



MILWAUKEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

100 – FOOT PURSUITS

GENERAL ORDER: 2026-16
ISSUED: April 16, 2026

EFFECTIVE: April 16, 2026

REVIEWED/APPROVED BY:
Assistant Chief Craig Sarnow
DATE: March 2, 2026

ACTION: Creates SOP

WILEAG STANDARD(S): NONE

100.00 PURPOSE

The purpose of this standard operating procedure is to create guidelines regarding the use of foot pursuits as foot pursuits are inherently dangerous. The Milwaukee Police Department must establish a balance between protecting the safety of the public and officers during pursuits on foot and law enforcement's duty to enforce the law and apprehend suspects.

100.05 POLICY

It is the policy of the Milwaukee Police Department that members may engage in foot pursuits with suspects only when there is an articulable reasonable suspicion to believe that the suspect has committed, is committing, or is about to commit a crime. It is the policy of the Milwaukee Police Department that officer and public safety shall be the overriding consideration in determining whether a foot pursuit will be initiated or continued.

100.10 DEFINITIONS

A. FOOT PURSUIT

An incident where an officer chases, on foot, a person who is evading detention or arrest.

B. PARTNER SPLITTING

When loss of visual contact, distance, or obstacles, separates partners to a degree that they cannot immediately assist each other should a confrontation take place.

C. REASONABLE SUSPICION

Individualized, objective, and articulable facts that, within the totality of the circumstances, lead a police member to reasonably believe that criminal activity has been, is being, or is about to be committed by a specific person or people. This standard is also known as articulable suspicion.

100.15 GENERAL PROVISIONS

- A. The mere act of flight alone (as described in SOP 100.20(C)) by a person shall not serve as justification for engaging in a foot pursuit.
- B. When deciding to initiate or continue a foot pursuit, members must continuously balance the objective of apprehending the suspect(s) with the risk and potential for injury to department members, bystanders, or the suspects. Members must act reasonably, based on all of the circumstances.
- C. When directed by a supervisor to terminate a foot pursuit, such an order shall be considered mandatory and the pursuit must be discontinued immediately.
- D. Members must use the tactics described below to avoid the use of unnecessary or excessive force during or at the conclusion of a foot pursuit. When a foot pursuit terminates with a suspect in custody, it is prohibited to use force to punish persons for fleeing, resisting arrest, or assaulting a member.

100.20 DECIDING WHEN TO PURSUE

- A. The safety of department members, the suspect, and the public should be the primary consideration when determining whether a foot pursuit should be initiated or continued.
- B. Members may engage in foot pursuits with suspects only when there is articulable reasonable suspicion to believe that the suspect has committed, is committing, or is about to commit a crime and when members reasonably believe that there is a valid law enforcement need to detain the suspect that outweighs the threat to safety posed by pursuit. The decision to initiate or continue such a foot pursuit, however, must be continuously re-evaluated in light of the circumstances presented at the time.

Note: Although foot pursuits are permissible under the above circumstances, members are expected to weigh the seriousness of the offense against the immediate need to apprehend and the consideration of member and public safety. For example, the need to immediately apprehend a curfew violator is minimal, while the need to apprehend an armed carjacking suspect is more significant given the danger they pose to the public.

- C. A member may not conduct a foot pursuit based solely on a person's response to the presence of police, including a person's attempt to avoid contact with a member (e.g., walking away, declining to talk, running away, or crossing the street to avoid contact). People may avoid contact with a member for many reasons other than involvement in criminal activity.
- D. If otherwise consistent with this policy, a member may conduct a foot pursuit when a person in a location known for certain criminal activity runs, unprovoked, from the police and there is an articulable reasonable suspicion to believe the person is running because they are involved in the type of criminal activity prevalent in that location.

1. In this situation, the member must be able to articulate the specific facts establishing articulable reasonable suspicion, including how the individual's unprovoked flight is linked to their suspected participation in the type of criminal activity prevalent in that location.
2. Examples of facts that may establish a link between a person's unprovoked flight and the type of criminal activity (e.g., drug dealing, entry to autos) prevalent in a location include, but is not limited to, the member:
 - a. Observes the person taking actions that are consistent with the commission of the particular crime prevalent at that location;
 - b. Has personal knowledge that the person has committed the crime previously;
or
 - c. Has personal knowledge that there was a recent call for service about that particular crime being committed at that location.
- E. Members are prohibited from intentionally provoking or attempting to provoke flight in an effort to justify a field interview or a foot pursuit. For example, a member may not drive at a high rate of speed toward a group congregated on a corner, stop quickly, and exit quickly with the intention of stopping anyone in the group who flees.
- F. Surveillance and containment are generally the safest tactics for apprehending fleeing persons. In deciding whether to initiate or continue a foot pursuit, members should continuously consider reasonable alternatives based upon the circumstances and resources available, such as:
 1. Setting up a perimeter.
 2. Saturation of the area with law enforcement personnel, including assistance from other agencies.
 3. A canine search.
 4. Thermal imaging or other sensing technology.
 5. Airborne Assessment Team support.
 6. Apprehension at another time when the identity of the suspect is known or there is information available that would likely allow for later apprehension, and the need to immediately apprehend the suspect does not reasonably appear to outweigh the risk of continuing the foot pursuit.

100.25 FOOT PURSUIT GUIDELINES

A. OVERALL TACTICS

The rapidly changing nature of these encounters requires that officers develop a flexible, tactical approach to each pursuit situation.

1. Members shall be aware of their own physical condition and conserve energy. If a member has not caught a suspect within a short period of time, the pursuit may turn into a “tail” or a search.
2. Members should consider not following the exact same path as the suspect. Members should avoid jumping over walls or fences where the suspect did, to reduce the risk of being ambushed. Whenever possible, members should meter all corners when conducting a foot pursuit.
3. Metering corners prevents the member from turning directly into an ambush.
4. If members are aware the suspect has a weapon other than a firearm, members should not run directly behind the suspect. Instead, members should keep a reaction distance that allows them to escalate or disengage if the suspect turns and tries to attack. When possible, use an alternate route to stay involved in the pursuit, but away from the immediate vicinity of the suspect.
5. If members are aware the suspect has a firearm, members should consider whether a foot pursuit is appropriate. Some factors to consider include:
 - a. The suspect’s ability to instantly turn and fire;
 - b. The suspect’s access to cover;
 - c. Action versus reaction time;
 - d. Surrounding circumstances, such as innocent bystanders, environment, etc.; and
 - e. Whether the member has sufficient cover or distance.

Note: If the member cannot safely pursue the suspect, the foot pursuit should be terminated and a perimeter should be established.

6. If there are two members working together they should consider not splitting up as officers working as a team are better than two officers working as individuals.
 - a. Officers who split from their partner lose their tactical advantage. Officers are considered split when the distance or barriers between the officers would unreasonably delay one officer’s ability to render aid to the other.

- b. The primary member should concentrate on the suspect's actions while the second member provides back up and maintains contact with police radio and other responding members.
7. An officer's decision to draw his or her firearm is based on the officer's reasonable belief that the situation could escalate to the use of deadly force. However, running with a firearm in the member's hand may increase the chance of an accidental discharge and may limit their responses to the actions of the suspect.
 - a. Generally, members should consider leaving their firearm in its holster while keeping a sufficient reaction gap to allow them to draw their weapon if it becomes necessary. This also makes crossing fences and other barriers easier.
 - b. It can be inherently dangerous to initiate a foot pursuit with an un-holstered weapon, because of postural disturbances or inter-limb-interaction.
 1. A postural disturbance is something that affects an officer's ability to maintain his or her balance and or physical posture, such as tripping.
 2. Inter-limb-interaction is the transfer of energy from the support hand gripping something or someone, and the nerve impulse transferring to the trigger finger, causing an unintentional discharge.
8. If the member loses sight of the subject during the foot pursuit, the member should discontinue the foot pursuit and begin a search of the area and set up a perimeter.
 - a. A perimeter may prevent a suspect from escaping, protects the public from the incident, and it slows the incident to provide time.
 - b. Members should establish a perimeter by surrounding a scene with officers to control the suspect's movement and contain the suspect's threat. With proper placement of a sufficient number of officers, the suspect cannot escape without being confronted by officers.
 - c. When only one officer is immediately available, that officer will usually select the best available observation point that can exert control over ingress and egress.
 - d. After assessing the scene, the first officer will request additional assistance, assume command of the scene until relieved by a supervisor, and assign additional officers to specific areas of the perimeter.
 - e. When setting up a perimeter it is important to Contain, Communicate, and Call:
 1. Contain the situation by establishing a perimeter and establishing control of the scene using the Incident Command System.

2. Communicate with the suspect by providing them clear instructions of what the officer wants them to do to safely end the incident, dispatch, and other officers. The primary unit, acting as the incident commander, must give clear and timely direction to responding units in order to seal the perimeter. Officers on the perimeter need to be kept apprised of probable suspect locations and if there are officers searching inside the perimeter.
 3. Call for additional resources, if needed. The incident commander should establish a Command Post (CP) as soon as practicable.
- B. Members should consider alternatives to engaging in or continuing a foot pursuit in the following circumstances. These circumstances create particularly high risk for the members and the public.
1. The member is acting alone.
 2. Two or more members become separated, lose visual contact with one another, or obstacles separate them to the degree that they cannot immediately assist each other should a confrontation take place. In such circumstances, it is generally recommended that a single member keep the suspect in sight from a safe distance and coordinate the containment effort.
 3. The member is unsure of their location and direction of travel.
 4. The physical condition or size of the member relative to the suspect renders them incapable of controlling the suspect at the conclusion of the foot pursuit.
 5. The member loses radio contact with the dispatcher or with assisting or backup members.
 6. The suspect enters a building, structure, confined space, isolated area, or dense or difficult terrain, and there are insufficient members to provide backup and containment. The primary member should consider discontinuing the foot pursuit and coordinating containment pending the arrival of sufficient resources.
 7. The member becomes aware of unanticipated circumstances that unreasonably increase the risk to members or the public (e.g., the foot pursuit is heading toward a large crowd of people at an event or festival depending on the original reason for the foot pursuit).
 8. The member reasonably believes that the danger to the pursuing members outweighs the objective of immediate apprehension.
 9. The member or a third party is injured during the foot pursuit, requiring immediate assistance, and there are no other emergency personnel available to render assistance.
 10. The suspect's location is no longer known.

11. The identity of the suspect is established or other information exists that will allow for the suspect's apprehension at a later time, and it reasonably appears that there is no immediate threat to department members or the public if the suspect is not immediately apprehended.
12. The member's ability to safely continue the foot pursuit is impaired by inclement weather, darkness, or other environmental conditions, such as steep terrain, worn-out structures, piles of debris, etc.
13. The presence of vehicular traffic in the area of the pursuit and risk of emergency vehicle response by additional members create safety concerns.

100.30 FOOT PURSUIT RESPONSIBILITIES

A. INITIATING MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The member shall immediately activate their body-worn camera (BWC), and ensure that the BWC is activated throughout the duration of the foot pursuit in accordance with SOP 747 Body Worn Cameras.
2. Unless relieved by another member or a supervisor, the initiating member shall be responsible for coordinating the progress of the pursuit and containment. When acting alone and when practicable, the initiating member should consider not attempting to overtake and confronting the suspect and consider attempting to keep the suspect in sight until sufficient members are present to safely apprehend the suspect based on the following, but not limited to, factors:
 - a. The type of crime suspected - particularly in crimes of violence where the use or threat of deadly weapons is involved.
 - b. Police member vs. subject factors (age, gender, and size considerations)
 - c. Prior knowledge of the subject's use of force and/or propensity to carry deadly weapons.
 - d. Visual indications that suggest that the subject is carrying a firearm or other deadly weapon.
3. Early communication of available information is essential. Members engaging in a foot pursuit must initiate a radio broadcast within the first few seconds to ensure that adequate resources are coordinated and deployed to assist and manage the pursuit to a safe conclusion. The broadcast shall contain the following information, at minimum:
 - a. Location and direction of travel.
 - b. Squad number.

- c. Reason for the foot pursuit, such as the crime incident type.
 - d. Number of suspects and physical descriptions, to include name if known.
 - e. Whether the suspect is known or believed to be armed with a dangerous weapon.
4. Members should be mindful that radio transmissions made while running may be difficult to understand and may need to be repeated.
 5. Absent exigent circumstances, any member unable to promptly and effectively broadcast this information should terminate the foot pursuit. If the foot pursuit is discontinued for any reason, immediate efforts for containment should be established and alternatives considered based upon the circumstances and available resources.
 6. In the event that the suspect enters a building, structure, confined space, wooded or otherwise isolated area, the initiating member shall assess the situation, notify the dispatcher of their location and determine whether to wait for the arrival of responding members and a supervisor so a perimeter around the area can be established, or if there exists an exigent need to enter.

Note: In cases where the suspect is believed to be armed and has taken a defensive posture which would meet the definition of a barricaded person, members shall refer to the procedures established for barricaded persons in SOP 900.15(B) Hazard Mitigation Plan.

B. ASSISTING MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Whenever any member announces that they are engaged in a foot pursuit, all other members should minimize non-essential radio traffic to provide the involved members with maximum access to radio communications.
2. Assisting members should respond in a safe manner, and take an active role in the apprehension of the suspect by assisting the initiating member.

C. TERMINATING A FOOT PURSUIT

1. Members shall not use more force than is necessary to arrest the suspect when a foot pursuit terminates. It is prohibited to use force to punish persons for fleeing, resisting arrest, or assaulting a member.
2. When a foot pursuit terminates, members should utilize approach considerations to determine which intervention option they will use to end the pursuit.
 - a. Officers are discouraged from tackling a suspect from behind. Officers should attempt to use a strong push or forearm strike to the upper back of the suspect, causing the suspect to lose his or her balance and fall forward.

- b. At the successful conclusion of a foot pursuit, members may maintain distance and issue verbal commands, decentralize the suspect, or whatever their evaluation of the situation reasonably demands.
3. When a foot pursuit terminates, the member shall notify the dispatcher of their location and the status of the foot pursuit termination (e.g., suspect in custody, lost sight of suspect). The member will also direct further actions as reasonably appear necessary, to include requesting needed medical aid for members, suspects, or other persons.

D. SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Upon becoming aware of a foot pursuit, the supervisor shall make every reasonable effort to ascertain sufficient information to direct responding resources and to take command, control, and coordination of the foot pursuit.

Note: Foot pursuits are often difficult to supervise due to their short duration and the difficulty members may have speaking to the supervisor on the radio while running. Supervisors shall make a good faith effort to supervise under these challenging circumstances.

2. Respond to the area whenever possible. The supervisor does not, however, need to be physically present to exercise control over the foot pursuit. The supervisor shall continuously assess the situation in order to ensure the foot pursuit is conducted within established department guidelines.
3. Supervisors shall terminate the foot pursuit when:
 - a. It reasonably appears either that the pursuit lacks a lawful purpose or is unsupported by articulable reasonable suspicion (e.g., cases of mistaken identity where actual suspect has been apprehended elsewhere).
 - b. The danger to pursuing members or the public appears to unreasonably outweigh the objective of immediate apprehension of the suspect.
 - c. The pursuit is otherwise not in compliance with this policy.
4. Upon apprehension of the suspect, the supervisor shall:
 - a. Promptly proceed to the termination location to direct the post-foot pursuit activity.
 - b. Upon arriving at the scene, check for any injuries to victims, bystanders, members or suspects. Supervisors shall ensure medical aid was requested if needed and all injuries shall be documented in accordance with department policies.
 - c. If force was used, follow the procedures in SOP 460 Use of Force.

- d. Clear the scene of any unnecessary/uninvolved officers as soon as safe and practicable to do so.
 - e. Vacate the termination/apprehension point of all involved officers as soon as all investigative needs are completed
- Note: The end of foot pursuits often attract attention of residents and crowds to gather, creating avoidable confrontations with onlookers due to extended, unnecessary time at the scene.**
5. Supervisors shall review (debrief) the incident with responding members for any issues regarding tactics or performance improvement. The supervisor shall review as part of the review process:
 - a. BWC footage of the event from the initiating member and other responding members;
 - b. Any written reports that were generated from the event;
 - c. Any other information available regarding the incident.
 6. Supervisors shall evaluate whether the foot pursuit was in compliance with this department policy and assess:
 - a. Whether opportunities for de-escalation or prevention of flight were missed and what tactics may have been useful;
 - b. Whether, during the pursuit, any tactics used could have been improved;
 - c. Whether any missteps were made, and if so, how those can be addressed avoided in the future (e.g., through further training, mentorship, or shadowing).

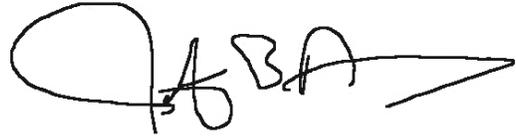
100.35 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Within the body of the narrative of any reports (e.g., Records Management System, TraCS, etc.), department members shall include details surrounding the foot pursuit to include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Articulable reasonable suspicion and/or probable cause for any offenses.
2. Reason and circumstances surrounding the foot pursuit.
3. Course and approximate distance of the foot pursuit.
4. Involved vehicles and members.
5. Any use of force.

6. Any injuries and/or medical treatment.
7. Any property or equipment damage.

Note: Members shall avoid broad, boilerplate phrases such as “high crime area” in their written reports when articulating justifications for foot pursuits and field interviews.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.B.N.' with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

JEFFREY B. NORMAN
CHIEF OF POLICE

JBN:mfk