

Ride-Alongs

405.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for a ride-along with members of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office. This policy provides the requirements, approval process, and member responsibilities for a ride-along.

405.2 POLICY

Ride-along opportunities will be provided to the members of the public, County employees and members of this office to observe and experience first-hand various functions of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office. The term "ride-along" includes riding as a passenger with a deputy on patrol.

405.3 ELIGIBILITY

A ride-along is available to people 16 years of age or older or 15 years of age and a member of a recognized Criminal Justice Program. Citizens are limited to two (2) ride-alongs per calendar year; exceptions to this limit can be approved by the Sheriff or designee. However, any applicant may be disqualified without cause from participating.

Factors that may be considered in disqualifying an applicant include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Being under 15 years of age
- Prior criminal history
- Pending criminal action
- Pending lawsuit against this office or the County
- Extensive negative driving history
- Mental health issues
- Negative involvements with law enforcement
- Denial by any supervisor

The Sheriff or designee may authorize participation by any individual who does not fall within the eligibility requirements; if it is determined that participation in the ride-along would benefit both the individual and the agency.

405.4 REQUESTS TO PARTICIPATE

Generally, ride-along requests will be maintained and scheduled by the Shift Supervisor. The applicant will complete and sign a ride-along waiver form, Citizen Release and Covenant Not to Sue (SMCSO Form #129). If the applicant is under 18 years of age, a parent or guardian must

St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office

LE Policy Manual

Ride-Alongs

be present to complete the waiver form. Information requested will include a valid state-issued identification card or driver's license number, birthdate, address and telephone number.

After the records check and warrant check is completed, members holding the rank of Sergeant or above will review ride-along request forms and approve or deny each request.

The Shift Supervisor will schedule a date, based on availability, generally one week after the date of application. If approved, a copy of the waiver form will be forwarded to the appropriate division as soon as possible for scheduling considerations.

If the request is denied, a representative of this office will advise the applicant of the denial.

Upon completion of the ride, all forms will be forwarded to the Office of Professional Responsibilities which has the responsibility of maintaining records regarding the ride-along program.

405.5 PROCEDURES

Once approved, ride-along applicants will be allowed to participate no more than once every six months. An exception may apply to the following law enforcement-involved participants:

- Explorers
- Volunteers
- Chaplains
- St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office applicants
- Any others with approval of the Shift Supervisor
- Students enrolled in any office-approved dispatcher training course

An effort will be made to ensure that no more than one member of the public will participate in a ride-along during any given time period. Normally, no more than one ride-along participant will be allowed in office vehicles at a given time, unless otherwise approved by the Sheriff or designee.

Ride-along requirements for office Explorers are covered in the Explorers Policy.

405.5.1 OFF-DUTY PARTICIPATION

Off-duty members of this office and employees of the County will not be permitted to participate in a ride-along with on-duty members of this office without the express consent of the Shift Supervisor.

In the event that such participation is permitted, the off-duty office member or County employee shall not:

- (a) Be considered on-duty.
- (b) Represent him/herself as a member of this office.
- (c) Participate in any law enforcement activity except as emergency circumstances may require.

Ride-Alongs

405.5.2 CERTIFIED ACTIVE OR RETIRED

Certified active or retired law enforcement officers may participate in a ride-along with permission of the Shift Supervisor. The visiting officer must have his/her law enforcement identification and may possess a weapon while on patrol with a deputy sheriff. Retired officers must have retired law enforcement credentials and a MD L.E.O.S.A. or HR-218 certification card in possession if carrying a weapon.

405.5.3 MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES

Representatives of the Media with appropriate press credentials. Media representatives are limited to five (5) ride-alongs per calendar year; exceptions to this limit can be approved by the Sheriff or designee.

405.5.4 CRIMINAL HISTORY CHECK

All ride-along applicants are subject to a criminal history check. The criminal history check shall include a local records check, Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) check, Maryland Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) check and/or Maryland Telecommunications Enforcement Resource System (METERS)/National Crime Information Center (NCIC) check prior to approval of the ride-along.

405.5.5 SUITABLE ATTIRE

Any person approved to participate in a ride-along is required to be suitably dressed in a collared shirt, blouse or jacket, slacks and closed toe shoes. Open toe shoes, t-shirts, tank tops, shorts and ripped or torn pants are not permitted. Hats and ball caps will not be worn without the express consent of the Shift Supervisor. The Shift Supervisor or a supervisor may refuse a ride-along to anyone who is not dressed appropriately.

405.6 MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

The assigned office member shall always consider the safety of the ride-along participant. The member shall maintain control over the participant and shall instruct the individual about the conditions that necessarily limit his/her participation. Instructions should include:

- (a) The participant will follow the directions of the office member.
- (b) The use of safety belts and any other safety device in the agency vehicle is mandatory.
- (c) The participant will not become involved or interfere in any investigation, handling of evidence, discussions with victims or suspects, reading an individual's criminal history or other protected information, or handling any sheriff's office equipment.
- (d) A safety equipment orientation (e.g., fire extinguishers, flares, blanket, etc.).
- (e) Participation may be terminated at any time by the office member if the participant interferes with the performance of the member's duties. If the participant is on a ride-along, the member may return the participant to the point the ride originated.
- (f) Participants may be allowed to continue a ride-along during the transportation and booking process, provided it does not jeopardize their safety.

St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office

LE Policy Manual

Ride-Alongs

- (g) Members will not allow participants to be present in any location or situation that would jeopardize the participant's safety or cause undue stress or embarrassment to a victim or any other member of the public.
- (h) Participants who are not law enforcement officers shall not be permitted to accompany the office member into a private residence without the express consent of the resident or other authorized person.
- (i) Participants will not be permitted to use cameras or recording devices during the ride-along. Exceptions may be made for members of the media with consent of the Sheriff or designee.
- (j) Participants are prohibited from being on scene or perimeter of critical incidents or other incidents with the potential of violence (i.e., barricades, robberies in progress, etc.). If the office member finds themselves assigned to or on a scene with a participant which escalates to a potential for violence or requires the forming of a perimeter, the office member will ensure the participant is removed to a safe location and will advise the dispatcher to arrange for pick up.
- (k) Participants are prohibited from entering a premise on a law enforcement raid (search and seizure warrant service), secured crime scene, or ride with plain clothes members without specific coordination and approval of the Division Commander.
- (l) When engaged in emergency driving, responding to a crime-in-progress reportedly involving violence, or performing a felony vehicle stop, the host deputy sheriff will use caution and due regard for the safety of their participant.

The member assigned to provide a ride-along shall advise the dispatcher that a ride-along participant is present in the vehicle before going into service. A deputy with a ride-along participant should use sound discretion when encountering a potentially dangerous situation, such as a high-speed pursuit, and if feasible, let the participant out of the vehicle in a well-lit public place. The dispatcher will be advised of the situation and as soon as practicable have another office member respond to pick up the participant at that location. The ride-along may be continued or terminated at this time.

Conduct by a person participating in a ride-along which results in termination of the ride, or is otherwise inappropriate, shall be immediately reported to the Shift Supervisor. The member should enter comments regarding the reasons for terminating the ride-along on the waiver form.