



HILLSBOROUGH POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Chief of Police Duane Hampton



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Letter to the Hillsborough Community from Police Chief Duane Hampton

The following is a letter to the community from Hillsborough Police Chief Duane Hampton in response to issues surrounding the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25.

In the wake of the tragic death of George Floyd and the subsequent violence and unrest we have seen across our country, we have been contacted by many citizens expressing their concern and asking questions about our policies and practices.

I would like to be able to have an open and public forum to discuss those concerns, but with our country still struggling with COVID-19 and our state under restrictions, we cannot do that now. We are exploring other options. In the meantime I wanted to write this letter to provide as much information as I can to answer the questions our community may have and to provide reassurance that the Hillsborough Police Department will not engage in or tolerate the kind of tragedy that has happened in Minneapolis. First and foremost, I want to be clear that I, as the chief of police, am appalled and outraged at any senseless loss of life at the hand of police officers. As law enforcement officers, we have a responsibility to protect life and should hold it sacred, using deadly force only as a last resort. We have a responsibility to be careful and correct in our application of any force option. We have a responsibility to care for those in our custody and to monitor their well-being. We have a responsibility to speak up when we see other officers engaging in conduct that is wrong. We have a responsibility to treat all people with respect and the dignity that all human beings are due.

Hillsborough is a unique and wonderful town, and our police force is a reflection of that. Being a small town gives us some significant advantages over the large municipalities — we have been able to do things our larger peers cannot, we have been able to do some things sooner than our larger peers, and we have been able to build a strong community-focused culture for our officers.

Hiring and Selection

One of the first things that makes Hillsborough unique is the focus we put into our hiring and selection process. Our success is critically linked to our finding the right people to serve, and we are very selective. We scrutinize the backgrounds of people we are considering hiring, we have multiple interviews, and the candidates undergo a psychological evaluation to ensure they are the right fit for us and our community. Several years ago, we started a diversity hiring opportunity that allows us to identify diverse candidates and hire them to attend a basic law enforcement academy. Being able to pay people to go through the training academy removes what can be a significant barrier to diverse candidates pursuing a law enforcement career. Prior to this, we have only been able to hire people after they complete the academy — many of them doing this on their own without any pay. This new program also allows us to identify good candidates early and then get to know them much better as they progress through the 12 to 14 weeks of academy training. As a result, we have been able to identify some candidates who have not been compatible with the “Hillsborough way.” In spite of the positive success of this program, our diversity as an agency is still not where we want it to be and continues to be a focus for us.

Use of Force

Another area that we put a lot of focus on is our Use of Force Policy, which is available on the town website, www.hillsboroughnc.gov. In 2016, we made significant revisions and changes to our policy. We moved to a model that was in use in Canada, which helped officers to see use of force as a more fluid wheel of options as opposed to a strict step-based continuum. This model provides clearer emphasis on the need to continually assess the situation and to escalate and de-escalate force based on the situation as well as the resistance that the officer is encountering. This model also emphasizes the importance of communication throughout all interactions.

Another major change in our Use of Force Policy was to implement reviews of situations where officers display some level of force even if the force is not used. For example, drawing their Taser in response to a combative suspect who then complies and the Taser is not used. In the past these displays of force were not always reviewed if no actual force was applied. This change has resulted in an increase of reviews of officer actions and has put more emphasis on the responsibility that is attached the minute an officer even thinks about using force. Reviews involve looking at all the information available, including the statements of involved officers, any body-worn or in-car video, statements and information from others involved, and any other information that may be available.

Our policy also emphasizes a number of other very important points. These include exhausting all reasonable options to achieve voluntary compliance before resorting to any use of force, to only use the amount of force that is reasonable and necessary to achieve the officer's lawful goals, and to de-escalate the level of force being used as soon as reasonably possible. The force option that an officer chooses has to be reasonable and proportionate to the resistance the officer is facing. The policy specifically points out that the amount of force which can be used to protect property is less than what might be reasonable in response to a dangerous threat. Choke holds or any technique that restricts a person's ability to breathe are forbidden unless in a deadly force situation. Once a use of force situation has stabilized, an officer's first and foremost duty is to assess those involved for injuries and to seek any medical intervention needed. As a final highlight, our policy starts with the fundamental statement that all members of our department must recognize the importance of human life, show respect for basic human rights, and have an intolerant attitude toward abusive treatment of all persons.

Body-Worn Cameras

Hillsborough has had body-worn cameras since 2014 and was ahead of the curve compared to many of our peers. We conducted testing and purchased cameras prior to their becoming a national discussion as a result of the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on Aug. 9, 2014.

All of our officers have a camera assigned to them. Our patrol personnel are expected to wear their cameras at all times while on duty and to activate them before responding to any call for service or as soon as they decide to take a self-initiated activity, such as a traffic stop. Non-patrol personnel who are covering patrol functions or who reasonably anticipate taking an enforcement action are expected to be wearing and to activate a body-worn camera. We do regular random auditing of the cameras at several levels to assess officer performance. We use footage in our internal reviews in response to complaints and actions, such as use of force and pursuits. We also do audits of camera activations to ensure compliance with the policy.

We have been posting policies on the town website based on our receiving questions about them. We had not posted any in a while, and I realized that our body-worn cameras policy was not there. This is an oversight that has been corrected.

Internal Accountability and Complaint Process

Hillsborough has developed a very robust process that we call "internal accountability" for reviewing issues like complaints, use of force, pursuits, accidents, and internally identified performance problems.

We also take a very broad view of what we will review. In terms of complaints, we don't wait for someone to contact us about a problem. Many of our complaints — in many cases, simply expressions of dissatisfaction with our services — come from things we find out thirdhand or even from things as simple as a negative Facebook post that we encounter. In 2019, we reviewed 72 incidents, including 30 use of force reviews, 24 complaints or expressions of dissatisfaction, and 12 reviews of performance problems that were identified internally. Each of these incident reviews are checked at multiple levels; and, ultimately, I sign off on each them. Each review also takes a very broad look at everything the officer did during the incident. As a result, we may find issues unrelated to the specific incident in question that need to be addressed — such as seeing a problem with how an officer drives to a call when reviewing an incident that involved use of force. This total review process helps find opportunities to improve how our officers perform in many areas.

Training

During the past week I have received a lot of questions about the kinds of training that our officers get, especially in areas of de-escalation and use of force. We provide a significant amount of training to our officers in these areas and in many others that are critically linked. Training on anti-bias, fair and impartial policing, use of force and de-escalation are part of our annual in-service training and covered every year. These topics are also woven into much of the other training that we do, and we have introduced concepts from the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing into various trainings. On top of this, the state creates mandated annual training that touches on these topics as well. One example is an annual class called Juvenile Minority Sensitivity Training. Its exact focus changes from year to year, and this year the focus was on the long-term effects of childhood adversity.

We also actively pursue getting our officers certified in Crisis Intervention Training — a weeklong course that focuses on dealing with people in crisis and that places heavy emphasis on communication and de-escalation. This training is only offered a few times each year and seats are limited, but we have been able to get half our officers through this training.

We also seek out other opportunities for training that will help strengthen our officers in these areas. COVID-19 has severely limited our ability to send officers to training and has canceled much of what we had scheduled this spring and summer so we used this time to have our officers complete some online training offered by the North Carolina League of Municipalities, including a two-part anti-bias training and a training on effective communication. We have sent a number of officers and supervisors to one- and two-day courses offered by the League of Municipalities on use of force and issues surrounding the first and fourth amendments. Members of our command staff and I attended a Racial Equity Groundwater training offered here in town last October. We have been sending our supervisors to a weeklong Supervisor Leadership Institute and had them go through a multi-week online supervisor liability course offered through the FBI-Law Enforcement Executive Development Association (FBI-LEEDA). In 2016, we purchased a training series called Path of the Guardian. This series consisted of short training segments that were offered weekly over a 28-week period which included focus on 21st century policing, procedural justice, use of force, and issues of bias.

Community-Focused and Positive Culture

A final point I would like to discuss here and that I feel makes Hillsborough unique is the effort we have made to build a community-focused positive culture. In keeping with our core values of community, positivity and service, our officers actively look for ways to engage with our community that don't involve "being the police." They attend and participate community meetings and events such as "Coffee with a Cop," where they can sit down with citizens and discuss concerns and issues over a cup of java; "Crafts with a Cop," an officer-generated idea to host a craft making session with seniors at our local senior center; and workdays at various community gardens to work side by side with our citizens. We have helped organize large community events, such as Fairview Live, an annual Easter egg hunt for dogs,

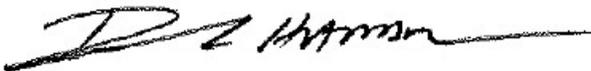
and an annual “Trunk or Treat”; and we have hosted camps for kids, such as our Junior Police Academy and our basketball camp.

We also track and recognize our officers for engaging in things we call “Positive Policing.” Examples of this have included officers buying gas for stranded motorists, providing food for people in need, fixing a mailbox that was damaged in an accident, shoveling an elderly person’s driveway, or simply going out of their way to find someone an answer after others have given them the run-around. Positive policing is also reflected in activities our agency does, such as helping deliver Meals on Wheels and a “Straw for Dogs” program created to provide bales of straw to help keep outdoor dogs warm over the cold months.

I realize that these few pages cannot possibly answer all the questions people may have during this time, but it is my sincere hope that this information has at least answered some of your questions and helped to show the efforts your police department — Hillsborough Police — make to be a different kind of police agency. Our country continues to be plagued by the legacy of racial discrimination — and discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation and identity, national origin and the many other ways people choose to try to divide us. We cannot allow this to continue. We all have to work together to put an end to this, and I believe police departments should be partners in making our world a better place. Our vision is to be “Policing at its Best.” We will continue to work every day to live up to that ideal.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Hampton", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chief Duane Hampton
Hillsborough Police Department