PISCATAQUIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Policy 2 – VEHICULAR PURSUIT Effective Date: 6/1/2020

Reviewed & Revised: 7/1/2026

DIVISION: Law Enforcement

I. Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines for the initiation and continuation of vehicular pursuits.

II. Policy

Vehicular pursuit of fleeing suspects can present a danger to the lives of the public, deputies, officers, and suspects involved in the pursuit. Tactics used to stop a fleeing vehicle may be considered a use of force. It is the policy of the Piscataquis County Sheriff's Office [PCSO] to regulate the manner in which vehicular pursuits are undertaken and performed.

III. Definitions

Vehicular Pursuit - A deliberate attempt by an officer in an authorized emergency vehicle to apprehend a fleeing suspect who is actively attempting to elude apprehension in a reckless manner.

Authorized Emergency Vehicle - A Sheriff's Office vehicle equipped with operable emergency equipment, including blue lights and siren, as designated by state law.

Pursuit-Rated Vehicle - An authorized emergency vehicle that is specially designed and equipped for use during high-speed pursuits.

Primary Unit - The police unit immediately following the suspect vehicle at a reasonable distance and that assumes primary control of the pursuit.

Secondary Unit - Any police unit that becomes involved as a backup to the primary unit and follows the primary unit at a safe distance.

Trail or Trailing - The unauthorized following of a pursuit at any distance, to include paralleling, intercepting, or tracking.

Caravanning - Direct participation in or following of, a pursuit by emergency vehicles other than the primary and authorized secondary units.

Terminate - To abandon or abort the pursuit.

Termination Point - The location where the pursuit comes to a conclusion.

IV. Procedures

Only deputies who have completed the Maine Criminal Justice Academy Emergency Vehicle Operations Course or have received a waiver for equivalent training may become actively involved in a pursuit.

Deputies are responsible for being familiar with the applicable statutes in 15 M.R.S., 17-A M.R.S., 29-A M.R.S. and 30-A M.R.S., including the permissible use of deadly force, as outlined in 17-A M.R.S. §107, and pertinent chapters of the Maine Law Enforcement Officer's Manual.

A. Initiation of Pursuit

1. Pursuit is authorized only if the officer has a reasonable belief that the suspect, if allowed to flee, would present a danger to human life or cause serious injury, or the suspect is believed to have committed Murder or a Class A, B, or C crime and immediate apprehension is advisable for public or officer safety. In general, pursuits for minor violations are discouraged.

2. The decision to initiate a pursuit must be based on the pursuing officer's conclusion that the immediate danger to the officer and the public created by the pursuit is less than the immediate or potential danger to the public should the suspect remain at large.

3. Unless a greater hazard would result, a pursuit should not be undertaken if the subject(s) can be identified with enough certainty that they can be apprehended at a later time.

4. In deciding whether to initiate or continue a pursuit, the officer shall take the following into consideration:

a. The seriousness of the offense;

b. Known information on the suspect;

c. Road configuration (e.g. interstate, divided highway, work zone);

d. Physical location and population density (e.g. residential area, school zone, business district);

e. Existence of vehicular and pedestrian traffic;

f. Lighting and visibility;

g. Weather and environmental conditions;

h. The relative performance capabilities of the pursuit vehicle and the vehicle being pursued;

i. Officer training and experience;

j. Available equipment;

k. Speed and evasive tactics employed by the suspect;

l. The presence of other persons in the police and suspect vehicle;

m. Any other condition or situation that would create an unreasonable risk.

5. A pursuit should not be initiated or engaged in while providing transportation for any person, other than law enforcement officers.

B. Pursuit Operations

1. Upon undertaking a pursuit, the pursuing vehicle shall activate emergency lights, sirens, and camera systems, and they shall remain activated for the duration of the pursuit.

2. Upon initiating a pursuit, the officer shall notify the communications center of:

a. The offense for which the pursuit was begun, the location, direction of travel, description of the vehicle, and number of occupants if known.

b. Officers operating "unmarked" authorized emergency vehicles may initiate a pursuit. Whenever a marked vehicle becomes available to take over as the primary pursuer, the unmarked vehicle will yield and serve in a back-up role.

c. Communications personnel shall notify an available supervisor of the pursuit, clear the radio channel of non-emergency traffic, and relay necessary information to other officers and jurisdictions. Communications will immediately check the registration information in an attempt to identify the owner of the fleeing vehicle.

d. The supervisor assigned will have control over the pursuit.

e. The backup to the primary pursuit officer shall be assigned by a supervisor or Communications. The secondary unit shall:

1. activate emergency lights, sirens, and camera systems, and they shall remain activated for the duration of the pursuit,

2. follow the primary pursuit vehicle at a safe distance,

3. assume the responsibility of updating Communications with the location and direction of travel of the pursuit,

4. become the primary pursuit vehicle if the primary unit becomes disabled.

5. No pursuit shall be conducted in a direction against the lawful flow of traffic on a one-way street or lane of a divided highway.

6. Unless circumstances dictate otherwise, a pursuit shall consist of no more than two police vehicles: a primary and a secondary unit.

7. All other personnel shall stay clear of the pursuit unless instructed to participate by a supervisor.

8. Caravanning and trailing is prohibited unless directed by a supervisor. However, deputies should monitor the progress of the pursuit and be prepared to assist if directed by a supervisor.

9. The number of vehicles engaged in a pursuit may be adjusted to fit the situation with supervisory approval.

10. A supervisor who has joined in the pursuit and supervises the units shall be considered an additional unit.

11. The supervisor shall consider units from other jurisdictions in determining the number of vehicles participating.

12. Whenever possible, pursuit-rated vehicles should be utilized.

C. Supervisory Responsibilities

1. Supervisors are responsible for managing all vehicular pursuits to include determining whether the pursuit should continue or be terminated.

2. When made aware of a vehicular pursuit, the appropriate supervisor shall notify communications that he or she is monitoring the pursuit and accepting supervisory responsibility.

3. The supervisor is responsible for monitoring incoming information; coordinating and directing activities as needed to ensure that proper procedures are used, to include ensuring that no more than the necessary number of units are involved, the appropriate radio channel is being utilized, and surrounding jurisdictions have been notified; and discontinuing the pursuit when necessary.

4. A supervisor shall respond to the termination point following a pursuit.

D. Pursuit Tactics

1. All deputies involved in a vehicular pursuit shall wear a seat belt.

2. Non-involved deputies shall not follow the pursuit on parallel streets unless authorized by a supervisor or when it is possible to conduct such an operation without unreasonable hazard to other vehicular or pedestrian traffic.

3. Motorcycles should not be used for pursuits except in extremely exigent circumstances and when weather and related conditions allow. Motorcycle units shall disengage when support from marked patrol units becomes available.

E. Pursuit Intervention Tactics

All intervention tactics short of deadly force such as tire deflation devices and Precision Immobilization technique (PIT) maneuver should be used when it is possible to do so safely and when the officer utilizing such tactics has received appropriate training. The decision to use intervention tactics shall be based on careful consideration of all facts

known to the officer and should be initiated when conditions permit. A supervisor's permission should be obtained prior to the use of intervention tactics.

1. Tire Deflation Devices

   Tire Deflation Devices are designed to be used against vehicles having at least four tires. Use of tire deflation devices against motorcycles and three-wheeled vehicles substantially increases the risk of bodily injury or death to the vehicle's operator and passengers. Under no circumstances will tire deflation devices be used against a motorcycle or three-wheeled vehicle unless the use of deadly force on all vehicle occupants is legally justified. Tire deflation devices shall not be used against tractor trailer units loaded with dangerous chemicals or passenger buses carrying innocent passengers.

2. Precision Immobilization Technique (PIT)

   The Pursuit Immobilization Technique (PIT) may be utilized as a means of stopping a fleeing vehicle by officers trained in its use by the Maine Criminal Justice Academy. If feasible, supervisory approval should be gained prior to employing the technique. The following criteria should be used when making the decision to utilize PIT:

   a. When it is believed the continued movement of the pursued vehicle would place others in danger of serious bodily injury or death.

   b. When the apparent risk of harm to citizens is so great as to outweigh the risk of harm to the occupants of the pursued vehicle and the officer in utilizing the PIT.

   c. When all other reasonable means of apprehension have been considered and rejected as impractical.

The PIT shall be considered the use of non-deadly force if conducted at 45 MPH or below in the manner prescribed by an officer's training, education, and experience. The use of PIT as trained by the Maine Criminal Justice Academy is not likely to result in serious bodily injury or death.

A PIT conducted at over 45 MPH should only be used when the use of deadly force is justified, AND, barring extraordinary or life-threatening circumstances, may only be employed with the prior approval of a supervisor.

3. Roadblocks

   Only in the case of suspected violent fleeing felons whose escape poses a danger to life or serious bodily injury, may officers set up a roadblock. The roadblock should have an "avenue of escape", unless deadly force is justified. Such a roadblock should afford the operator of a pursued vehicle an opportunity to in fact stop unless deadly force is justified under the circumstances. To the extent that a decision to establish a roadblock may be a decision to employ deadly force, the provisions of the agency's Use of Deadly Force Policy apply.

F. Termination of Pursuits

1. If, in the opinion of the pursuing officer, supervisor or Sheriff, the potential danger to the violator, uninvolved persons or police personnel outweighs the necessity of apprehension, the pursuit will be terminated.

2. If an outside agency assumes control of a pursuit initiated by PCSO, the supervisor overseeing the pursuit will decide PCSO's continued involvement.

3. If an outside agency requests that we terminate a pursuit in their jurisdiction, the pursuing officer and/or supervisor will attempt to comply.

4. If a pursuing officer loses communication with both the Communications Center and the supervisor, he shall terminate the pursuit.

5. No officer can be disciplined for discontinuing a pursuit.

G. Fresh Pursuit Across State Boundaries: An officer may pursue a vehicle across state lines only as permitted by law. (See 15 MRSA c. 7; 276 MA Gen LA § 10A; NHRSA § 614:1)

1. A pursuit may continue into New Hampshire or Massachusetts if the operator or an occupant of the vehicle is suspected of having committed murder, or a Class A, B, or C crime.

2. A pursuit may continue into New Hampshire if the operator is reasonably suspected of operating under the influence (O.U.I.).

3. A pursuit must cease at the New Hampshire state line unless the operator or an occupant of the vehicle is suspected of having committed a Class D crime other than O.U.I., a Class E crime, a traffic infraction, or other civil violation.

4. An officer may not pursue a vehicle into Canada under any circumstances.

Sheriff Robert Young