POLICY AND PROCEDURE NO. 570

Missing Children and Persons

Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards:
41.2.5 & 41.2.6

Date Issued: April 6, 1994
Date Effective: July 27, 2026
Review Date: July 27, 2027 19 Pages

1. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures for the Worcester Police Department's response to reports of missing persons; both children and adults. These procedures are designed to ensure a prompt, thorough, and coordinated response that prioritizes the safety of the missing individual while complying with Massachusetts General Laws and federal law (including Suzanne's Law). Procedures specific to missing children are set out in Part One (Sections 4 through 12); procedures specific to missing adults are set out in Part Two (Sections 13 through 19); and provisions applicable to all missing persons, including database entry, clearance, and documentation, are set out in Part Three (Sections 20 through 25).

2. POLICY:

It is the policy of the Worcester Police Department to accept all reports of missing persons without delay and regardless of the jurisdiction in which the person was last seen or is believed to reside. There shall be no waiting period before accepting a missing person report, initiating an investigation, or entering the missing person's information into appropriate databases. The Department recognizes that rapid response is critical to the successful resolution of missing persons cases and that each case must be evaluated on its own facts to determine the appropriate level of response.

The Department shall give special priority to cases involving children, elderly persons, individuals with cognitive or developmental disabilities, persons believed to be in danger of physical harm, and any case in which foul play is suspected. In such cases, the Department shall assemble all available resources to locate the missing individual as quickly as possible.

This policy applies equally to all persons reported missing, regardless of age, mental or physical condition, or circumstances of the disappearance.

3. DEFINITIONS:

A. Missing Person

Any individual whose whereabouts are unknown to the reporting party and whose absence is of concern due to the circumstances, including individuals who are absent without explanation, who may have disappeared involuntarily, or whose safety may be at risk.

B. At-Risk/Vulnerable Missing Person

A missing person whose circumstances indicate that the person's physical safety may be in danger, including but not limited to: (a) a child age 17 or younger; (b) an elderly person (age 60 or older); (c) a person suffering from Alzheimer's disease, dementia, autism spectrum disorder, or other cognitive or developmental disability; (d) a person who is dependent on medications or medical treatment and does not have access to such; (e) a person whose disappearance is believed to involve foul play, abduction, or criminal activity; (f) a person who has expressed suicidal ideation or has a history of self-harm; (g) a person whose disappearance is inconsistent with established patterns of behavior; (h) a person who may be unable to return to safety due to environmental conditions.

C. Child/Juvenile

Any person under the age of eighteen (18). For purposes of NCIC/LEAPS entry requirements under Suzanne's Law, any person under the age of twenty-one (21).

D. Voluntary Missing Person

A person who has chosen to leave their residence or usual location of their own free will and who is not believed to be in danger.

E. Involuntary Missing Person

A person whose disappearance may not be voluntary, including situations involving possible foul play, accident, or abduction.

F. Parental/Custodial Kidnapping

The taking, retention, or concealment of a child by a parent or other person in violation of the custodial rights of another parent or legal guardian.

G. Stranger Abduction

The taking or attempted taking of a child by a person who is not a family member or who is not known to the child or family.

H. Child Requiring Assistance (CRA)

As defined in MGL c. 119, §39E, a child between the ages of 6 and 18 who repeatedly runs away, fails to obey lawful commands of a parent/guardian, fails to obey school regulations, is habitually truant, or is a sexually exploited child.

I. AMBER Alert

The America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response alert system, a voluntary partnership among law enforcement agencies, broadcasters, and transportation agencies to activate an urgent bulletin in cases of child abduction. Activation criteria and procedures are set out in Section 9 and Policy 572 (AMBER Alert).

J. Silver Alert

An alert system available for any person over the age of 17 who is missing and believed to be endangered due to cognitive impairment or other factors. Activation criteria and procedures are set out in Section 17.

K. Suzanne's Law

A federal law (Public Law 108-21, Title II, §204) requiring the immediate entry of a missing person under the age of twenty-one (21) into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), with no waiting period.

L. BOLO

Be On the Lookout — a broadcast alert to all on-duty officers.

M. NCMEC

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (1-800-THE-LOST / 1-800-843-5678).

N. NamUs

National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, a national centralized repository and resource center for missing persons and unidentified decedent records.

O. Supervisor

Any sworn member of the Worcester Police Department of the rank of Sergeant or above on duty at the time of the incident. The on-duty Supervisor of a missing-person investigation may be a patrol Supervisor, the Officer-in-Charge (OIC), or other ranking officer designated to assume supervisory responsibility for the case.

PART ONE — MISSING CHILDREN (PERSONS UNDER 18)

4. MISSING CHILDREN: IMMEDIATE ACTIONS:

When a child is reported missing, the following actions shall be taken immediately and without any waiting period: MPAC 41.2.6 [d]

(a) dispatch an officer and broadcast a BOLO with available information to all units;

(b) notify the on-duty Supervisor; MPAC 41.2.6 [a]

(c) with the consent of a parent or guardian, immediately search the child's residence, including closets, attics, basements, appliances, vehicles, and other places a child could hide;

(d) initiate a neighborhood canvass;

(e) obtain a recent photograph and make it available for distribution and, when appropriate, public release through Department-approved channels;

(f) enter the child's information into NCIC, LEAPS, and CJIS without delay in accordance with Suzanne's Law and Section 20;

(g) contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children in cases involving an endangered or abducted child; and

(h) if the criteria are met, consider an AMBER Alert (see Section 9 and Policy 572). The full requirements for each of these steps are set out in the sections of this Part and in Part Three.

5. MISSING CHILDREN: INITIAL REPORT AND RESPONSE:

A. Report Acceptance and Initial Handling

The Department shall accept every report of a missing child without delay, regardless of jurisdiction or the duration of the child's absence. There shall be no waiting period before initiating a response. Upon receipt of a report:

1. An officer shall be dispatched to the reporting party's location to take a formal written report. MPAC 41.2.6 [d]

2. A BOLO with available information shall be broadcast to all on-duty units.41.2.6 [d]

3. The on-duty Supervisor shall be immediately notified of every report of a missing child. Supervisory notification is required in all missing child cases, without exception. MPAC 41.2.6 [a]

Department personnel who receive an initial report of a missing child, whether in person, by telephone, or by radio, shall record the available identifying information for the child along with the reporting party's contact information, ensure that an officer is dispatched and that the preliminary information is broadcast to units, and immediately alert the on-duty Supervisor. The responsibilities of responding officers, supervisors, and investigators are set out in Sections 5.B, 21, and 10, respectively. MPAC 41.2.6 [d]

B. Responding Officer Duties

The responding officer shall:

1. Respond promptly to the reporting party's location and complete an incident report documenting the missing child.

2. Obtain a comprehensive interview with the reporting party, including: (a) the child's identifying information (name, address, date of birth, age, sex, race, Social Security number and identification card number (if available), physical description, clothing at time last seen), the time/date/location last seen, any associated vehicle, and any circumstances suggesting risk or endangerment; (b) the child's state of mind, including any statements made prior to disappearance; (c) the child's physical and mental health condition, including any required medications, medical devices, or treatments; (d) any history of prior missing incidents and the circumstances of those incidents, including where the child was ultimately located; (e) destination plans, if any, including travel arrangements or stated intentions; (f) the name and address of the child's school and the identity of the person responsible for picking up or supervising the child, if applicable; (g) whether the absence is a significant deviation from the child's established patterns of behavior; (h) whether the child is believed to be with any adult, including parents or relatives, who may endanger the child's welfare; (i) whether any custody disputes or court orders (restraining orders, custody orders, CRA warrants) exist; (j) names and contact information for the child's friends, their parents, and common gathering locations; (k) the child's social media accounts and recent online activity, if known; (l) financial resources available to the child; and (m) whether the child took personal belongings, identification, phone, or a vehicle.

3. Obtain a recent photograph of the child. Photographs shall be made available for distribution to officers and, when appropriate, for public release through Department-approved channels.

4. Conduct an initial assessment of the circumstances and classify the case as described in Section 6.

5. Provide all pertinent information obtained to dispatch for BOLO updates and to the on-duty Supervisor. The Supervisor shall ensure that information is relayed to oncoming shifts through roll-call briefings.

6. Advise the reporting party of their obligation to notify the Worcester Police Department immediately upon the return or location of the child and document this advisement in the incident report.

7. If a report is made to the Worcester Police Department and the child was last seen in another jurisdiction, accept the report, immediately notify the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction where the child was last seen, and coordinate as appropriate. Before any database entry is made, the officer shall comply with the pre-entry query requirement of Section 20.A to prevent duplicate entries.

8. Remain responsible for the continued investigation until formally relieved by the on-duty Supervisor or by a detective/investigator assigned to the case.

C. Reports from Schools, Group Homes, and Residential Programs

Reports of children missing from schools, group homes, residential programs, and treatment facilities — including walkaways and elopements — shall be accepted and handled in accordance with this Part. The fact that the reporting entity maintains its own internal reporting requirements does not diminish the Department's response obligations once a report is received. The responding officer shall request that the reporting facility provide: a recent photograph; a physical and clothing description; a designated point of contact; information regarding the child's condition, medications, and likely destinations; and any history of prior elopements, including where the child was previously located. The facility shall be directed to notify the Department immediately if the child returns to or is located by the facility; while the child remains missing, the responding officer or assigned investigator shall periodically recontact the facility's point of contact to confirm that the child has not returned, and shall document each contact in the incident report. A missing child in DCF or DYS custody triggers the notification requirements of Section 7.

6. MISSING CHILDREN: CLASSIFICATION:

Upon completing the initial report and interview, the responding officer, in consultation with the on-duty Supervisor, shall classify the missing child case into one of the following categories. Classification shall be based on the known facts at the time and shall be updated as additional information becomes available. A child shall not be classified as a runaway until a thorough investigation rules out involuntary disappearance.

A. Endangered/Involuntary Missing Child

The child is believed to be in danger of physical harm or death, or the disappearance is believed to be involuntary. This classification includes any case involving: (a) evidence of foul play, abduction, or criminal activity; (b) a child age 13 or under whose disappearance is unexplained; (c) a child with autism spectrum disorder or other cognitive or developmental disability; (d) a child who is dependent on medication or medical treatment and does not have access to such; (e) a child who has expressed suicidal ideation or has a history of self-harm; (f) a disappearance involving environmental dangers (extreme weather, water hazards, etc.); (g) a disappearance that is a significant deviation from established behavioral patterns and cannot be explained.

Response: Immediate and intensive investigation. All available resources shall be utilized. The OIC or designee shall consider AMBER Alert activation as set out in Section 9. See Section 8 (Search and Enhanced Response).

B. Voluntary Missing Juvenile (Runaway)

A child who has voluntarily left home. The investigation should focus on the child's family, friends, school, and lifestyle. Officers shall consider whether the child took personal items and sentimental belongings. Officers should be mindful that missing children may be victims of exploitation or trafficking and should investigate accordingly.

Response: Full investigation. The officer should advise the parent(s)/guardian to obtain a Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) warrant from the Juvenile Court to aid in recovery (see Policy 710). Any indication of abuse or neglect shall be reported to DCF.

C. Parental/Custodial Kidnapping

A child has been taken, retained, or concealed by a parent or other person in violation of a custody order or the custodial rights of another parent or legal guardian.

Response: Full investigation. Officers shall verify custody orders, file appropriate criminal charges, obtain arrest warrants, and coordinate with the District Attorney's Office. The FBI shall be notified if interstate flight is suspected. The U.S. Attorney's Office may be contacted for a Federal Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution warrant in appropriate cases. The safety of the child is the primary concern. If custody has not been formally established by a court, the law enforcement responsibility is to ensure the child is safe.

D. Stranger Abduction

A child has been taken or is believed to have been taken by a person who is not a family member.

Response: Maximum emergency response. All available Department resources shall be mobilized. AMBER Alert activation shall be immediately considered as set out in Section 9. The FBI shall be notified for direct assistance, including the Child Abduction Rapid Deployment (CARD) Team. See Section 8 (Search and Enhanced Response).

E. Missing Child — Unknown Circumstances

The reason for the child's disappearance is unknown. The child shall be treated as endangered until facts emerge indicating otherwise. An immediate investigation shall be conducted.

7. MISSING CHILDREN: NOTIFICATIONS AND INTERAGENCY COORDINATION:

In addition to the database entries required by Section 20, the following notifications shall be made in missing child cases as appropriate to the circumstances. When making a notification, personnel shall provide the receiving agency with the identifying information, circumstances of the disappearance, and risk indicators necessary for an effective coordinated response. MPAC 41.2.6 [b]

1. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC): 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678). Shall be contacted in all cases involving missing endangered or abducted children.

2. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI): Shall be notified in cases of confirmed or suspected stranger abduction. The Detective Bureau may consult with the FBI when interstate flight is suspected. The FBI Child Abduction Rapid Deployment (CARD) Team may be requested through the FBI Worcester Field Office or Worcester Police FBI Task Force Officers.

3. Worcester County District Attorney's Office: Shall be notified and coordinated with in cases involving suspected criminal activity, abductions, and parental kidnapping.

4. Department of Children and Families (DCF): Shall be notified via the DCF Hotline when a missing child is in DCF custody, when abuse or neglect is suspected, or when a recovered child cannot be released to a parent or guardian.

5. Department of Youth Services (DYS): Shall be notified when a missing child is in DYS custody or placement.

6. School Notification: In accordance with MGL c. 22A, §9, the last known elementary or secondary school in which the missing child was enrolled shall be notified.

7. Massachusetts Missing Persons Clearinghouse (Commonwealth Fusion Center): Voice: (978) 451-3700; FAX: (978) 451-3707. May be notified in cases involving children, at-risk persons, or cases in which extended investigation is anticipated.

8. NamUs (National Missing and Unidentified Persons System): Cases involving missing children who have not been located within a reasonable amount of time should be entered into NamUs.

8. MISSING CHILDREN: SEARCH AND ENHANCED RESPONSE:

Every report of a missing child shall receive an enhanced response in addition to all standard procedures. The scope and intensity of the response shall be commensurate with the assessed level of risk.

A. Immediate Search Actions

1. The on-duty Supervisor shall be immediately notified and shall assume supervisory responsibility for the case.

2. A BOLO with all available information shall be broadcast to all on-duty units and to surrounding jurisdictions via LEAPS.

3. NCIC, LEAPS, and CJIS entries shall be made immediately in accordance with Section 20, regardless of whether a written report has been completed.

4. Parental consent to search the child's residence shall be obtained and such a search shall be conducted immediately, including closets, attics, basements, storage areas, appliances, vehicles, and other spaces where a child might hide or become trapped.

5. An immediate check shall be made of the last place the child was reportedly seen, as well as friends' homes, playgrounds, parks, schools, shopping areas, transportation hubs, and other places frequented by the child.

6. A neighborhood canvass shall be initiated using available officers.

7. Officers shall identify and attempt to preserve any potential crime scenes, evidence, or video surveillance in the area of the last-seen location.

B. Preliminary Investigative Steps

The following investigative steps shall be taken in all missing child cases: (1) interview the reporting party in depth to verify all information and obtain any additional facts; (2) obtain a recent photograph and ensure it is made available for distribution to officers, with an accompanying description; (3) issue a BOLO to all on-duty officers and ensure that information is relayed to oncoming shifts at roll call; (4) interview individuals who were present at the actual scene of disappearance or last-seen location; (5) conduct an initial search of the area where the child was last seen; (6) contact friends, relatives, the child's school, and other associates; (7) check local hospitals, shelters, detention facilities, behavioral health centers, and the Medical Examiner's Office; (8) review and collect available video surveillance from the last-seen area; (9) assess the child's phone, social media, and financial activity, if accessible; (10) identify and preserve any potential evidence or crime scene indicators; and (11) document all investigative steps in the incident report and CAD system. If the child is not located through these preliminary efforts, the on-duty Supervisor shall notify the Detective Bureau in accordance with Section 10.

C. Command Post and Resource Mobilization

1. If the child is not located promptly, the OIC or designee shall consider establishing a Command Post at or near the last-seen location (see Policy 800 — All Hazard Plan). The Command Post shall serve as the coordination point for all search and investigative activities.

2. The OIC or designee shall assess the need for additional resources, which may include: (a) recall of off-duty personnel; (b) K-9 units (tracking and/or cadaver); (c) air support (MSP Airwing Unit, drone); (d) Worcester Fire or MSP Dive Units if water hazards are present; (e) mutual aid from surrounding agencies; (f) Massachusetts State Police resources, including specialized units; (g) volunteer search organizations (with appropriate coordination and oversight); (h) Department of Public Works, Fire Department, or other municipal resources.

9. MISSING CHILDREN: AMBER ALERT:

The Massachusetts AMBER Alert Plan is a voluntary, cooperative effort among law enforcement agencies, broadcasters, and transportation agencies, administered by the Massachusetts State Police, to notify the public when a child has been abducted and is believed to be in serious danger. The Worcester Police Department does not itself broadcast an AMBER Alert; activation is requested through the Massachusetts State Police, which verifies the information provided and makes the final activation decision. Because time is critical in abduction cases, all officers shall be familiar with the activation criteria set out below.

ALL of the following criteria must be met before the Massachusetts State Police will activate an AMBER Alert: (a) a child, 17 years of age or younger, has been abducted; (b) the child is believed to be in danger of serious bodily harm or death; and (c) there is enough descriptive information for law enforcement to believe that an AMBER Alert will help locate the child. MPAC 41.2.6 [c]

An AMBER Alert shall not be requested for runaways or for incidents involving child custody disputes, except in cases of abduction in which a threat of serious bodily harm or death to the child exists. Each case shall be evaluated on its own facts.

When the criteria are met, the OIC or a command officer shall initiate an activation request through the Massachusetts State Police in accordance with Policy 572 (AMBER Alert), which sets out the activation request procedure, supplemental information requirements, cancellation, and documentation. A denied activation request does not limit or delay the continued investigation, the enhanced response required by Section 8, or other lawful means of public notification.

10. MISSING CHILDREN: FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATION:

When a missing child is not located through the initial response and preliminary investigation, the following shall apply: MPAC 41.2.6 [e]

1. The on-duty Supervisor shall notify the Detective Bureau, which shall assign the case to a detective or investigator.

2. The assigned investigator shall request that the parent or legal guardian provide the following within 72 hours, if possible: (a) written authorization for the release of the child's medical and dental records, as well as copies of such records (required by law per MGL c. 22A, §6); (b) a copy of the child's fingerprints, if available; (c) DNA reference samples, if available and appropriate (e.g., toothbrush, hairbrush).

3. The investigator shall coordinate with outside agencies as needed, including State Police, FBI, NCMEC, DCF, DYS, the Worcester County District Attorney's Office, and other law enforcement agencies.

4. The investigator shall request the assistance of specialized equipment or resources through the OIC or designee, including but not limited to: cell phone tracking, financial record analysis, computer forensics, and polygraph examination.

5. Media notification may be used to aid in locating the child. The decision to release information to the media shall be made by the Chief of Police or designee after consultation with the child's family, subject to the juvenile privacy protections in Section 11.

6. If the child is not located locally or within a reasonable amount of time, the investigator shall ensure that the notifications in Section 7 have been made, if not previously done, including the Massachusetts Missing Persons Clearinghouse, NCMEC, the FBI (in cases of suspected abduction or interstate flight), and entry into NamUs.

7. In parental kidnapping cases, the investigator shall conduct a thorough investigation and coordinate with the District Attorney's Office. Criminal charges shall be filed and arrest warrants obtained when supported by the evidence.

8. Periodic Reporting: The assigned investigator shall periodically report the status of the case to the person who initiated the report and to the assigned Supervisor.

9. Cases involving missing children who have not been located within a reasonable amount of time shall be reviewed by the assigned detective supervisor and the on-duty Supervisor to ensure all investigative avenues have been pursued and all appropriate databases and agencies have been notified.

11. MISSING CHILDREN: RECOVERY:

1. Upon locating a missing child, officers shall verify the child's identity, ensure that medical attention is provided if needed, and immediately notify the on-duty Supervisor.

2. The recovered child shall be interviewed to determine their whereabouts and activities during the period of absence. Officers shall determine whether the child was the victim of any crime during that period.

3. When the child is willing to return, the on-duty Supervisor shall arrange for the child to be returned to a parent, guardian, or custodian, or for a parent/guardian to come to the station for the child. Where a child is not in danger and refuses to return, and no CRA warrant, custody order, or other lawful basis for taking the child into custody exists, officers shall verify the child's identity, assess the child's welfare, attempt to persuade the child to return voluntarily, notify the parent or guardian — and DCF, when applicable — of the child's located status, ensure that database entries are cleared/located in accordance with Section 20, and document the circumstances. See Policy 710 (Juvenile Procedures and Arrests).

4. A welfare assessment shall be conducted in every case. If there is any indication of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or danger in the home, a 51A report shall be filed with DCF. Any indication that the child was the victim of sexual exploitation or human trafficking during the period of absence shall result in a 51A report to DCF and referral to the Detective Bureau for follow-up investigation; sexually exploited children shall be treated as victims.

5. In cases of persistent runaways, the parent(s) or guardian shall be advised to seek a CRA warrant from the Juvenile Court (see Policy 710). If the child is unclaimed by that same evening, the on-duty Supervisor shall ensure that DCF is notified via the DCF Hotline.

6. If the located child does not wish their location disclosed, the officer should consider the child's safety and consult with the on-duty Supervisor and the Detective Bureau before disclosing location information to the reporting party, particularly in cases where abuse or neglect may be a factor.

7. The child's school shall be notified that the child has been located, if the school was previously notified.

8. Officers shall comply with all juvenile privacy protections. The identity of a missing juvenile shall not be disclosed to the public except as authorized in this policy or as necessary to locate the child. See Policy 710 (Juvenile Procedures and Arrests).

9. All database entries shall be cleared/located, all previously notified agencies shall be advised of the recovery, and a located report shall be filed, in accordance with Section 20. If an AMBER Alert was activated, it shall be cancelled through the Massachusetts State Police in accordance with Policy 572 (AMBER Alert).

12. SAFE HAVEN AND ABANDONED CHILDREN:

In accordance with MGL c. 119, §39½ (the Safe Haven Act), a parent may legally surrender a newborn infant 7 days old or younger at a hospital, police station, or staffed fire station without criminal prosecution. MPAC 41.2.6 [f]

1. If an infant 7 days old or younger is surrendered at the police station, officers shall ensure the infant's immediate medical needs are addressed and shall contact DCF via the DCF Hotline.

2. In accordance with MGL c. 119, §39, if a child under the age of ten (10) is found abandoned, the Department shall immediately notify DCF via the DCF Hotline. MPAC 41.2.6

3. If a child between the ages of 10 and 17 is abandoned at the police station, the Department shall immediately notify DCF via the DCF Hotline.

4. Officers shall document the circumstances of the surrender or abandonment in an incident report.

PART TWO — MISSING ADULTS (PERSONS 18 AND OLDER)

13. MISSING ADULTS: INITIAL REPORT AND RESPONSE:

A. Report Acceptance and Initial Handling

The Department shall accept all reports of missing adults without delay, regardless of jurisdiction or the duration of the absence, and regardless of an adult's right to be voluntarily absent. There shall be no waiting period before initiating a response. Upon receipt of a report:

1. An officer shall be dispatched to the reporting party's location to take a formal written report.

2. A BOLO with available information shall be broadcast to all on-duty units, pertinent updates shall be provided to dispatch, and information shall be relayed to oncoming shifts through roll-call briefings. MPAC 41.2.5 [b]

3. If the report involves an at-risk/vulnerable adult or circumstances suggesting foul play or abduction, the on-duty Supervisor shall be immediately notified.

Department personnel who receive an initial report of a missing adult, whether in person, by telephone, or by radio, shall record the available identifying information for the missing person along with the reporting party's contact information, ensure that an officer is dispatched and that the preliminary information is broadcast to units, and immediately alert the on-duty Supervisor when the report involves an at-risk or endangered person or circumstances suggesting foul play or abduction.

B. Responding Officer Duties

The responding officer shall:

1. Respond promptly to the reporting party's location and complete an incident report documenting the missing person.

2. Obtain a comprehensive interview with the reporting party, including: (a) the missing person's identifying information (name, address, date of birth, age, sex, race, Social Security number and driver's license or identification card number (if available), physical description, clothing at time last seen), the time/date/location last seen, any associated vehicle, and any circumstances suggesting risk or endangerment; (b) the missing person's state of mind, including any statements made prior to disappearance; (c) the missing person's physical and mental health condition, including any required medications, medical devices, or treatments; (d) any history of prior missing incidents and the circumstances of those incidents, including

where the person was ultimately located; (e) destination plans, if any, including travel arrangements or stated intentions; (f) contact information for the missing person's employer, close friends, significant other, relatives, and any other associates; (g) places frequented by the missing person; (h) social media accounts and recent online activity, if known; (i) financial resources available to the missing person (access to money, credit cards, bank accounts); (j) whether the person took personal belongings, identification, phone, or vehicle. MPAC 41.2.5 [a]

3. Obtain a recent photograph of the missing person. Photographs shall be made available for distribution to officers and, when appropriate, for public release through Department-approved channels.

4. Conduct an initial assessment of the circumstances and classify the case as described in Section 14.

5. Advise the reporting party of their obligation to notify the Worcester Police Department immediately upon the return or location of the missing person and document this advisement in the incident report. MPAC 41.2.5 [d]

6. If a report is made to the Worcester Police Department and the person was last seen in another jurisdiction, accept the report, immediately notify the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction where the person was last seen, and coordinate as appropriate. Before any database entry is made, the officer shall comply with the pre-entry query requirement of Section 20.A to prevent duplicate entries.

7. Remain responsible for the continued investigation until formally relieved by the on-duty Supervisor or by a detective/investigator assigned to the case.

C. Reports from Hospitals, Treatment Facilities, and Group Homes

1. Reports of adults missing from hospitals, behavioral health facilities, group homes, and residential programs — including walkaways and elopements — shall be accepted and handled in accordance with this policy. The fact that the reporting entity maintains its own internal reporting requirements does not diminish the Department's response obligations once a report is received.

2. The responding officer shall assess such persons for At-Risk/Vulnerable classification under Sections 3.B and 14, with particular attention to: (a) whether the person is subject to an active order or authorization for involuntary hospitalization or apprehension (e.g., MGL c. 123, §12) that provides lawful authority for the person's return; (b) dependence on medication or medical treatment; (c) cognitive impairment or developmental disability; (d) expressed suicidal ideation or history of self-harm; and (e) environmental hazards, including proximity to bodies of water, roadways, or extreme weather.

3. The responding officer shall request that the reporting facility provide: a recent photograph; a physical and clothing description; a designated point of contact; information regarding the person's condition, medications, and likely destinations; and any history of prior elopements, including where the person was previously located.

4. The reporting facility shall be directed to notify the Department immediately if the person returns to or is located by the facility. While the person remains missing, the responding officer

or assigned investigator shall periodically recontact the facility's point of contact to confirm that the person has not returned, and shall document each contact in the incident report.

5. The return of a located patient who is unwilling to return to the facility shall be governed by Section 19 and applicable law. Officers shall not compel a person's return to a facility absent lawful authority (e.g., an active order or authorization under MGL c. 123, §12, a warrant, an order of a court, or another lawful basis).

14. MISSING ADULTS: CLASSIFICATION AND RISK ASSESSMENT:

Upon completing the initial report and interview, the responding officer, in consultation with the on-duty Supervisor, shall classify the missing adult case into one of the following categories. Classification shall be based on the known facts at the time and shall be updated as additional information becomes available.

A. Endangered/Involuntary Missing Adult

The missing adult is believed to be in danger of physical harm or death, or the disappearance is believed to be involuntary. This classification includes any case involving: (a) evidence of foul play, abduction, or criminal activity; (b) a person with Alzheimer's disease, dementia, autism spectrum disorder, or other cognitive or developmental disability; (c) a person who is dependent on medication or medical treatment and does not have access to such; (d) a person who has expressed suicidal ideation or has a history of self-harm; (e) a disappearance involving environmental dangers (extreme weather, water hazards, etc.); (f) a disappearance that is a significant deviation from established behavioral patterns and cannot be explained.

Response: Immediate and intensive investigation. All available resources shall be utilized. The OIC or designee shall consider Silver Alert activation as set out in Section 17. See Section 16 (Enhanced Response).

B. Voluntary Missing Adult

The person is age 18 or older and is believed to have left voluntarily. There is no indication of foul play, danger, or mental incapacity.

Response: Standard investigation. Report shall be taken, databases entered in accordance with Section 20, and reasonable investigative steps pursued. Officers shall remain alert to any change in circumstances that would warrant reclassification.

C. Missing Adult — Unknown Circumstances

The reason for the person's disappearance is unknown. The person shall be treated as endangered until facts emerge indicating otherwise. An immediate investigation shall be conducted.

15. MISSING ADULTS: PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION AND SEARCH:

The following investigative steps shall be taken in all missing adult cases: (1) interview the reporting party in depth to verify all information and obtain any additional facts; (2) obtain a recent photograph and ensure it is made available for distribution to officers, with an accompanying description; (3) issue a BOLO to all on-duty officers and ensure that information is relayed to oncoming shifts at roll call; (4) interview individuals who were

present at the actual scene of disappearance or last-seen location; (5) conduct an initial search of the area where the person was last seen; (6) contact friends, relatives, employer, and other associates; (7) check local hospitals, shelters, detention facilities, behavioral health centers, and the Medical Examiner's Office; (8) review and collect available video surveillance from the last-seen area; (9) assess the missing person's phone, social media, and financial activity, if accessible; (10) identify and preserve any potential evidence or crime scene indicators; and (11) document all investigative steps in the incident report and CAD system.

If the missing person is not located through these preliminary efforts, the on-duty Supervisor shall notify the Detective Bureau for follow-up investigation in accordance with Section 18.

16. MISSING ADULTS: ENHANCED RESPONSE FOR AT-RISK AND ENDANGERED ADULTS:

When a missing adult is classified as at-risk/vulnerable or endangered/involuntary, the following enhanced response procedures shall be implemented in addition to all standard procedures. The scope and intensity of the response shall be commensurate with the assessed level of risk. MPAC 41.2.5 [f]

A. Immediate Actions

1. The on-duty Supervisor shall be immediately notified and shall assume supervisory responsibility for the case.

2. A BOLO with all available information shall be broadcast to all on-duty units and to surrounding jurisdictions via LEAPS.

3. NCIC, LEAPS, and CJIS entries shall be made immediately in accordance with Section 20, regardless of whether a written report has been completed.

4. An immediate check shall be made of the last place the missing person was reportedly seen, as well as friends' homes, places of employment, shopping areas, transportation hubs, and other places frequented by the missing person.

5. A neighborhood canvass shall be initiated using available officers.

6. Officers shall identify and attempt to preserve any potential crime scenes, evidence, or video surveillance in the area of the last-seen location.

B. Command Post and Resource Mobilization

1. If the missing person is not located promptly, the OIC or designee shall consider establishing a Command Post at or near the last-seen location (see Policy 800 — All Hazard Plan). The Command Post shall serve as the coordination point for all search and investigative activities.

2. The OIC or designee shall assess the need for additional resources, which may include: (a) recall of off-duty personnel; (b) K-9 units (tracking and/or cadaver); (c) air support (MSP Airwing Unit, drone); (d) Worcester Fire or MSP Dive Units if water hazards are present; (e) mutual aid from surrounding agencies; (f) Massachusetts State Police resources, including specialized units; (g) volunteer search organizations (with appropriate coordination and oversight); (h) Department of Public Works, Fire Department, or other municipal resources.

17. MISSING ADULTS: SILVER ALERT:

The Silver Alert Community Response System is administered through the Massachusetts State Police. The Worcester Police Department does not itself broadcast a Silver Alert; activation is requested through the Massachusetts State Police Media Relations unit at (508) 820-2623, and the State Police make the final activation determination. All officers shall be familiar with the criteria set out below.

A Silver Alert may be requested when ALL of the following criteria are met: (a) the person is over the age of 17; (b) the person is missing; and (c) the person is believed to be endangered due to cognitive impairment — including Alzheimer's disease, dementia, or autism spectrum disorder — or other factors indicating that the person is at risk. MPAC 41.2.5 [g]

The OIC or a command officer shall evaluate every at-risk/vulnerable and endangered/involuntary missing adult case for Silver Alert activation. If a Silver Alert is activated, it shall be cancelled through the Massachusetts State Police upon the person's recovery.

18. MISSING ADULTS: FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATION:

When a missing adult is not located through preliminary investigation, the following shall apply to the follow-up investigation and continued search: MPAC 41.2.5 [e]

1. The on-duty Supervisor shall notify the Detective Bureau, which shall assign the case to a detective or investigator.

2. The assigned investigator shall request that the reporting party or the missing person's family provide the following within 72 hours, if possible: (a) written authorization for the release of the missing person's medical and dental records, as well as copies of such records; (b) a copy of the missing person's fingerprints, if available; (c) DNA reference samples, if available and appropriate (e.g., toothbrush, hairbrush).

3. The investigator shall coordinate with outside agencies as needed, including State Police, the FBI (in cases of suspected abduction or interstate flight), the Worcester County District Attorney's Office (in cases involving suspected criminal activity), and other law enforcement agencies.

4. The investigator shall request the assistance of specialized equipment or resources through the OIC or designee, including but not limited to: cell phone tracking, financial record analysis, computer forensics, and polygraph examination.

5. Media notification may be used to aid in locating the missing person. The decision to release information to the media shall be made by the Chief of Police or designee after consultation with the missing person's family.

6. If the missing person is not located locally or within a reasonable amount of time, the investigator shall ensure notification of the Massachusetts Missing Persons Clearinghouse (Commonwealth Fusion Center) and entry of the case into NamUs, if not previously done. Clearinghouse contact information is listed in Section 7.

7. Periodic Reporting: The assigned investigator shall periodically report the status of the case to the person who initiated the report and to the assigned Supervisor, and shall recontact the reporting party to confirm that the missing person has not returned. MPAC 41.2.5 [d]

8. Cases involving missing adults who have not been located within a reasonable amount of time shall be reviewed by the assigned detective supervisor and the on-duty Supervisor to ensure all investigative avenues have been pursued and all appropriate databases and agencies have been notified.

9. Unresolved cases meeting the criteria of Policy 530 (Unresolved Homicides) shall be referred to the Unresolved Homicide Unit, when applicable.

19. MISSING ADULTS: RECOVERY:

1. Upon locating a missing adult, officers shall verify the person's identity, ensure that medical attention is provided if needed, and immediately notify the on-duty Supervisor.

2. The recovered person shall be interviewed to determine their whereabouts and activities during the period of absence. Officers shall determine whether the person was the victim of any crime during that period.

3. The reporting party shall be notified that the missing person has been located, subject to the disclosure limitations in item 5 below.

4. All database entries shall be cleared/located, all previously notified agencies shall be advised of the recovery, and a located report shall be filed, in accordance with Section 20. If a Silver Alert was activated, it shall be cancelled through the Massachusetts State Police in accordance with Section 17.

5. Located Adults Who Decline Contact or Return: When a located missing person is a competent adult who has left voluntarily and does not wish to return or to have their location disclosed, officers shall verify the person's identity, assess the person's general welfare, and document the contact. Database entries shall be cleared/located in accordance with Section 20. The reporting party shall be notified only that the person has been located and is safe; the person's location and other identifying information shall not be disclosed without the located person's consent.

6. Delayed Discovery of Return: When the Department learns that a previously reported missing person returned or was located at an earlier time without notification to the Department, an officer shall confirm the person's return, identify the original incident number, file a located report under that original incident number, and ensure that the CJIS operator clears/locates all associated database entries in accordance with Section 20.

PART THREE — PROVISIONS APPLICABLE TO ALL MISSING PERSONS

20. DATABASE ENTRY, CLEARANCE, AND DOCUMENTATION OF ENTRIES:

Timely and accurate database entry is critical to locating missing persons and is required by law. The following procedures apply to every missing person case, whether the missing person is a child or an adult. MPAC 41.2.5 [c]

A. Pre-Entry Query

Before a new entry is made, the responding officer or CJIS operator shall query NCIC, LEAPS, and CJIS to determine whether the missing person is already the subject of an active entry by another agency. If an active entry exists, a duplicate entry shall not be made. The officer shall

instead: (a) conduct an area search if the person's possible whereabouts in Worcester are known; (b) request that a BOLO be broadcast; (c) notify the originating agency of the report and of any information developed in Worcester; and (d) document the incident as an assist to the originating agency.

B. Timing of Entry

Immediately upon receipt of the report and sufficient identifying information, the missing person's information shall be entered into NCIC, LEAPS, and CJIS. There shall be no waiting period for any missing person, regardless of age. Entry shall be made even if a written report has not yet been completed, and in no case later than two (2) hours from the time the report is received. For missing persons under the age of twenty-one (21) — including all missing children and missing adults age 18 to 20 — immediate entry is additionally mandated by Suzanne's Law (Public Law 108-21, Title II, §204), the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act (34 U.S.C. §41308), and MGL c. 22A, §4, and the Department shall promptly notify the National Crime Information Center in accordance with Suzanne's Law.

C. Entry Procedure

The officer taking the report shall present the missing person report, or the available identifying information, to the CJIS operator in person, or shall contact the CJIS operator by telephone or radio so that the operator may record the information and make the required entries and messaging without delay. Entry shall not be delayed pending completion of the written report. Consistent with CJIS audit requirements, entries shall be packed with all identifying and demographic information available to the Department — including, when available, the missing person's Social Security number and driver's license or identification card number — whether obtained from the reporting party or through CJIS queries.

Pursuant to MGL c. 22A, §3, when a parent, guardian, or governmental unit responsible for a child reports that child missing, the Department shall immediately enter relevant information into the central register and immediately undertake to locate the missing child.

D. Documentation of Entry

The CJIS operator shall assemble and file the entry packet (missing person cover sheet, incident report, and NCIC entry confirmation receipt) within the CJIS office for audit purposes. The CJIS operator shall also provide the Records Bureau with a second copy of the NCIC entry confirmation receipt, which records the NIC number, OCA number, and time of entry. The Records Bureau shall file this copy in a supplemental report under the original incident number in the records management system (RMS). The responding officer shall verify that entry has been made.

An administrative BOLO message shall be sent via LEAPS to surrounding agencies by the CJIS operator. The responding officer shall ensure that this notification occurs.

E. Clearance Upon Recovery

Upon verification that a missing person has been located, all NCIC, LEAPS, and CJIS records shall be cleared or located, as applicable, immediately and regardless of the day or hour. The CJIS operator shall notify the Records Bureau of each such clear or locate and provide the corresponding CJIS confirmation receipt. The Records Bureau shall file the confirmation

receipt under the original incident number, closing the record in both CJIS and the records management system. Documentation shall be completed promptly, and in no case later than five (5) business days after notification.

All agencies previously notified of the missing person (State Police, FBI, NCMEC, Fusion Center, NamUs, etc.) shall be notified of the recovery. A supplemental (located) report shall be filed under the original incident number detailing the circumstances of the recovery, including any difficulties encountered (e.g., reluctance or refusal to return home).

21. SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES:

The Supervisor shall:

1. Be notified immediately of all reports of missing children and of at-risk/vulnerable missing adults.

2. Respond to the scene for all endangered/involuntary, at-risk/vulnerable, parental kidnapping, and stranger abduction classifications.

3. Ensure that all procedures in this policy are followed, that appropriate resources are utilized, that NCIC/LEAPS/CJIS entries are made in a timely manner, and that entries are cleared/located without delay when a missing person is located.

4. Assign cases to appropriate personnel for preliminary and follow-up investigation.

5. Authorize resource escalation, in coordination with the OIC or designee, including Command Post establishment, mutual aid requests, K-9 deployment, and recall of off-duty personnel.

6. Evaluate cases for AMBER Alert (Section 9), Silver Alert (Section 17), or other alert system activation.

7. Notify the Commanding Officer (Captain or Deputy Chief) for all endangered or high-profile cases.

8. Ensure that shift-to-shift continuity is maintained through roll-call briefings and proper documentation.

9. Authorize and coordinate media contact in consultation with the Chief of Police or designee.

10. The Detective Bureau supervisor shall maintain awareness of all open missing persons cases and ensure periodic case review.

22. UNIDENTIFIED PERSONS AND REMAINS:

1. Officers who encounter an unidentified person (living) shall make every effort to identify the person and locate family members, guardian, or caretakers.

2. If the unidentified person is a child, the on-duty Supervisor shall be immediately notified and DCF shall be contacted.

3. Appropriate data shall be entered into the NCIC/CJIS Unidentified Persons File.

4. In cases involving unidentified deceased persons, the Department shall coordinate with the Medical Examiner’s Office in accordance with MGL c. 22A, §5 for fingerprint, dental, and other comparison with the missing persons database.

5. Unidentified decedent information shall be entered into NamUs and cross-referenced against missing persons records. The handling and database entry of unidentified deceased persons is governed by Policy 535 (Deceased Persons).

23. REPORTING AND DOCUMENTATION:

1. All missing person reports shall be documented via incident report and entered into the records management system (RMS).

2. NCIC entry, locate and clear confirmations shall be documented by supplemental report under the original incident number (see Section 20).

3. All investigative actions, notifications, and case status updates shall be documented in the incident report.

4. NCIC/LEAPS entries shall be validated in accordance with established schedules and reconfirmed as active.

5. Supervisors shall review and sign off on all missing person reports.

6. Cases shall be periodically reviewed to ensure continued investigative activity and database accuracy.

24. BODY-WORN CAMERAS:

Officers equipped with body-worn cameras shall activate recording in accordance with Policy 403 (Body-Worn Cameras) during all missing person investigations involving field activity, interviews with reporting parties, search operations, and recovery of the missing individual.

25. TRAINING:

Officers shall be notified of this policy and will receive training on this policy periodically as directed by the Training Division.

Per:

Paul B. Saucier
Chief of Police

Revisions:

July 27, 2026–

Complete rewrite of Policy 570 (last issued April 6, 1994) and conversion to the Department's current policy template for MPAC accreditation compliance. The policy was retitled Missing Children and Persons and organized into three parts — Part One (missing children), Part Two (missing adults), and Part Three (provisions applicable to all missing persons) — so that procedures for children and for adults are stated separately and correspond to the applicable accreditation standards. Substantive additions since the prior policy include: classification and risk-assessment frameworks for children (endangered/involuntary, runaway, parental and custodial kidnapping, stranger abduction, unknown circumstances) and for adults (endangered/involuntary, voluntary, unknown circumstances); enhanced-response and search procedures, including residence searches, neighborhood canvasses, Command Post establishment, and resource mobilization; Suzanne's Law and M.G.L. c. 22A requirements, including a two-hour maximum for NCIC/LEAPS entry and the no-waiting-period rule for all missing persons; a statement of the Massachusetts AMBER Alert activation criteria and statutory exclusions, with activation requested through the Massachusetts State Police in accordance with Policy 572; Silver Alert criteria and activation procedures for endangered adults; a mandatory pre-entry query of NCIC, LEAPS, and CJIS to prevent duplicate entries when another agency has an active record; a requirement that entries be packed with all available identifying and demographic information, including Social Security and driver's license or identification card numbers when available; notification requirements (Fusion Center, NCMEC, FBI CARD Team, District Attorney, DCF, DYS, and school notification); defined procedures for reports of persons missing from hospitals, behavioral health and residential facilities, group homes, and schools, including elopements; documentation of NCIC entries by the CJIS operator and of clear/locate withdrawals by the Records Bureau, in each case filed under the original incident number; recovery procedures for children and adults, including disclosure limitations for located adults and juveniles who decline to return or to have their location disclosed, and a mandatory 51A report and Detective Bureau referral where a located juvenile shows any indication of sexual exploitation or human trafficking; Safe Haven and child-abandonment provisions; unidentified-persons and remains procedures with NamUs entry; and body-worn camera activation requirements. Responsibilities were assigned to personnel receiving initial reports and to responding officers, supervisors, and investigators, and accreditation standards 41.2.5 and 41.2.6 were cited by element at their operative provisions. Training requirements and signing authority were updated.

Original Issue Date: April 6, 1994