


NORTHAMPTON POLICE DEPARTMENT		
Administration & Operations Manual		
Policy: Missing Persons		AOM: O-214
Massachusetts Police Accreditation Standards Referenced: [41.2.5.a], [41.2.5.f], [41.2.6.c], [41.2.5.c], [41.2.5.b], [41.2.6.f], [41.2.5.e], [41.2.5.d], [41.2.6]		Issuing Authority <hr/> Jody Kasper Chief of Police
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I. Introductory Discussion

A missing person is one who is absent with no apparent reason or under circumstances that may indicate involuntary disappearance. The fears and concerns of those in the community reporting missing persons deserve attention. This is particularly true in the case of small children or any report where the possibility of foul play may be a strong likelihood.

It should be remembered that missing persons are not fugitives and often have voluntarily left home for personal reasons of which the person making the report may be reluctant to inform the police. Despite limited resources and the fact that many of these reports may be unfounded or unnecessary, the Department cannot ignore such reports and must be prepared to respond to all missing persons reports effectively and efficiently so that emphasis can be placed on those cases that truly require in-depth attention.

II. Initial Response

- A. When a report of a missing person is received over the telephone, the dispatcher receiving the report shall take down preliminary information and explain that the procedures of the Department require personal submission of **AOM 0214.a Missing Person Affidavit/Verification**. If it appears that the person may be endangered or the subject of foul play or be of runaway, abandoned, abducted or other missing status the dispatcher shall notify the Officer-in-Charge.
- B. An officer should then be dispatched to meet the caller and obtain **AOM 0214.a Missing Person Affidavit/Verification**, and shall obtain the following information: [41.2.5,a]
1. A full description of the missing person including name, age, sex, marital status, occupation and complete physical description including description of clothing.
 2. The extent of any search already performed by the caller or other parties.
 3. Whether the person has ever been reported missing on previous occasions.
 4. Time and place at which the missing person was last seen.
 5. Other information that may be useful in locating the person (for example, particular habits or personal interests, places frequented, location of out-of-town relatives or friends, etc.).
 6. The name and address of the caller.
 7. The relationship between the caller and the person reported missing.
- C. If the report concerns a missing child, the officer shall also inquire: [41.2.5,f]
1. The name of the school the child attends and, if relevant, the person who was supposed to pick up the child.
 2. Whether the child's absence is a significant deviation from established patterns of behavior and cannot be explained.
 3. Whether the child is believed to be with adults, including parents and other relatives, who may endanger the welfare of the child.
- D. Upon receipt of the necessary information, the Dispatcher/Desk Officer shall enter all information into the LEAPS/CJIS computer system, and record the NCIC, LEAPS, and OCA numbers on the missing person's report, signing and dating the same. [41.2.6,c][41.2.5.c]

Note: Massachusetts law requires that whenever a parent, guardian or governmental unit responsible for a child reports the child missing, police officers are required to immediately enter relevant information into the central register for missing persons and immediately to undertake to locate the missing child (M.G.L. c. 22A, sec. 4). In addition, the Section 9 of Chapter 22A requires that the police department notify the last known elementary or secondary school where the child was enrolled. [41.2.5]

III. Preliminary Investigation

- A. The Officer-in-Charge (OIC) shall assign cases involving missing persons, if no unit or officer is regularly assigned to such duty. Officers assigned should be given all initial data obtained, and should conduct a preliminary investigation in an attempt to locate the individual. [41.2.5.a]
 - 1. If a child is reported lost, the juvenile officer, if any, shall be notified and given all pertinent data. [41.2.6.c]
- B. Officers assigned to a missing person case should interview the person who initiated the report to verify information already available and provide the opportunity to obtain further facts that may be helpful.
- C. A photograph of the missing person should always be obtained, if available. Such photographs should be posted in the police station with an accompanying description where all officers may view them. [41.2.5.b]
- D. Upon taking the initial report of a missing person, the officer shall put a BOLO for the missing person to all officers on-duty. The officer shall also provide information to be passed to oncoming shifts during roll call.
- E. In the case of a missing child, parental consent to a search of the house for the child should be obtained and such a search should be conducted immediately. [41.2.6.f]
- F. In the case of a missing child, an immediate check should be made of the last place the child was reportedly seen, friends' houses, arcades, playgrounds, places of employment, and other places frequented by a child, as well as local hospitals. A check of all registered sex offenders within a one-mile radius of the child's home should also be conducted. [41.2.6. f]
- G. In the event that it becomes apparent that the person cannot be located immediately, a more detailed investigation and search will be required. Such follow-up investigation shall be conducted only when authorized and directed by the OIC.

IV. Follow-Up Investigation [41.2.5.e]

- A. Officers authorized to conduct in-depth investigation and search shall coordinate such through the OIC. If the officers determine that the aid of outside agencies or special equipment will be helpful, a request for these services shall be made to the OIC.
- B. In all cases of a missing person, regardless of age, the investigating officer should request that the parent, legal guardian, or reporting entity, submit the following documents to the police department within 72 hours, if possible:

1. Written authorization for the release of medical and dental records (required by law in the case of a missing child (M.G.L. c.22A, §6) as well as a copy of such records; and
 2. A copy of the missing person's fingerprints.
- C. An interview of individuals who were present at the actual scene of disappearance should be conducted, as well as subsequent searches of the scene and places frequented by the missing individual.
- D. Notification of the general public through any of the news media can be valuable in locating a missing person. A decision to use such facilities shall be made by the Chief or their Designee after consultation with the family of the missing person. [41.2.5,b][41.2.6,f]
1. If activation of the **AMBER Alert** is being considered, refer to **AOM 0217 AMBER Alert Plan** for requirements and instructions.
- E. In any case where it appears that the missing person may not be found locally or within a reasonable amount of time, the investigating officer should notify the following agencies and data bases, if not previously notified: State Police Missing Persons Unit, LEAPS/CJIS, NCIC. In cases of apparent stranger abductions the FBI should be contacted.
- F. Officers assigned to a missing person case should periodically report the status of the case to the person who initiated the report. [41.2.5.d]

V. **Special Considerations: Missing Child and at Risk Persons Investigations** [42.1.5, f] [41.2.6]

A. Voluntary Missing Juveniles

1. An investigation of a voluntary missing juvenile focuses on the family, friends, school and lifestyle of the missing youth. Survival resources that the youth may have should be considered. In determining whether a child is voluntarily missing, officers should consider whether the child took any items to which they have a particular sentimental attachment.
2. Other units in the department and nearby jurisdictions should be informed of the case and provided with pictures of the missing youth.
3. The officer should instruct the parent(s) to secure a Children Requiring Assistance (CRA) warrant from the juvenile court as soon as possible to aid in the recovery of the child. Any indication of neglect or abuse in the family should be considered, and upon recovery of the missing child, appropriate follow-up action should be taken by the investigating officer, including filing a neglect and abuse report with the Department of Children & Families (DCF).

B. Parental Kidnapping

1. A parental kidnapping case requires a thorough investigation as the abducting parent is in violation of the law and the child abducted by a parent may be in serious danger.
2. The investigation focuses on the abductor parent, their friends and relatives, and on the needs of the child for public care. A thorough check of bank records, employment, labor unions, and credit bureaus should be made in an attempt to locate the abductor. The Federal Bureau of Investigation should also be notified.
3. If friends or relatives are thought to be in contact with the abductor through the mail, the postal inspector's office may be asked to place a "cover" on that individual's mail. When sufficient supporting data is provided, criminal charges should be filed against the abductor parent and an arrest warrant obtained.
4. The District Attorney's office should be notified in parental kidnapping cases to expedite court procedures. In certain cases, the District Attorney's office may seek a *Federal Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution Warrant* through the United States Attorney's office.

C. Abduction of Juveniles

1. Abduction cases require that the child be considered in extreme danger and are therefore subject to mobilization of every available resource of the Department. The search for an abducted child has two purposes:
 - a. Primarily, to find the child and ensure their safety; and
 - b. Secondly, to identify, locate, and apprehend the perpetrator and to build a case that will result in their conviction in a criminal court. The District Attorney's office and State Police Missing Persons Unit should be notified in abduction cases. The FBI should also be informed of the abduction.

D. Juveniles Missing for Unknown Reasons and At Risk Persons

These cases should be investigated using all of the techniques discussed in the other three case categories. A child or at risk person who is missing due to mental illness (e.g. Alzheimer's or Autism), developmentally challenged, and or unknown causes should be assumed to be in extreme danger until facts emerge that indicate otherwise. An immediate investigation shall be conducted and is required by law in the case of a missing child (M.G.L. c. 22A, §4). There shall be no waiting period established before taking action. If any unusual circumstances are present, a command post should be set up and an extensive search and investigation conducted. [41.2.5, f]

E. Abandoned Children

In cases where a child is abandoned at the police station officers shall follow the Safe Haven Act of Massachusetts, which allows a parent facing the last resort to legally surrender a newborn infant 7 days old or younger at a hospital, police

station, or manned fire department without criminal prosecution. If a child is abandoned at the police station who is between the age of 8 days old and 18 years old, the department shall notify the DCF hotline immediately.

VI. Recovery of Missing Persons

- A. Whenever a missing person is located, officers shall ensure that medical attention is provided, if needed.
- B. When officers locate an adult missing person, the OIC shall be notified and shall notify the party who originally reported the missing person. [41.2.5.d]
- C. When a juvenile missing person is found, the OIC shall be notified and they shall arrange for the child to be taken home or arrange for parent(s) to pick up the child.
- D. All missing persons, when found, shall be questioned as to their whereabouts and activities. Police should determine whether the missing person was the victim of any crime during the period of absence.
- E. Officers locating a missing person shall file a report detailing the circumstances surrounding the finding of the person. Particular difficulties encountered, for example, reluctance or refusal to return home, should be noted.
- F. In the case of juveniles who are persistent runaways, their parents, or guardians, shall be notified by the OIC to come to the station for the child. If unclaimed by that same evening, the OIC shall ensure that the Department of Children and Families is notified.
- G. When a missing person has been located, the OIC shall ensure that all appropriate agencies are notified. [41.2.5,d]
- H. All entries into NCIC/LEAPS shall be changed to indicate the person was located. [41.2.5,c]
 - 1. If a warrant was issued for a missing juvenile (i.e. CRA warrant, etc.) all appropriate entries into NCIC/LEAPS shall be modified to reflect the location of missing juveniles.
- I. MGL Chapter 119, Section 39A allows parents of newborn infants to abandon their babies at a hospital, manned fire station, or police station within seven (7) days of birth without being charged criminally with abuse or neglect based solely on the abandonment. [41.2.6]