



CITY OF TAUNTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

CHIEF
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We have had many residents reached out with various questions concerning the policies of the Taunton Police Department. Many of these requests mirror items from the 8cantwait.org movement. Massachusetts, to include the Taunton Police Department, have been at the forefront of these issues and generally they have all been addressed in Massachusetts. Rather than trying to respond to every request, I have decided to put this out publicly.

1. What, if any training, does the Taunton Police Department receive for de-escalation of situations?

A: Officers from the department have extensive training relative to de-escalation. De-Escalation is taught as part of our annual use of force curriculum and included in Applied Patrol Procedures. Specific training the department has received, and in some cases provided to other departments, include Mental Health First Aid and Crisis Intervention Training. The department serves as the regional training hub for the Department of Mental Health on these subjects and has presented nationally. The Taunton Police Department was one of the first departments in the United States to commit to the One Mind Campaign.

2. Are police officers forbidden from using vascular restraints and hog-tying methods. Are they prohibited from transporting prisoners in uncomfortable positions?

A: Vascular restraints and choke holds have never been authorized in my 30-year career. The department does not provide training on these techniques No officer from this department should be using a vascular restraint for any reason.

Our use of Force Policy states:

The use of neck restraints, commonly known as choke-holds, have a potential for serious injury, and therefore, are not authorized unless the circumstance(s) warrant the use of deadly force.

The Taunton Police Department generally does not hog-tie people. In the rare occasion that it has occurred, it is because it is the only way to ensure the safety of the individual and officers because of the assaultive or self-destructive behavior of the person involved. I have only seen this done once, and that involved an assaultive suicidal individual for which there was no other way to contain until they could be brought to the hospital and placed in four-point restraints. If an individual is hog-tied, it requires a report explaining why it was done and why no other less restrictive alternative was available.

As a rule, we handcuff prisoners behind their back. This on its own is uncomfortable. Prisoners are generally transported in a sitting position. If they are able, officers should seatbelt the prisoner during transport. Some prisoners are combative or actively resistant. Some will try kicking out the cruiser windows, which has forced us to put bars on the inside of the rear doors. Most people we

transport are transported without issue. Sometimes it is a battle getting a prisoner in a cruiser and they may end up on their side, back or face. We will try to reposition them, but if they are actively combative it can be difficult.

3. Are officers required to intervene if they witness another officer using excessive force? Will they be reprimanded if they fail to intervene?

A: All officers have a legal and moral obligation to intervene if they observe another officer engaged in illegal or other unauthorized behavior. As with all issues of discipline, each case will be evaluated on its merits.

4. Are policed officers in Taunton prohibited from shooting at moving vehicles?

A: The verbatim policy of the Taunton Police Department is as follows:

MOVING VEHICLES

a. Officers shall not discharge a firearm from inside any moving vehicle.

b. Officers shall not discharge a firearm at a moving vehicle, except if all of the following conditions are met:

- i. It is necessary for the officer to defend himself/herself or others;
- ii. The occupants of the vehicle are employing deadly force, which the officer reasonably perceives as an immediate threat of death or serious physical injury to themselves or another;
- iii. There is no substantial risk to the safety of other persons, including risks associated with motor vehicle accidents;
- iv. Officers have not positioned themselves in such a way as to create a likelihood of being struck by an occupied vehicle (e.g., surrounding a vehicle at close proximity while dismounted);
- v. The officer is not firing strictly to disable the vehicle; and
- vi. The circumstances provide a high probability of stopping or striking the intended target.

5. Is there a clear and enforced use of force continuum that details what weapons and force are acceptable?

A: Yes. The Taunton Police Department has a written Use of Force policy that is quite extensive. Our policy is basically the model policy promulgated by the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association and represents the most current policy reflective of police accreditation standards.

6. Are police officers required to exhaust every other option before using deadly force?

A: Yes. Deadly force may only be used in the following circumstances:

A member of this Department is authorized to use lethal force only when it is reasonable to:

a. Defend himself/herself or another from unlawful attack which he/she reasonably perceives as an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury;

OR

b. Effect an arrest, only when:

- i. The arrest is for a felony; and
- ii. The officer reasonably believes that:
 - a) The force employed creates no substantial risk of injury to innocent persons; and
 - b) The crime for which the arrest is made involved the use or attempted use, or threatened use of lethal force; and
 - c) There is substantial risk that the person to be arrested will cause death or serious physical injury if his/her apprehension is delayed.

7. Are officers required to give a verbal warning before drawing their weapon or using deadly force?

There is no simple yes or no answer to this question. The dynamics of all encounters are unique to each situation. The following is our policy:

DRAWING & POINTING OF FIREARMS: An officer shall not draw a firearm except when there is justification for its use to accomplish a proper police purpose. However, in responding to any potentially dangerous situation (e.g., searching a building pursuant to a burglar alarm or approaching a business establishment on a report of a robbery in progress etc.) the officer should carry their firearm in a position that will facilitate its speedy, effective, and safe use. Officers shall not point firearms at persons in circumstances which are clearly unjustifiable. In the event it is necessary to point a firearm at a subject, officers shall note justification for the use of force within a Use of Force report.

So in a situation as outlined above, an officer is authorized to draw their firearm maintaining it at what is called a low ready position. Basically, pointed downward and not towards a person.

As far as verbal warnings before using deadly force, the policy states:

Where practical, and if time and circumstances permit, officers shall verbally identify themselves as police officers and give some warning before using deadly force.

8. Are officers required to report the use of force?

A: Yes.

9. Are officers vetted to ensure that they do not have a history with abuse, racism, xenophobia/transphobia or discrimination?

A: This is a complex question. We have to begin by describing our hiring process. We are a civil service police department. There are only two ways to be employed by us. First is by taking the civil service examination. The second way is to be on a Massachusetts Civil Service department and transferring in. That is it. So for example, if an officer worked in Ohio or some other state or even Massachusetts town, they cannot simply leave there and apply for a job here. As a general rule, the people we hire through Civil Service are local people.

Our hiring process is rigorous. We do multiple interviews. We talk to neighbors, employers, and former teachers. We scour the applicant's background to include school discipline, employment issues

and social media. The department interview consists of five members that will grill an applicant about any issues in their past. We will also ask them questions to elicit responses that gauge their intellectual flexibility and ability to adapt to changing situations. If they make it through this and are given a condition offer of employment, they receive a psychological evaluation. There have been several people that we did not hire because of past issues and because we did not believe they possessed the right temperament for the job.

Our department is reflective of society. We have openly gay officers. We have officers of color. We have officers that were immigrants. We are an inclusive department. The last thing we want is someone who is going to bring hate or bigotry into the department. All we can do is our due diligence and hope that we do not miss anything on a candidate. I am not sure if this answers the question.

10. Are officers trained to perform and seek necessary medical action after using force?

A: Yes. Officers are first responders and are specifically trained to provide initial medical treatment to any injury that a person might receive as a result of the use of force. Officer also have a legal and moral obligation to treat anyone that is injured.

11. Is there an early intervention system enforced to correct officers who use excessive force? How many complaints does an officer have to receive before they are reprimanded? Terminated?

A: Actually, it is very rare that we get a complaint about excessive force. Our usual complaints are that an officer gave them a ticket, or someone did not like an officer's accident investigation or was rude. We have a complaint process. Each complaint is assigned to an internal affairs officer for review and investigation. Each complaint is viewed on its own. Depending on the nature of the complaint and what is determined by the investigating officer, actions could range from no action, to training, to counseling and all the way to termination. So, in answer to the question of how many complaints an officer has to receive before action, it is going to be determined by the nature of the incident, previous discipline, and likelihood of remediation. One incident could cause an officer to lose their job. It depends on the facts.

If we see a pattern of complaints about an officer, the staff will meet and evaluate the situation and try to determine the best way to handle it. As I stated, most complaints are for minor issues. However, if there is a pattern of minor issues, we want to correct it before it becomes a major issue.

An early intervention system is a formal system that evaluates many warning signs that may be predictive of future behavior. Sick leave use, tardiness, etc., may be indicators of other issues, which if left unchecked, may result in greater issues. The Taunton Police Department utilizes a computer program as part of its early intervention system. The department also has a nationally recognized and certified employee assistance program which is available to address the emotional health of officers.