

464 HOMELESS PERSONS**464.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that personnel understand the needs and rights of the homeless and to establish procedures to guide officers during all contacts with the homeless, whether consensual or for enforcement purposes. The Columbia Police Department recognizes that members of the homeless community are often in need of special protection and services. The Columbia Police Department will address these needs in balance with the overall mission of this department. Therefore, officers will consider the following policy when serving the homeless community.

464.1.1 POLICY

It is the policy of the Columbia Police Department to provide law enforcement services to all members of the community while protecting the rights, dignity and private property of the homeless. Homelessness is not a crime and members of this department will not use homelessness solely as a basis for detention or law enforcement action.

464.2 HOMELESS COMMUNITY LIAISON

The Chief of Police will designate a member of this department to act as the homeless liaison officer. The responsibilities of the homeless liaison officer include:

1. Maintaining and making available to all employees a list of assistance programs and other resources that are available to the homeless.
2. Meeting with social services and representatives of other organizations that render assistance to the homeless.
3. Maintaining a list of the areas within and near this jurisdiction that are used as frequent homeless encampments.
4. Remaining abreast of laws dealing with the removal and/or destruction of the personal property of the homeless. This will include:
 - a. Proper posting of notices of trespass and cleanup operations.
 - b. Proper retention of property after cleanup, to include procedures for owners to reclaim their property in accordance with the Property and Evidence Policy and other established procedures.
5. Be present during any cleanup operation conducted by this department involving the removal of personal property of the homeless to ensure the rights of the homeless are not violated.
6. Develop training to assist officers in understanding current legal and social issues relating to the homeless.

464.3 FIELD CONTACTS

Officers are encouraged to contact the homeless for purposes of rendering aid, support and for community-oriented policing purposes. Nothing in this policy is meant to dissuade an officer from taking reasonable enforcement action when facts support a reasonable suspicion of criminal activity. However, when encountering a

homeless person who has committed a nonviolent misdemeanor and continued freedom is not likely to result in a continuation of the offense or a breach of the peace, officers are encouraged to consider long-term solutions to problems that may relate to the homeless, such as shelter referrals, counseling and summons and release in lieu of physical arrest.

Officers should provide homeless persons with resource and assistance information whenever it is reasonably apparent such services may be appropriate.

464.3.1 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Homeless members of the community will receive the same level and quality of service provided to other members of our community. The fact that a victim or witness is homeless may require special consideration for a successful investigation and prosecution. Officers should consider the following when handling investigations involving homeless victims, witnesses or suspects:

1. Document alternate contact information. This may include obtaining addresses and telephone numbers of relatives and friends.
2. Document places the homeless person may frequent.
3. Provide homeless victims with victim/witness resources when appropriate.
4. Obtain statements from all available witnesses in the event a homeless victim is unavailable for a court appearance.
5. Consider whether the person may be a dependent adult or elder and if so, proceed in accordance with the Elder Abuse Policy.
6. Arrange for transportation for investigation-related matters, such as medical exams and court appearances.
7. Consider whether a crime should be reported and submitted for prosecution even when a homeless victim indicates he/she does not desire prosecution.

464.4 PERSONAL PROPERTY

The personal property of homeless persons must not be treated differently than the property of other members of the public. Officers should use reasonable care when handling, collecting and retaining the personal property of homeless persons and should not destroy or discard their personal property.

When a homeless person is arrested or otherwise removed from a public place, officers should make reasonable accommodations to permit the person to lawfully secure his/her personal property. Otherwise, the arrestee's personal property should be collected for safekeeping. If the arrestee has more personal property than can reasonably be collected and transported by the officer, a supervisor should be consulted. The property should be photographed and measures should be taken to remove or secure the property. It will be the supervisor's responsibility to coordinate the removal and safekeeping of the property.

Officers should not conduct or assist in cleanup operations of belongings that reasonably appear to be the property of homeless persons without the prior authorization of a supervisor or the homeless liaison officer. When practicable, requests by the public for cleanup operations of a homeless encampment should be referred to the homeless liaison officer.

Officers who encounter unattended encampments, bedding or other personal property in public areas that reasonably appear to belong to a homeless person should not remove or destroy such property and should inform the homeless liaison officer. If such property appears to involve a trespass, is blight to the community or is the subject of a complaint. It will be the responsibility of the homeless liaison officer to address the matter in a timely fashion.

464.5 MENTAL ILLNESSES AND MENTAL IMPAIRMENTS

Some homeless persons may suffer from a mental illness or a mental impairment. Officers shall not detain a homeless person for an emergency admission to a mental health facility unless facts and circumstances warrant such a detention.

When a mental illness hold is not warranted, the contacting officer should provide the homeless person with contact information for mental health assistance, as appropriate. In these circumstances, officers may provide transportation to a mental health specialist if requested by the person and approved by a supervisor.

464.6 ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

Sometimes homeless encampments can affect the ecology and natural resources of the community and may involve criminal offenses beyond mere littering. Officers are encouraged to notify other appropriate agencies or departments when a significant impact to the environment has or is likely to occur. Significant impacts to the environment may warrant a crime report, investigation, supporting photographs and supervisor notification.