General Order

Houston Police Department

ISSUE DATE:	NO.
September 28, 2023	600-32

REFERENCE: Supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars and Directives, and General Order 600-32, dated August 17, 2020

SUBJECT: RIDE-ALONG PROGRAM

POLICY

The Ride-Along Program provides an opportunity for the general public, civilian employees, and law enforcement personnel to accompany Houston police officers on patrol. Employees shall not permit any person to participate in an informal ride-along. Unless noted otherwise in this General Order, guests are prohibited from carrying any weapon or firearm while participating in the Ride-Along Program, even if they hold a license to carry a handgun.

This General Order applies to all employees.

DEFINITIONS

Guest. For this General Order, any participant in the Ride-Along Program.

Ride-Along Form. The *Authorization to Participate in the Ride-Along Program and Release of Liability* form, available on the Intranet Portal.

1 GENERAL PROVISIONS

When receiving a completed *Ride-Along Form* from a prospective guest to participate in the Ride-Along Program, the host division commander shall evaluate and approve or disapprove the request pursuant to Section 2, *Ride-Along Authorization*. Division commanders shall approve ride-alongs on a case-by-case basis, verify availability of qualified host officers, and ensure the ride-along participant has met any additional requirements, if applicable.

Participation in the Ride-Along Program does not give police powers, real or implied, to guests unless normally granted by federal or state laws.

2 RIDE-ALONG AUTHORIZATION

Each prospective guest must complete and submit a notarized *Ride-Along Form* at least 48 hours prior to the scheduled ride-along. The *Ride-Along Form* shall only be valid for the date on the form. After receiving an original notarized form, the host division shift sergeant and lieutenant shall complete and sign the *Police Department Information* section and provide the form to the division commander for final review and approval.

The host division shall check TCIC/NCIC, SETCIC, and local records of the prospective guest for criminal and warrant history. The division commander shall not approve a prospective guest who has a final conviction of a Class B misdemeanor within the past 10 years, a final conviction of a Class A misdemeanor or higher, or an active charge for a Class B misdemeanor or higher. Employees shall handle any person with outstanding warrants as required by policy and law.

Division commanders shall not approve prospective guests who are not age 18 or older, unless the prospective guest is part of the HPD Explorer Program and age 16 or 17. Employees assigned to manage the HPD Explorer Program shall coordinate such ride-alongs, which shall not include HPD aircraft, and shall complete the approval duties of the host division.

If approved, the host division commander shall sign the form. The host division shall maintain the original *Ride-Along Form* and the host division shift sergeant shall distribute copies of the form as indicated at the bottom of the form.

Annual Ride-Along Form

The following persons may apply to participate in the Ride-Along Program on an annual basis by completing the *Annual Authorization to Participate in the Ride-Along Program and Release of Liability* form, available on the Intranet Portal:

a. Police and Clergy Alliance (PACA) members.

b. Independent Police Oversight Board (IPOB) members.

c. Other persons as authorized by the Chief of Police.

Patrol Operations employees shall complete the approval duties of the host division, and the Executive Assistant Chief of Patrol Operations shall approve or disapprove prospective guests. The form shall be valid for one year from the date of approval. Patrol Operations shall maintain the original form and distribute copies as indicated at the bottom of the form. Patrol Operations shall direct guests to forward a copy of the form as indicated at the bottom of the form. When the guest requests a ride-along at a certain division, the host division shall obtain a copy of the form from the guest and maintain a copy in division files.

HPD Civilian Employee Guests

Civilian employees may request to participate in the Ride-Along Program while off-duty by completing the *Ride-Along Form.* Such employees shall not be compensated or entitled to workers' compensation benefits for the ride-along. Off-duty civilian employees shall not wear a department uniform. Civilian employees shall not have any pending or sustained disciplinary actions classified as category C or higher within the last three years.

Officers from Other Agencies

Guests who are certified, full-time peace officers from other agencies must complete the *Ride-Along Form.* The host division shall request that a guest peace officer from another agency within the state of Texas wear their official uniform, but it is not mandatory. These officers shall retain all their powers and privileges as peace officers, including carrying a weapon and/or firearm, unless prohibited by state or federal law.

When a peace officer from another agency wants to participate in the Ride-Along Program, the host division commander shall ensure a division supervisor contacts that officer's supervisor to obtain verbal permission from the officer's supervisor to participate and confirmation that the officer does not have any serious pending or sustained disciplinary actions.

Unless it is necessary and/or unavoidable, HPD officers shall not use other non-local agency personnel in a manner that would require them to return at a later date to appear in a judicial proceeding.

Honorably Retired Officers and Active or Retired Judges

Honorably retired police officers or active or retired judges must complete the *Ride-Along Form*. These guests may carry a weapon and/or firearm except as restricted by Section 6, *Non-Patrol Ride-Alongs*, or as prohibited by state or federal law.

Members of the Media

Members of the media must complete the *Ride-Along Form*. Only the Chief of Police may approve members of the media to participate in any aspect of the Ride-Along Program. The Office of Community Affairs shall coordinate any media ride-along.

Persons presenting credentials identifying themselves as members of the media may use audio/visual recording devices during any ride-along.

3 HOST OFFICER REQUIREMENTS

An officer may decline to participate as a host officer in the Ride-Along Program. An officer may volunteer to be a host for the Ride-Along Program upon achievement of two years of seniority from the officer's employment date. A shift commander also may allow any non-probationary officer to host a ride-along, regardless of that officer's seniority. Host officers shall not have any pending complaints or sustained disciplinary actions classified as category C or higher within the last three years.

When signing on for duty, a host officer shall notify the dispatcher that they are hosting a guest and indicate what type of participant is riding with them (e.g., officer, civilian employee, PACA or IPOB member).

The host officer shall not volunteer for an overtime assignment unless an emergency exists. Host officers shall not exchange ride-along participants during their shift. Unless noted otherwise in Section 5, *High-Risk Situations During Ride-Alongs*, the participant shall remain with the host officer for the length of the ride-along.

As required by General Order 800-06, **CJIS Compliance**, the host officer shall protect criminal justice information (CJI) and shall not intentionally display or provide CJI to a non-law enforcement guest. The host officer shall make reasonable efforts to limit or prevent a non-law enforcement guest from viewing or obtaining CJI. Officers shall not permit non-law enforcement guests to record or photograph CJI.

The host officer shall obtain a Guest Observer Card from the host division shift lieutenant (or designee) prior to beginning the ride-along and shall provide the card to the guest. The host officer shall return the Guest Observer Card to the lieutenant (or designee) after the ride along

and report any lost or damaged card in the same manner as an official identification card under General Order 400-02, **HPD Badges and Identification Cards**.

Unless approved by the host division commander or exigent circumstances exist, the host officer shall begin and end the ride-along at that officer's division.

4 GUEST CONDUCT, DUTIES, AND RESTRICTIONS

Unless permitted otherwise by this General Order, guests shall wear comfortable business attire and shall not wear shorts, jeans, tank tops, beach clothing, or any clothing that would give the appearance that the guest is a law enforcement officer (e.g., law enforcement patches, logos, or insignias, visible body armor). Neckties are not recommended. A guest with an *Annual Ride-Along Form* may wear visible armor, but the guest shall not have any law enforcement patches, logos, or insignia on the body armor. Except for HPD aircraft ride-alongs, the guest shall wear the Guest Observer Card in a manner that is always visible from the front.

Duties

The host officer may use a guest to fulfill various duties, including:

a. Traffic or crowd control (if the guest is in a uniform).

b. Protection of a crime scene (if the guest is in a uniform).

c. Radio operation.

d. Motorist assistance.

e. Gathering information or completing routine paperwork that shall not be used in any court action.

f. Acting as an interpreter, pursuant to General Order 500-13, **Use of Interpreters and Translators**.

g. Being listed as a witness to an offense.

Restrictions

Non-law enforcement guests are required to obey lawful orders of police officers and may be denied access to crime scenes. Unless an unavoidable emergency exists, officers shall not allow non-law enforcement guests to:

a. Conduct criminal or witness interrogations or interviews.

b. Participate in an arrest or be left in charge of a prisoner.

c. Accompany an officer inside any structure where a suspect may still be hiding.

d. Leave the police vehicle unless otherwise directed by an officer.

e. Assist at a crime scene except as specifically directed by an officer.

f. Sign any report (e.g., arrest, incident, crash), traffic citation, or other legal document.

g. Provide cover or back-up.

h. Drive any City vehicle.

i. Interact with any Vice, Narcotics, or Criminal Intelligence personnel.

j. Sit or ride in the prisoner compartment with a prisoner.

k. Receive any information concerning the timing or details of a warrant execution.

l. Use an audio/visual recording device unless authorized by the host officer or another section of this General Order.

m. Operate any HPD computer, as defined by General Order 400-13, **Acceptable Use of Computer Systems**, if not an authorized civilian employee.

5 HIGH-RISK SITUATIONS DURING RIDE-ALONGS

If the host officer is dispatched or responds to a call for service with a high risk of danger (e.g., shooting in progress, barricaded suspect, or CBRNE event) during a ride-along with a non-law enforcement guest (other than a cadet), the host officer shall leave the guest at the nearest operational police facility. If the incident warrants an immediate response, the host officer shall leave the guest at the first convenient and safe location and immediately notify the dispatcher of the situation. The dispatcher shall immediately assign a unit to retrieve and transport the guest back to the host officer's division. After the incident has ended, the host officer and the guest can resume the ride-along.

If a high-risk situation is unavoidable, non-law enforcement guests shall remain in the police vehicle until police personnel advise the situation is safe. The host officer shall make every effort to ensure the safety of the guest.

If a host officer initiates a pursuit with a non-law enforcement guest (other than a cadet), the dispatcher shall immediately assign a replacement unit. When that unit arrives, the host officer shall turn off the vehicle's emergency equipment and fall back to a safe position. The host officer shall not assume a secondary position in the pursuit even if a secondary unit is unavailable.

If a guest is injured or exposed to a high-risk situation, the host officer shall report the incident to a supervisor, who shall complete a *Significant Event Report*, pursuant to General Order 200-10, **Significant Events**.

6 NON-PATROL RIDE-ALONGS

The division commander of the Air Support Division, Port Patrol Unit, or Lake Patrol Unit may approve aircraft or boat ride-alongs requested by:

a. Classified or civilian employees with a mission specific need, pursuant to Section 7, *Temporary Assignment of On-Duty Employees*.

b. Other law enforcement agency officers with a mission specific need.

The assistant chief over the division may approve aircraft or boat ride-alongs requested by:

c. Classified or civilian employees without a mission specific need, pursuant to Section 7, *Temporary Assignment of On-Duty Employees*.

d. Other law enforcement agency personnel without a mission specific need.

e. The general public.

Once approved, employees and guests shall follow the applicable division's standard operating procedures prior to any flight or embarkment. Unless otherwise restricted by the host division or by General Order 800-06, **CJIS Compliance**, all ride-along participants are allowed to use audio/visual recording devices during an aircraft or boat ride-along.

Employees shall not allow a conducted energy device and/or incendiary or spark-emitting device in any HPD aircraft for any reason.

7 TEMPORARY ASSIGNMENT OF ON-DUTY EMPLOYEES

With supervisor approval, an employee may request a temporary one-day assignment with any division. The division commander of the host division shall approve or deny the request prior to the temporary assignment. Such temporary assignments are not considered part of the Ride-Along Program (except for the requirements in Section 6, *Non-Patrol Ride-Alongs*) and require no *Ride-Along Form*.

If necessary for the benefit of the department, a division commander may order a civilian employee, including a cadet, to participate in the Ride-Along Program, subject to the same restrictions in this General Order. Such civilian employees do not have to complete the *Ride-Along Form* and shall wear their department uniform if they have one.

Troy Finner
Chief of Police