POLICY AND PROCEDURE NO. 548

Mandatory Reporting: Abuse and Neglect of Children, Disabled Persons, and Elders

Date Issued: June 12, 2026
Date Effective: June 12, 2026
Review Date: June 12, 2027 5 Pages

1. PURPOSE:

Massachusetts law designates police officers as mandated reporters of suspected abuse, neglect, and exploitation involving three vulnerable populations: children under eighteen years of age (MGL Ch. 119, §51A), disabled persons between the ages of eighteen and fifty-nine (MGL Ch. 19C), and elders sixty years of age and older (MGL Ch. 19A). This policy establishes uniform procedures for fulfilling these statutory obligations, ensuring that all reports are made promptly and accurately, and that victims receive appropriate assistance and protection.

This policy applies to all sworn and non-sworn personnel of the Worcester Police Department.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK:

Immunity: Any person who, in good faith, makes a report of suspected abuse or neglect under MGL Ch. 119, §51A, MGL Ch. 19A, or MGL Ch. 19C is immune from civil or criminal liability.

Penalty for Failure to Report: A mandated reporter who fails to make a required report may be subject to a criminal fine of up to $1,000.00 under each of the three governing statutes.

Confidentiality: Reports made under these statutes are confidential and shall be disclosed only as authorized by law.

3. DEFINITIONS:

A. General Definitions (Applicable to All Populations):

Abuse: The infliction or threat of physical harm, sexual contact or activity without consent, or the infliction of emotional or psychological harm through threat, humiliation, intimidation, or other verbal or nonverbal conduct.

Neglect: The failure or refusal of a caretaker to provide one or more of the necessities essential for physical well-being, including but not limited to food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and personal hygiene.

Financial Exploitation: The unauthorized or improper use of funds, property, or resources of a vulnerable person, resulting in a substantial loss to that person for the benefit of another.

Mandated Reporter: A person required by law to report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation. All sworn and non-sworn members of the Worcester Police Department are mandated reporters when acting in a professional capacity.

B. Population-Specific Definitions:

Child: Any person under eighteen (18) years of age. (MGL Ch. 119, §51A)

Disabled Person: A person between the ages of eighteen (18) and fifty-nine (59) who has a permanent or long-term physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. (MGL Ch. 19C)

Elder: Any person sixty (60) years of age or older. (MGL Ch. 19A)

4. REPORTING OBLIGATIONS:

When any member of the Worcester Police Department, while acting in a professional capacity, has reasonable cause to believe that a child, disabled person, or elder has been subjected to abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, or any combination thereof, the member shall:

a. Make an immediate verbal report to the appropriate receiving agency identified in Section 5 of this policy.

b. File a written report with the appropriate receiving agency within forty-eight (48) hours of the initial verbal report.

c. Complete a WPD Incident Report documenting the facts giving rise to the report, the verbal report made, and the receiving agency and individual to whom the report was made.

d. Notify the on-duty supervisor that a mandatory report has been filed.

e. Send an email notification to the Special Crimes Unit supervisor advising that a mandatory report has been filed, including the incident report number, the victim's population category (child, disabled person, or elder), and the receiving agency to which the report was made.

5. RECEIVING AGENCIES AND CONTACT INFORMATION:

A. Child Abuse and Neglect (MGL Ch. 119, §51A):

Reports shall be made to the Department of Children and Families (DCF):

1. Business Hours (0845–1700): East Side incidents: DCF, 151 West Boylston Drive, Worcester, MA 01606 — (508) 793-8000. West Side incidents: DCF, 5 Brussels Street, Building C, Worcester, MA 01610 — (508) 929-2000.

2. After Hours, Weekends, and Holidays: Child-at-Risk Hotline — 1-800-792-5200.

3. Written reports: DCF 51A Report form, available in the Service Division, Operations, and/or through the DCF online portal.

B. Abuse of Disabled Persons (MGL Ch. 19C):

Reports shall be made to the Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC):

1. 24-Hour Hotline: 1-800-426-9009.

2. Written reports: DPPC 19C Intake Form, available in the Service Division and Operations. Forms may also be submitted online at www.mass.gov/dppc.

C. Elder Abuse (MGL Ch. 19A):

Reports shall be made to the designated local Protective Services Agency:

1. Business Hours: Elder Services of Worcester Area, Inc. Protective Services Supervisor — (508) 756-1545.

2. After Hours, Weekends, and Holidays: Elder Abuse Hotline — 1-800-922-2275.

3. Written reports: 19A Report form, available in the Service Division and Operations.

NOTE: Contact information for receiving agencies is subject to change. The Operations Division shall maintain current contact information and ensure that all reporting forms are available and accessible to personnel on all shifts. Any changes to agency names, addresses, phone numbers, or reporting procedures shall be disseminated by written directive.

6. WRITTEN REPORT CONTENT:

All written reports filed with receiving agencies shall contain, at a minimum, the following information where known or available:

a. Name, address, and age of the victim.

b. Name and address of the parent, guardian, or caretaker, if applicable.

c. The victim's sex and date of birth.

d. The nature and extent of injuries, abuse, neglect, or exploitation, including any evidence of prior incidents.

e. The circumstances under which the officer became aware of the condition.

f. Any action taken to assist or protect the victim.

g. The identity of the suspected perpetrator, if known.

h. The name and badge number of the reporting officer.

i. The date and time of the verbal report and the name of the individual at the receiving agency to whom it was made.

7. ON-SCENE PROCEDURES:

In addition to fulfilling mandatory reporting obligations, officers responding to suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation shall:

a. Ensure the immediate safety of the victim. If the victim is in imminent danger, take appropriate action to protect the victim, including removal from the dangerous environment when legally authorized.

b. Request emergency medical services if the victim requires medical attention.

c. Photograph visible injuries and the scene, consistent with department evidence collection procedures, when the circumstances suggest criminal conduct.

d. Identify and interview witnesses, including household members, neighbors, and any professionals (medical, educational, social services) who may have relevant information. Questioning of a suspected child abuse victim at the scene is governed by Section 7.G and shall

be limited accordingly; the standard scene-witness interview procedure described in this paragraph does not apply to suspected child abuse victims.

e. Preserve physical evidence when criminal conduct is suspected.

f. Provide the victim or the victim's family/guardian with information regarding available victim services, including the Victim/Witness Assistance Program, protective orders, shelter services, and applicable community resources.

g. Minimal-Facts Interview Standard for Suspected Child Abuse Victims. When the suspected victim is a child, officers at the scene shall limit questioning of the child to a minimal-facts interview. The detailed forensic interview shall be conducted at the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) under the multidisciplinary observation protocol described in Section 8.C.

8. COORDINATION WITH CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS:

A mandatory report to a protective services agency does not replace or satisfy the obligation to investigate suspected criminal conduct. When the facts giving rise to a mandatory report also suggest that a crime has been committed, the following procedures apply:

a. The responding officer shall complete an Incident Report documenting the suspected criminal conduct in addition to the mandatory report to the receiving agency.

b. The on-duty supervisor shall evaluate whether the matter should be referred to the Detective Bureau for further investigation.

c. Child Abuse Cases. The Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) is the designated forum for the detailed forensic interview of a suspected child abuse victim. Officers and detectives shall coordinate with the Worcester County District Attorney's Office to arrange a CAC forensic interview rather than conducting a detailed interview themselves. Under the CAC multidisciplinary observation protocol, WPD, DCF, and the District Attorney's Office observe the interview in real time so that the child tells the account once, in a child-friendly setting, to a trained forensic interviewer. Officer questioning of the child at the scene is limited to the minimal-facts interview standard set forth in Section 7.G.

d. Elder/Disabled Persons Cases. Financial exploitation cases involving elders or disabled persons may require coordination with the District Attorney's Elder and Disabled Persons Financial Exploitation Unit or equivalent. Officers shall consult with the Detective Bureau on complex financial exploitation matters.

e. The mandatory report to the protective services agency and the criminal investigation shall proceed simultaneously. Officers shall not delay a mandatory report pending the outcome of a criminal investigation, nor shall the filing of a mandatory report be delayed to avoid interfering with a criminal case.

9. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

A. Children Without Parental or Custodial Supervision:

Officers who encounter a child without parental or custodial supervision, whether due to absence, arrest, incapacitation, or other cause, shall attempt to place the child with a responsible family member. If no responsible family member is available, officers shall contact DCF for placement. When the caretaker is expected to be released within a reasonably short time, the

child may be temporarily cared for at the police station. If the child requires medical care, it shall be provided immediately.

B. Handle with Care Program:

When an officer or detective responds to a call or scene and believes a school-age child has been exposed to or witnessed a traumatic event, the officer shall send a notification to the Worcester Public Schools via email to Handlewithcare@worcesterschools.net. The notification shall include only the child's name, age, and school attended. No details of the incident shall be included. Officers shall document in their report that the Handle with Care notification was sent.

C. Self-Neglect:

In cases involving an elder or disabled person who appears to be engaging in self-neglect (failure to provide for one's own essential needs), officers shall make a report to the appropriate protective services agency. Self-neglect does not necessarily involve a perpetrator, but the reporting obligation still applies when the officer has reasonable cause to believe the person is unable to care for themselves.

D. Abuse in Licensed Facilities:

When suspected abuse or neglect occurs in a licensed care facility (nursing home, group home, assisted living facility, residential program), the mandatory report shall be made to the appropriate receiving agency as specified in Section 5. Officers shall also notify the facility administrator and, when applicable, the appropriate state licensing authority.

10. DOCUMENTATION AND RECORDS:

Officers shall maintain documentation of all mandatory reports in accordance with the following:

a. A copy of the written report filed with the receiving agency, or documentation of the verbal report including the date, time, receiving agency, and individual contacted, shall be attached to or referenced in the WPD Incident Report.

b. The on-duty supervisor shall review all mandatory reports filed during their shift to ensure completeness and compliance with this policy.

c. Mandatory reports and supporting documentation shall be maintained in accordance with the department's records retention schedule and applicable law.

d. Records relating to child abuse investigations shall be maintained with restricted access in accordance with MGL Ch. 119, §51A and department records policy.

Per:

Paul B. Saucier
Chief of Police

Revisions:

June 12, 2026–

Replaced Policy 545 Child Abuse and Neglect, Policy 550 Abuse to Disabled Persons, and Policy 555 Elderly Abuse Reporting with a single mandatory reporting directive covering children, disabled persons, and elders. Removed those three policies as standalone directives. Replaced the definitions carried in those policies with definitions drawn from current statutory language. Added criminal investigation coordination procedures at Section 8. Added on-scene procedures, evidence preservation, and victim services referral provisions at Section 7. Added a minimal-facts interview standard at Section 7.G limiting officer questioning of suspected child abuse victims at the scene and establishing the Children's Advocacy Center as the forum for detailed forensic interviews. Added self-neglect provisions at Section 9.C and licensed facility provisions at Section 9.D.

Original Issue Date: June 12, 2026