MILWAUKEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

165 – HOMELESS PERSONS

GENERAL ORDER: 2025-21 **ISSUED:** April 24, 2025	**EFFECTIVE:** April 24, 2025	**REVIEWED/APPROVED BY:** Assistant Chief Steven Johnson **DATE:** March 6, 2025
ACTION: Amends General Order 2023-12 (March 8, 2023)		**WILEAG STANDARD(S): NONE**

165.00 POLICY

The policy of the Milwaukee Police Department is to treat homeless persons in a manner that respects individual rights, human dignity and community values while enforcing laws that protect life and property, and that sustain civic life. Unless circumstances dictate otherwise, members should use proper discretion and refer homeless individuals to an appropriate social service agency whenever possible.

165.05 DEFINITIONS

A. HOMELESS

A person is considered homeless when he or she lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence or resides in one of the places described below:

1. In places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, the street, abandoned buildings.

2. In an emergency shelter, transitional housing, hotels and motels.

3. In any of the above places, but is spending a short time (90 days or less) in a hospital or other institution.

4. Is being evicted within 14 days from a private dwelling unit and no subsequent residence has been identified.

5. Is being discharged from an institution, such as a mental health or substance abuse treatment facility or a jail /prison, in which the person has been a resident for 90 days or less and no subsequent residence has been identified and the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.

6. Is fleeing a domestic violence or other life threatening condition that relates to violence against the individual or family member.

B. HOMELESS CAMP

Any place where homeless individuals gather to store their property and/or sleep.

C. HOMELESS OUTREACH TEAM (H.O.T.)

Officers specially trained and assigned to work with homeless individuals and are Crisis Intervention Team members.

D. OUTREACH

The initial and most critical step in connecting or reconnecting, a homeless individual to needed health, mental health, recovery, social and housing services that involves the process of engagement, assessing needs, defining service goals or agreeing on a plan for delivering those services.

165.10 ENGAGEMENT

A. Absent reasonable suspicion that a homeless person is violating the law, members should approach homeless individuals as they would any other citizen. Homelessness, on its own, does not constitute reasonable suspicion. If reasonable suspicion is present, members may detain and identify a homeless person.

B. No items of personal property shall be destroyed or discarded unless it is contaminated or considered a health hazard. Homeless individuals keep many personal belongings, including documents and medications in what might initially appear to be an item of trash or other type of refuse. No personal property shall be searched or seized unless consent is obtained, reasonable suspicion or probable cause exists, the homeless person is arrested, or as otherwise authorized by department standard operating procedures and law.

C. Homeless individuals cannot be forced to move to another location if they have a legal right to be present at a location. A homeless person may be asked to move for safety or security reasons if on private property by request of the owner, or if violating a specific ordinance, law, or posting.

D. Whenever possible, homeless individuals should be referred to health, mental health, substance abuse treatment, recovery, social, and housing services. A list of these resources are on the *Crisis Intervention – Homeless Outreach Card* (form PC-30) or may be accessed on the H.O.T. SharePoint page. Officers not on a dispatched assignment who come into contact with homeless individuals may also refer those individuals to H.O.T. officers for additional referrals to services. Members shall contact their shift commander if they are unable to locate a H.O.T. officer.

E. Work locations shall ensure all H.O.T. officers assigned to their work location are designated as H.O.T. officers within the Special Training module of the Online Time Entry System.

165.15 HOMELESS VERIFICATION REFERRAL MEMO (PR-3H)

A. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), funds programs to help persons who are homeless. Local homeless assistance agencies provide a range of services and assistance, including emergency shelter, food and housing.

B. HUD requires, before a person who is homeless can receive services, there must be verification they are actually homeless. A police officer can make this verification.

C. The *Homeless Verification Referral Memo* (form PR-3H) can be used by officers for submission to homeless shelters or any other service that requires a homeless verification. A copy shall be sent to the Crisis Assessment Response Team via fax (extension [redacted] or interdepartmental mail for entry into the Homeless Management Information System.

D. Officers conducting either a legal detention, arrest, welfare check or otherwise consensual citizen contact with any person who identifies as homeless shall complete the *Homeless Verification Referral Memo* (form PR-3H) and distribute copies as listed on the form instructions, regardless of the disposition of the contact (e.g., arrest, medical attention, conveyance to the First Step Community Resource Center, advised). Officers shall not demand or coerce the person's name or other identifiers solely on the basis of homelessness or suspected homelessness or only for the purpose of completing this form.

165.20 HOMELESS CAMPS

A. Homeless camps on private property should initially be referred to H.O.T. officers, if practical. Subsequent contact should consist of a warning as a step toward developing probable cause for an arrest. Members shall document this warning in the add info section of the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system and include the location of the homeless camp and the name and date of birth of any individuals in the homeless camp.

B. Homeless camps on public property, such as a bridge underpass, should initially be referred to a H.O.T. officer for appropriate referral to social service agencies.

C. If complaints of criminal activity or health code violations require the Department of Public Works to initiate a clean-up, homeless individuals will be given one (1) week to vacate after notification to remove their personal property. Camps should be monitored until clean-up.

165.25 OUTREACH

A. OUTREACH

In connecting, or reconnecting, a homeless individual to needed health, mental health, social and housing services, H.O.T. officers collaborate with health and mental health experts and street chaplains. Together, they will be able to visit individuals and homeless camps to allow for joint assessment and planning.

B. EXTREME WEATHER CONTINGENCY PLAN

People experiencing homelessness have a much higher risk than the general population of developing exposure-related conditions such as hypo/hyperthermia and frostbite, or heat related illness. These conditions can be immediately life threatening

and may also increase the risk of dying from unrelated conditions in the future. Increased homeless services, especially additional shelter availability, are necessary to accommodate the amplified need in the winter. The winter contingency plan has been developed to provide relief to the homeless when inclement weather occurs. Milwaukee does have a number of shelters that do provide overflow space during the winter months to provide additional protection against the harsher elements. Generally, each shelter decides individually when they will begin their overflow based on their resources.

165.30 REFERRALS TO MILWAUKEE SHELTERS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

A. Shelters that receive certain funding are required to utilize the Coordinated Entry system through IMPACT 2-1-1. Due to limited resources within Milwaukee County's emergency shelter system not everyone will be granted a shelter bed. The community resource specialist's role is to offer referrals to other programs and resources that may help alleviate or end the client's housing crisis.

B. COORDINATED ENTRY SHELTERS

1. The following shelters use the 2-1-1 Coordinated Entry System: Cathedral Center, Guest House of Milwaukee, Hope House of Milwaukee, Salvation Army Emergency Lodge, and Milwaukee Women's Center (family placements only).

2. All referrals for these shelters must come via a 2-1-1 referral. Dropping off a person at these locations will not facilitate the person's entry into shelter.

3. Coordinated Entry is available at any time by dialing 2-1-1, 414-773-0211, or 1-866-211-3380. Members may initiate the call for the person with consent.

4. Individuals may also text their ZIP code to 898-211 to engage with a community resource specialist via text on weekdays from 9:00am to 9:00pm.

C. SHELTER FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Shelters serving special populations (veterans, unaccompanied youth, mental health, and people experiencing domestic violence) do not utilize Coordinated Entry. Clients in those categories may contact IMPACT 2-1-1 or a shelter directly. These shelters include Vet's Place Central, Sojourner Domestic Violence Shelter, Walker's Point Youth and Family, La Causa Crisis Nursery, and Pathfinders. Contact information for these shelters is located on the H.O.T. SharePoint page.

D. NON-COORDINATED ENTRY SHELTERS

Privately funded shelters such as the Milwaukee Rescue Mission, Joy House, and Casa Maria do not utilize the Coordinated Entry system, and members may contact these shelters directly. For a current list of all emergency shelter and alternative warming/cooling room resources refer to the *Crisis Intervention – Homeless Outreach Card* (form PC-30) or the H.O.T. SharePoint site.

E. HOMELESS PERSON CONVEYANCES

Any member that conveys a person voluntarily to a shelter or warming room shall:

1. Walk in with the person and give the designated copy of the *Homeless Verification Referral Memo* (form PR-3H) to the shelter representative.

2. Conduct a CCAP and wanted check to ensure that the person does not have a sexual assault or another conviction for a violent felony on their record that would prohibit the person from entering that location per the shelter/warming room policy.

3. Ensure that the person is not agitated, violent, incapacitated by alcohol, uncooperative, or suspected of having a medical or mental health emergency as he/she may not be a good candidate for shelter or warming room services without stabilizing treatment. Members shall request emergency medical services, mental health services, or convey the person to the First Step Community Resource Center as one of those options may be more appropriate until the person is treated and stabilized.

4. The member's commanding officer, or in her/her absence the night watch commander, shall approve conveyances of homeless persons to shelter locations outside of the city of Milwaukee if there are no reasonable safe alternatives for shelters within the city and the shelter pre-approves the acceptance of the person.

165.35 PERSONS REFUSING SHELTER SERVICES OR NO SHELTER AVAILABLE

A. Occasionally, individuals experiencing homelessness may refuse shelter services and choose to stay in a public area or there is no shelter space available. Members shall consider these alternatives for referrals:

1. Outreach Community Health Centers (Formerly Healthcare for the Homeless) Street Outreach and PATH Programs
   711 W Capitol Drive, Milwaukee, WI 53206
   414-374-2400 or 800-952-1086
   PATH and Outreach referral forms are available on the H.O.T. SharePoint page. Members shall fax the referral forms to [redacted]

2. Milwaukee County Housing Division Programs (including Safehaven, Permanent Supportive Housing, Housing First)
   600 W Walnut, Suite 100, Milwaukee, WI 53212
   414-278-4902 or 414-278-2894
   http://housingfirstmilwaukee.com/

3. Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC)
   1818 North Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive
   414-263-7673

4. VA Homeless Programs
   877-4AID-VET
   http://va.gov/homeless

B. Members shall refer to the H.O.T. SharePoint page for additional outreach and support services.

C. Members may also make referrals for technical assistance regarding homeless issues by emailing the homeless outreach team at [redacted]

165.40 HOMELESS JUVENILES

Members shall contact the Milwaukee Division of Child Protective Services at 414-220-7233 for juveniles experiencing homelessness who are unable to be placed in a shelter or a safe and appropriate environment.

165.45 ELDERLY HOMELESS

Members shall contact the Milwaukee Department of Aging at 414-289-6874 for resources for elderly persons experiencing homelessness who are unable to be placed in a shelter or a safe and appropriate environment.

JEFFREY B. NORMAN
CHIEF OF POLICE

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