



Charleston County Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual

Sheriff Carl Ritchie

2-03 Chain of Command

- NEW
- REVISED
- REVIEWED

ACA Standards Reference: 5-ALDF-7B-01, 02; 5-ALDF-7D-06, 07
CALEA Standards Reference: 11.3.3, 12.1.1, 12.1.2, 12.1.3, 12.1.4
NCCHC Standards Reference:
SCLEA Standards Reference:
SC Minimum Standards:
PREA: 115.13a, 115.42b

This policy dated 1/28/2025 replaces prior policies cited above and supersedes all previously issued directives.

I. Purpose:

To recognize the authority of the Sheriff as Chief Executive Officer of the agency and designate the chain of command during the absence of the Sheriff.

To establish clear guidelines for the chain of command for all employees to the Sheriff and the norms for following direction and information flow both up and down the chain of command.

To define guidelines and procedures for lawful orders, unlawful orders, and conflicting orders.

To establish procedures for command staff meetings and general attendance group meetings.

II. Policy:

The commensurate authority to command is herewith delegated to members of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office with command responsibility. There are inherently two different types of command; tactical and operational. Although they can both be applied by the same individual or from two different individuals at the same event/incident, there must be balance to ensure orders and actions of the subordinate are guided for their safety and the safety of others.

Tactical authority is determined by the event or incident and is usually determined prior to execution. Tactical authority, although not absolute, lends that authority generally to a subject matter expert or a specific individual based on a specific set of skills or certifications.

Operational authority is determined and usually commensurate with the rank of the individual and is what is most frequently associated with for chain of command. Operational authority can be superseded by tactical authority if the event/incident requires such separation of authority. However, overall authority will always fall on the Operational Commander on scene. For example, the Patrol Lieutenant requires SWAT assistance resolving a situation. The SWAT Commander, a Sergeant in this instance, arrives on scene and takes over tactical authority for all SWAT decisions and actions. The Patrol Lieutenant remains on scene as the operational authority and works congruently with the SWAT Commander to assist in the best possible outcome. The Lieutenant remains in control of the deployment of SWAT but not necessarily the decision of how SWAT deploys.

III. Definitions:

- A. For purposes of this procedure, the word “deputy” applies to all agency employees with a certification classification of Class I, Class II, Class III, or Reserve Deputy, as defined by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy.

The following terms are used interchangeably; however, they carry guidance to specific employees based on usage of the term:

1. Deputy, deputy sheriff, detention deputy, sworn employee, uniformed sworn employee, sworn administrative employee, etc., and
 2. civilian, non-sworn employee.
- B. *Employee*: When used without further clarification, the term employee is inclusive of all agency members (sworn and non-sworn).

IV. Procedure:

A. Authority and Responsibility of the Charleston County Sheriff:

1. The Sheriff is an elected official who answers directly to the people. This is an executive role. As chief administrator of the Sheriff's Office, the Sheriff performs as a policy maker, who also ensures that all such policies are properly executed with this office.
2. Pursuant to Article V, Section 24 of the South Carolina Constitution, the Sheriff is defined as the Chief Law Enforcement Officer of the County. As such, the Sheriff is responsible for law enforcement services as well as service of civil process and other orders emanating from the courts. The Sheriff must also attend upon and preserve order in all circuit courts of the county. (Ref: CALEA 12.1.1)
3. Pursuant to §24-5-10 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended (hereafter the S.C. Code), the Sheriff shall have custody of the detention center in their county and shall receive and safely keep any person delivered or committed to the detention center, according to law. The Detention Director is appointed by the Sheriff and charged with the responsibility and authority of operating the detention facility. The Detention Director is responsible for all aspects of the management of the Sheriff Al Cannon Detention Center (SACDC) to include, at minimum, the safekeeping and accountability of SACDC inmates.

(5-ALDF-7B-01, 02, 7D-07, PREA 115.13a, PREA 115.42b)

B. Command Protocol:

1. Whenever the Sheriff is absent from the State or otherwise unavailable to perform the duties of Sheriff, the Undersheriff, or designee, will act in the Sheriff's stead and will be empowered with all the authority of the Sheriff while serving in that capacity. (Ref: CALEA 12.1.2 item a)
2. In the event the Undersheriff is unavailable or vacant, the next in succession to command would be the next senior chief deputy, followed by the next senior major, and so on, unless otherwise indicated through written communication by the Sheriff. For this system of succession, seniority shall be determined based on time in grade in a sworn supervisory position or for unranked positions, on the length of service with the agency as a sworn member.
3. In the event of an emergency, the first arriving deputy will designate themselves as the Incident Commander (IC) and begin organizing the incident unless another senior official who has responsibility for controlling the operations of the site is on-scene. If the Sheriff's Office is not the primary response agency with overall responsibility for the incident, the deputy sheriff will support the on-scene primary responders as necessary. A deputy sheriff, acting as Incident Commander, will do so until relieved by a higher-ranking authority or until another senior official who has responsibility for controlling the operations is on-scene, at which time there will be an orderly transfer of command. (Ref: CALEA 12.1.2 item b)
4. The Sheriff will appoint a Detention Director as the administrator to keep the SACDC facility. The Detention Director will ensure the nature of the physical plant, staffing, and operational procedures for the SACDC are consistent with the security and program needs of inmates contained therein. The Detention Director will be vested with authority to oversee the daily affairs of the Detention Center.
5. Next in succession to command in the Detention Center will be a major assigned to the SACDC, followed by the next senior detention captain, and so on. In the absence of the Detention Director, the designee will be appointed through written communication by the Sheriff or Administrator. For this system of succession, seniority shall be determined based on time in grade in a sworn or detention supervisory position or for unranked positions, on the length of service with the agency as a sworn member and/or detention deputy.

6. Whenever all the SACDC majors are absent from the State or otherwise unavailable to perform the duties of the major, the captain acting as the Command Duty Officer (CDO) will act in the majors' stead and will be empowered with all the authority of a major while serving in that capacity. (5-ALDF-7D-06)

C. Normal Field Operations:

1. Unless specific written directives or higher-ranking authority dictates otherwise, the Uniform Patrol Division Shift Commander has operational command responsibility for all field operations that take place during their shift. When the command staff is off duty or otherwise unavailable, the Shift Commander or designee has command responsibility for both operations and support.

(Ref: CALEA 12.1.2 item d)

- a. In the absence of a Shift Commander, the highest-ranking supervisor present at the scene of an incident will assume command until relieved.
- b. In situations involving personnel of different functions engaged in a single operation, the Uniform Patrol Division Shift Commander or designee has operational command responsibility. If an operation is in a specialty area, such as a major criminal investigation, potentially fatal or serious traffic accident, narcotics, or vice special operation, etc., the Shift Commander may voluntarily relinquish control of resources to a deputy sheriff charged with that particular function, tactical authority. That deputy sheriff may then assume tactical command of personnel assigned specifically to that operation. Any dispute in command for a particular function or situation shall be resolved in favor of the Shift Commander and can be reviewed later by the Sheriff. Unless specifically designated otherwise, whenever Shift Commanders of the same rank from different components are involved together in a situation, the senior Shift Commander with more time in grade in that sworn supervisory position will be in charge and remain in Operational Command. (Ref: CALEA 12.1.2 item c)
- c. All other commanders will notify the Shift Commander of operations or details scheduled to take place during their shift.

D. Normal SACDC Operations:

1. The SACDC chain of command originates with a sergeant, lieutenant, captain, major, Detention Director and Sheriff. All employees of the SACDC must follow their chain of command to report any pertinent information concerning the facility or information of a personal matter that may affect their performance. The employee must follow the chain of command in order unless their immediate supervisor is unavailable, and the issue must be handled without delay. The supervisor receiving the information will forward the information, if deemed necessary, through the employee's chain of command.
2. Employees having any questions about policy, procedure, promotions, transfers, or other areas of concern are directed to address their issues to their immediate supervisor under all circumstances, and then questions may be directed to the next level of supervision if the question cannot be answered at that level.
3. Unless specific written directives or higher-ranking authority dictates otherwise, the Housing Lieutenant has command responsibility for all housing operations that take place during their shift.
4. Unless specific written directives or higher-ranking authority dictates otherwise, the Processing Lieutenant has command responsibility for all processing operations that take place during their shift.
5. In the absence of a Housing or Processing Lieutenant, the highest-ranking supervisor present at the scene of an incident will assume command until relieved.
6. In situations involving personnel of different functions engaged in a single operation, the Housing Lieutenant or designee has command responsibility. If an operation is in a specialty area, such as a juvenile incident, riot, escape, etc., the Housing Lieutenant may voluntarily relinquish control of resources to a supervisor charged with that particular function. That supervisor may then assume command of personnel assigned specifically to that operation. Any dispute in command for a particular function or situation will be resolved in favor of the Housing Lieutenant and can be reviewed later by the Detention Director. Unless specifically designated otherwise, whenever Housing lieutenants of the same rank from different teams are involved together in a situation, the Housing lieutenant who is senior by time in grade with the Sheriff's Office will be in charge.

7. All other captains will notify the Housing Lieutenant of operations or details scheduled to take place during their shift.

E. Lawful Orders:

1. Employees will obey all lawful orders from superiors, including any order relayed from a superior by a member of the same or lesser rank.

Employees, regardless of rank or position, will promptly obey lawful orders.

- a. The term "lawful order" will be construed as an order in keeping with the performance of any duty prescribed by law or rule of the Sheriff's Office, or for the preservation of order, efficiency, and proper discipline.
- b. The willful neglect or deliberate refusal of an employee to obey any lawful order given by a superior will be considered insubordination. Flouting the authority of any superior by manifest disrespect or by disputing orders will be considered insubordination and subjects the subordinate to disciplinary action.

F. Unlawful Orders:

1. No commander or other supervisory personnel will knowingly and willfully issue any order which is in violation of any law, statute, ordinance, or agency directive.

- a. No employee is required to obey any order which is contrary to law, statute, ordinance, or agency directive.
- b. Any employee who is given an unlawful or improper order will respectfully bring the matter to the attention of the superior issuing the order. They will accomplish this by asking for clarity of the order and then stating the nature of the conflict. If clarification is not provided by the supervisor or the order stands, the subordinate must then determine whether the order is unsafe, unlawful, and/or immoral. If either of the three conditions are still present, then the subordinate must ask for the order to be restated. If restated and it is still (according to the subordinate) unsafe, unlawful, or immoral, then the subordinate must state that they are refusing to obey the order and why.

- c. Refusal to obey an order is the employee's responsibility and that employee will be required to justify their action(s).
- d. Obedience to an unlawful order is never a defense for an unlawful or improper action.
- e. Any employee who is given an unlawful order will, at the first opportunity, report in writing the full facts of the incident, including their action(s), to the Sheriff via chain of command. The supervisor, at the initial and any subsequent stage of review, will make every effort to resolve the matter sending a written response to the employee with a copy forwarded to the Office of Professional Standards.

G. Conflicting Orders:

- 1. Employees given an otherwise lawful and proper order that is in conflict with a previous order will respectfully inform the supervisor issuing the order of the conflict. If the supervisor does not alter or retract the conflicting order, it will stand. Under these circumstances, the responsibility for the conflict will be upon the supervisor, and the subordinate employee will not be responsible for neglecting to obey the previous order.
 - a. When any such conflicting order is received by radio communication, the subordinate employee will attempt to bring notice of the conflict to the issuing supervisor by telephone or personal contact.
 - b. If circumstances do not allow telephone or personal contact, the receiving employee will explain the nature of the conflict as discreetly and succinctly as possible. Under no circumstances will any personnel engage in an argument in public or over the radio. (Ref: CALEA 12.1.3)

H. Agency Staff Meetings/Agency Communication:

- 1. The Sheriff and/or the command staff will conduct meetings with their staffs as deemed necessary. Staff members will be responsible for disseminating information conveyed during such meetings as necessary.
- 2. Other means by which the Sheriff, command staff, and other members of the Sheriff's Office may communicate information is via

memoranda to be posted on agency bulletin boards, read at roll call, via briefings provided at agency-wide training sessions, email, PowerDMS, the Charleston County Sheriff's Office Intranet and voice mail. Memoranda will only be posted on SACDC bulletin boards with a supervisor's approval. (Ref: CALEA 12.1.4)

3. There shall be a weekly meeting for the on-shift SACDC lieutenants on Thursday at 9:00 am. The meeting shall be headed by the Detention Director or designee. This meeting is an "open-forum" meeting aiming to highlight areas of needed improvement throughout the facility, offer solutions to those identified issues, and highlight the performance of staff.
4. The Detention Director will report in writing to the Sheriff all activities, major developments, major incidents, population data, assessment of staff and inmate morale and major problems and plans for solving them.
5. Copies of any memoranda issued by SACDC personnel, which affect policy and procedure, will be sent to the Accreditation Coordinator through the Housing/Security Major. The Accreditation Coordinator will update the affected policy and procedure for approval by the Detention Director.
6. The SACDC Shift Assignment Roster is maintained and updated monthly by the Command Administrative Assistant. (5-ALDF-7D-06)
7. The Sheriff or designee will be notified in a timely manner of all incidents where there may be a question as to the agency's liability or those incidents in which may result in heightened community interest. Incidents wherein an employee has allegedly performed in a manner that created a likeliness of death or serious injury to persons or significant loss of property will be reported to the Sheriff or designee as soon as practical. (Ref: CALEA 11.3.3)
8. In the event of a field operations critical incident where heightened community interests, where an employee has allegedly performed in a manner that created a likeliness of death or serious injury to persons or significant loss of property, or a critical incident has occurred; the on-scene supervisor will contact the Patrol Division Captain and notify them of the situation. The Patrol Division Captain will then relay the information through the chain of command, up to the Sheriff or their designee. The most practical form of communication to the sheriff or their designee will be with the use of cellular phones (call or

text messages), however the use of email will suffice, depending on the incident that has occurred. (Ref: CALEA 11.3.3)

9. The Sheriff or designee will be notified as soon as practical of any serious injury or death of an employee. (Ref: CALEA 11.3.3)
10. The Sheriff has established an "open door" approach to communication between employees and persons of higher rank or position. Any employee may contact any supervisor or manager for any reason. The supervisor or manager will encourage such communication, except in those instances where such communication is prohibited, such as a discussion concerning an internal affairs investigation or a grievance.