



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Police expand voluntary “flagging” program for calls to 911

Howard County police are expanding a program in which residents can voluntarily “flag” their address in the 911 system to make police aware of a family member with a disability. The program began through a partnership with autism advocates in 2012, but has expanded to include other information residents believe would be relevant to a police response, if 911 is ever called.

For example, if someone living with autism has sensory sensitivity, an officer could be mindful of the possible effect of police lights or sirens when approaching that household. If a person with dementia has a history of wandering to a particular place, responding officers would know to quickly check that location. Or if responding officers are aware in advance that a person inside a residence is deaf, they can be prepared if they do not get a response to verbal directions.

“Whenever possible, we want to make accommodations to best-serve the needs of all our residents,” said Police Chief Gary Gardner. “Having this valuable information in advance can reduce confusion in what may already be a stressful or chaotic situation. Our goal is always to create the safest possible environment for everyone.”

The flagging program can be used for various relevant mental or physical health concerns, to include:

- Autism
- Alzheimer’s
- Intellectual, developmental or degenerative disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- Mental health diagnoses
- Other behavior that may affect police response

A request form is available on the Howard County Police Department’s website under “Programs and Services.” Residents with questions about the program should contact the Community Outreach Division at 410-313-2207 or HCPDoutreach@howardcountymd.gov.

All information submitted as part of the 911 flagging program remains confidential and will only be used by emergency dispatchers and responders.

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