

CALVIN BALL
County Executive



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HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE
3410 Court House Drive, Ellicott City, Maryland 21043

Stopping for a Marked Police Car

For many people, your most likely interaction with a police officer will be through a traffic stop. Getting pulled over by an officer can be a stressful experience. Understanding what is expected reduces anxiety and fear, and improves communication.

Red and blue lights and/or siren mean pull over safely out of the flow of traffic. Use your turn signal so your movements are predictable.

Roll down your window and turn off your radio. This will enable you to effectively communicate with the officer.

If you are stopped at night, assist the officer by turning on the vehicle's interior light. Traffic stops can be dangerous encounters for police, the officer may use a bright spotlight or a flashlight to illuminate the interior of the car to look for any hidden threat.

Don't be surprised if a second officer arrives. This is a common practice for officer safety.

Wait until the officer asks before displaying your driver's license and vehicle registration. Keep your seat belt buckled and avoid sudden movement. Maryland law requires drivers to display their license and vehicle registration for a uniformed officer. The officer may also request identification from your passengers. Remain calm and comply with the officer's instructions. The officer WILL tell you why you were stopped, however this may not be immediate.

Remain in your vehicle, and keep your hands on the wheel so they are visible to the officer. Follow the officer's instructions. It is reasonable and legal for an officer to require that you and your passengers get out of the vehicle, for everyone's safety. If asked to do so, you must exit the vehicle. Do not get out until he or she asks.

You may ask questions and provide an explanation for your actions, but it is often best to avoid arguing with the officer. You may feel frustrated, but remember that the officer did not write the laws, establish the speed limit or set the fine. The appropriate time to present your argument is at traffic court.

If you are issued a citation, you may be asked to sign it. Signing is not an admission of guilt but an acknowledgment that you received the citation. For your safety, do not read the citation on the side of the road. After the traffic stop has concluded, safely move back into the travel portion of the road to reduce the risk of a collision.

Howard County police are dedicated to safeguarding our roadways and reducing conditions that endanger citizens. Remember that obeying the speed limit and always wearing your seatbelt reduces the risk of a collision, personal injury or being stopped for a violation. Be safe!

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Stopping for an Unmarked Police Car

Unmarked police cars are commonly used for conducting traffic stops. They remind drivers that any car—not just those with obvious lights and sirens—may be driven by a police officer. Some citizens feel unsure about what to do if approached by an unmarked police car.

Howard County police offer the following tips to ensure your safety:

- Activate your hazard lights to notify the officer you are complying with the request to pull over.
- Pull over in a safe location and follow advice from the “Stopping for a Marked Police Car” document.
- If you are concerned, drive to a nearby public area that is well-lit with your hazard lights activated.
- If you are unsure that the person stopping you is law enforcement, you can call 911 and ask the dispatcher to verify that it is an officer attempting to pull you over. Stop immediately once it is verified through dispatch that the person stopping you is law enforcement. If it cannot be verified, an officer will be dispatched to you to assist, but you should continue driving normally with your hazards on. Remember that Howard County is serviced by different agencies, and has officers from other agencies that travel through it.
- If the unmarked car is being operated by a plainclothes officer, you may request that a uniformed officer respond to the scene.

The Howard County Police Department is dedicated to safeguarding our roadways and reducing conditions that endanger motorists. Following these tips may reduce anxieties related to being stopped by less conventional police efforts in pursuit of this goal.

Police remind citizens that obeying the speed limit and always wearing your seatbelt reduces the risk of a collision, personal injury or being stopped for a violation.

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