secure the property. It will be the supervisor's responsibility to coordinate the removal and safekeeping of the property.

Officers should not conduct or assist in clean-up operations of belongings that reasonably appear to be the property of persons experiencing homelessness without the prior authorization of a supervisor or the Department Homeless Liaison Officer. When practicable, requests by the public for clean-up operations of a homeless encampment should be referred to the Homeless Liaison Officer.

Officers who encounter unattended encampments, bedding or other personal property in public areas that reasonably appears to belong to a person experiencing homelessness should not remove or destroy such property and should inform the Department Homeless Liaison Officer if such property appears to involve a trespass, blight to the community or is the subject of a complaint. It will be the responsibility of the Homeless Liaison Officer to address the matter in a timely fashion.

#### **428.5 MENTAL ILLNESSES AND MENTAL IMPAIRMENTS**

Some persons experiencing homelessness may suffer from a mental illness or a mental impairment. Officers shall not detain anyone under a 72-hour emergency medical hold unless facts and circumstances warrant such a detention.

#### **428.6 ECOLOGICAL ISSUES**

Sometimes homeless encampments can affect the ecology and natural resources of the community and may involve criminal offenses beyond mere littering. Officers are encouraged to notify other appropriate agencies or departments when a significant impact to the environment

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has or is likely to occur. Significant impacts to the environment may warrant a crime report, investigation, supporting photographs and supervisor notification.

#### **428.7 LOCAL RESOURCES**

The Community Action Center (CAC) is the best local resource for assistance for people experiencing homelessness. Officers having contact with persons experiencing homelessness or persons experiencing housing insecurity should contact the CAC with the persons permission in order to put them in touch with available services. The Northfield Union of Youth is also a resource for those persons under age 24 experiencing homelessness.