

COLUMBIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Policy and Procedure Manual

RIDE-ALONG OBSERVER PROGRAM

Approved By: Geoffrey Jones Chief of Police

CALEA 6th Edition Standard: 41.3.3; 44.2.5; 45.1.2.b. and e.

410 RIDE-ALONG OBSERVER PROGRAM

410.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines and procedures for the Columbia Police Department Ride-Along Observer Program to include the following:

- Eligibility requirements to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program.
- Application, approval, and scheduling process for the Ride-Along Observer Program.
- Expectations/requirements of the observer prior to the ride-along.
- Responsibilities of the host officer conducting the ride-along.
- Media ride-along expectations and guidelines.

410.2 POLICY

It is a goal of the Columbia Police Department to constantly improve the relationship and communications between our agency and the community we serve. In pursuit of this goal, the CPD offers a Ride-Along Observer Program to provide opportunities for citizens of our community and visitors to observe policing firsthand and, through personal interaction, become better acquainted with the duties and responsibilities of our agency and personnel.

410.3 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND AVAILABILITY

The Ride-Along Observer Program is designed to allow interested civilians, visiting law enforcement officers, and potential police officer applicants an opportunity to OBSERVE the daily operations, activities and functions of a Columbia Police Officer. The job of a police officer requires constant attention to their surroundings, activities of other officers, and their equipment to include the Mobile Computer Terminal and police radio. A primary concern of any police officer is the safety of community members, his/her own safety and the safety of any passengers in his/her vehicle. Although there may be times during the ride-along for conversation and explanations of the activities at hand, for the safety of all involved, the program is not intended for lengthy conversation, explanations or interview opportunities.

The program is generally available every day of the week. Ride-along times are generally from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m. Exceptions to this schedule may be made as approved by the Chief of Police, Bureau Commander or Watch Commander reviewing the Ride-Along Application.

410.4 ELIGIBILITY

The Columbia Police Department Ride-Along Observer Program is offered to most interested persons with a few limitations. All applicants must complete a ride along application and receive approval prior to participating in a ride-along. Any applicant may be denied without cause from participating in the program.

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The following are minimum factors that will be considered during the approval/denial process:

- No one under sixteen (16) years of age will be allowed to participate unless they are a member of the CPD Explorer Program in which the minimum age for participation will be fourteen (14) years of age.
- Applicants under sixteen (16) years of age who are not in the explorer program must receive an exception granted from the Chief of police or designee to participate.
- Observers under Eighteen (18) must have signed permission of a parent or legal guardian.
- Prior criminal history.
- Pending criminal action.
- Pending lawsuit against the Department.
- Current subject of a criminal investigation.
- Denial by any supervisor.

410.5 PROCEDURE TO REQUEST A RIDE-ALONG (LOCAL APPLICANTS)

The approval process is not immediate and may take up to two (2) weeks to complete. Please plan accordingly as last minute requests will not be granted. The following procedure will be followed for those wishing to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program:

1. Complete a Ride-Along Application which can be obtained online at **www.como.gov/police/ride-along-observer-program/** or in person from the Columbia Police Department Information Center.
2. Submit completed application in-person to CPD Information Center personnel. The application must be completed in entirety and the associated waivers signed. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.
3. Produce a valid photo identification at the time the application is submitted. A photocopy of the identification will be made and attached to the application for the approval process.
4. Applicants under eighteen (18) years of age must have a parent or guardian present at the time application is submitted as they will be required to sign the permission waiver in front of the CPD employee accepting the application.
5. A criminal history check (CPD records, MULES, NCIC) will be ran on each applicant and attached to the application.
6. Applications with accompanying documents will be forwarded to a watch commander for review and approval/denial. Approved applications will be forwarded to the Information Center Supervisor for scheduling. Scheduling information is forwarded to the appropriate sergeant for assignment.
7. The Information Center Supervisor will notify the observer of the date and time of the ride-along and provide additional information as needed.
8. An applicant whose application was denied will be contacted by a representative of the department.

410.5.1 PROCEDURE TO REQUEST A RIDE-ALONG (OUT OF AREA/STATE APPLICANTS)

For pre-planning purposes and to allow persons from out of the area/state (18 years of age or older) an opportunity to participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program, the following procedure shall be followed:

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1. Complete a Ride-Along Application which can be obtained online at www.como.gov/police/ride-along-observer-program/ or in person from the Columbia Police Department Information Center.
2. Applicants may submit applications in-person, by mail or email to CPDInfocenter@CoMo.gov if in-person is not possible.
3. The application must be complete, include all signatures, and include a copy of photo identification.
4. If applicant is a sworn/certified law enforcement officer/deputy, a copy of your employee identification including a photograph should be provided as well.
5. When application is received by CPD Information Center personnel, a criminal history check (CPD records, MULES, NCIC) will be run on the applicant and attached to the application.
6. The Application with accompanying documents will be forwarded to a watch commander for review and approval/denial. Scheduling will follow procedure in 410.5.1.
7. The Information Center Supervisor will notify the observer of the date and time of the ride-along and provide additional information as needed.
8. An applicant whose application was denied will be contacted by a representative of the department.

410.6 PEACE OFFICER RIDE-ALONGS

Off-duty police officers, Police Officers in Training, or any other employee of this department will not be permitted to ride-along for observation purposes with on-duty officers without the express consent of a watch commander. In the event that such a ride-along is permitted, the off-duty employee shall not be considered on-duty and shall not represent him/herself as a peace officer or participate in any law enforcement activity except as emergency circumstances may require.

Law enforcement officers from other jurisdictions who are visiting or are potential applicants for the CPD may participate in the Ride-Along Observer Program and should use the following procedure to apply:

410.6.1 PROCEDURE TO REQUEST A RIDE-ALONG (VISITING LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER)

1. Visiting sworn/certified law enforcement officers should follow the procedures outlined in sections 410.5 or 410.5.1 depending on if they are local or if they are located out of the area or out of state.
2. Applicants should pay close attention to and make sure to check the appropriate box if they are requesting to carry a firearm concealed during the ride-along.
3. In addition to regularly accepted photo identification, visiting law enforcement officers wishing to carry a concealed firearm during the ride-along must provide identification from their employing agency that includes a photograph.
4. Applicants will be notified by a representative of this department regarding approval or denial of their application. Those approved will be provided the date and time of their scheduled ride-along.

410.7 RIDE-ALONG CRIMINAL HISTORY CHECK

Ride-along observers will be in close proximity and exposed to sensitive information including criminal history information and records. As such, all ride-along applicants (with the exception of Columbia Police Department employees) will undergo a criminal history check prior to approval as a ride-along participant.

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The application form contains a section that must be signed by the applicant which authorizes members of the Columbia Police Department to run a complete criminal history check. The criminal history check shall include a review of records from the Columbia Police Department records system, Department of Revenue (DOR), Missouri Uniform Law Enforcement System (MULES), and National Crime Information Center (NCIC). Applicants with criminal histories including felony convictions, extensive misdemeanor convictions, ongoing voluntary interactions with known criminals, active pending criminal cases, and active lawsuits against the City or Department, among others, may be denied.

410.8 SUITABLE ATTIRE

Any person approved to participate as a ride-along observer is required to be suitably dressed in a collared shirt, blouse or jacket, slacks and closed toe shoes. Sandals, T-shirts, tank tops, shorts and ripped or torn blue jeans are not permitted. Hats and ball caps will not be worn in the police vehicle. The Watch Commander or a shift supervisor may refuse a ride-along to anyone not properly dressed.

CPD employees or CPD Explorers participating in a ride-along will not wear any items of clothing that identifies them as a police department or City of Columbia employee or CPD Explorer.

410.9 FIREARMS AND WEAPONS

Ride-along observers (with the exception of pre-approved sworn/certified law enforcement officers or retirees who are current in their qualification status) are prohibited from possessing weapons of any kind during the ride-along. Qualifying officers/retired officers wishing to carry a firearm during the ride-along must obtain pre-approval to do so and indicate their intentions by checking the appropriate box on the application form. If approved, the firearm must be carried secured in a holster, concealed, and in compliance with any rules, regulation, or policies of their employing department. The patrol officer conducting the ride-along opportunity shall be notified that the observer is armed with a firearm.

410.10 RECORDING EQUIPMENT AND CELL PHONES

Recordings (audio or visual) and photographs of any kind are prohibited during the ride-along. No recording cameras or other equipment will be allowed inside any police vehicle unless previous arrangements are made through the Public Relations Unit and approved by a watch commander or higher.

Observers may have a cell phone with them, however, will be required to have the phone shut **OFF** and out of sight for the duration of the ride-along. Any cell phone use during the ride-along by the observer will be grounds for termination of the ride-along and the observer will be returned to the police department. Any emergency communications should be done using the police radio (discussed in section 410.11.2.b).

410.11 OFFICER'S RESPONSIBILITIES/CONTROL OF THE RIDE-ALONG

The host officer in charge of the ride-along has many responsibilities which includes but is not limited to the following:

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1. The officer shall advise the dispatcher that a ride-along participant is present in the vehicle before going into service. Officers shall consider the safety of the participant at all times.
2. Prior to the beginning of the ride-along, the host officer will conduct a brief orientation which should include the following:
 - a. Safety equipment orientation (fire extinguisher, flares, etc.);
 - b. Police radio use and operation should the observer need to use it to summons emergency help;
 - c. Observer safety rules:
 - i. The observer will remain in the police vehicle unless permission is granted for the observer to accompany the officer.
 - ii. The observer must wear a seat belt at all times while in the police vehicle and the vehicle is in operation.
 - iii. No tobacco use of any kind is permitted in the police vehicle or at any time during the ride-along (this includes electronic cigarettes).
 - iv. The observer will follow the directions of the officer.
 - v. The observer will not become involved in any investigation, handling of evidence, discussions with victims or suspects or handling of any police equipment unless an emergency situation exists. Observers should be informed that as an observer they may become a witness to situations and actions the officer is involved in and may be listed in police reports as such and may be required to testify in court.
 - vi. Code 3 responses, vehicle pursuits, and certain police calls are inherently dangerous. The officer should use sound judgment and may decide to drop the observer off at a place of safety, if practical, before continuing. A place of safety for example could be a gas station or any other open business that is well lit. If this occurs, the officer should advise Boone County Joint Communications that the observer was dropped off, the location, and request someone to pick up the observer and return them to the police department. The ride-along may be continued at a later time in the shift or terminated at this time.
 - vii. Officers will not allow any observer to be present in any residence or situation that would jeopardize his/her safety or cause undue stress or embarrassment to a victim or any other person.
 - viii. Under no circumstance shall an observer be permitted to enter a private residence with an officer without the express consent of the resident or other authorized person (does not apply to support personnel).
 - ix. Ride-along observers may be allowed to continue riding during the transportation and booking process, provided this does not jeopardize their safety.
 - x. Conduct by an observer that results in termination of the ride-along or is otherwise inappropriate should be immediately reported to the Watch Commander.
 - xi. The observer may terminate the ride at any time, as practical, and the officer will return the observer to the police department.

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3. At the conclusion of the ride-along, the host officer will notify the appropriate watch commander of any concerns regarding the ride-along or the observer for future reference.
4. The ride-along form will be stored and archived in the Information Center in compliance with records retention schedules.

410.12 MEDIA RIDE-ALONG EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES

The Ride-Along Observer Program is for observation opportunities only and not intended for interviews. Due to the nature of a ride-along, an observer is located inside the police vehicle with the host officer and in close proximity to the Mobile Computer Terminal which contains access to highly sensitive criminal justice system information. As such, recording equipment of any kind, including the use of cell phones is strictly prohibited during the ride-along.

Host officers providing a ride-along experience are doing so at the request of the department but are also doing so voluntarily. No officer of this department will be forced to host an observer from the media for a ride-along opportunity. Observers will witness that the job of a police officer is stressful and at times mandates the officer's attention to a variety of stimuli at the same time. For an officer to host a ride-along safely, for all involved, they must be confident that the media representative is there for observation purposes only. Any attempts to conduct an interview, or ask questions regarding any topic outside of the specific scope of the ride-along is an unwelcomed stressor and will result in an immediate termination of the ride-along and the media representative will be returned to the CPD.

Members of the media wishing to conduct interviews with an officer or conduct a special project involving recording of an officer and or the interior of police vehicles should make their request through the CPD Public Relations Unit (**PolicePIO@CoMo.gov**) only as these types of activities are not applicable to the Ride-Along Observer Program. Media partners conducting special projects requiring riding in a police vehicle will need to complete the Ride-Along Form for completion of the Criminal History Background check.