



# Monroe County Sheriff's Office

## *Executive Order #203 Police Reform and Reinvention Plan*

### *Executive Summary*

The Monroe County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) recognizes the capacity and significance of the change in culture necessary to respond to the evolution of the communities we serve. When New York State Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order #203, our agency viewed this as an opportunity to validate our high standards and also look for areas of growth to develop new ideas and implementations for the future of policing.

Starting August 2020, the MCSO began a thorough analysis to help identify significant needs and areas for improvement within the agency in order to improve the trust and confidence within the communities we serve. Currently, over thirty policies and procedures are under review and undergoing changes or adjustments. We collaborated with multiple stakeholders during this process, to include community forums, faith based organizations, and community leaders. We received significant community input, over 2,000 community survey responses, and a survey of our current deputies to gather first hand experience on our path forward in response to the current climate of policing.

The result of our collaboration and internal review process has provided us with feedback, which indicates we are not in need of a major overhaul and our department has been in the right direction for several years. However, this process has provided us with an opportunity to place a greater emphasis in five specific areas. These five elements are outlined in the following pages and are the focus of our long-term efforts. Our endeavors are going to be adaptable and will evolve as times change. However, the underlying fundamentals of shared understanding and mutual respect between law enforcement and the public will remain of the utmost importance.

Restoring the relationship between the community and law enforcement is the core mission of our plan. The MCSO anticipates a new beginning to help build the relationship between the public and law enforcement on a fact based dialogue. We will continue to measure our progress and always be open to feedback and opportunities for growth.

*I remain committed to working together for solutions; we have been  
and remain steadfast in building up the community that we love.*

*-Sheriff Todd K. Baxter*

## The Plan

*During our self-evaluation, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office re-committed our priority to five key areas. These topics are common elements of the "President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing" which served as a foundation for our work on Executive Order #203. We have begun work on identifying and achieving objectives under these five key areas, and will continue our efforts well past the April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 deadline imposed by the Executive Order.*

### 1) TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

*Current national and local conversation has law enforcement under question. MCSO already achieves a high standard of transparency, which can increase with the implementation of the four main objectives below. Each objective is designed to become more transparent and open with the community while nurturing trust with the public and our membership.*

- ★ **Sheriff's Website and Phone App** – The Sheriff's Website and App will provide the community with resources (mental health, domestic violence, addiction, poverty, etc.) and allow our agency to share information and statistics of current on-goings with local law enforcement. Having technological communication available to the community will promote transparency and the opportunity for them to give feedback and provide input on their community's needs
- ★ **Sheriff's Citizen Interaction Committee (SCIC) and Annual Citizen's Survey** – The SCIC is a chance for the community to engage one on one with the Sheriff, Todd K. Baxter, to ask questions, stay informed, and provide input. Along with the SCIC, the MCSO will implement the Annual Citizen's survey, which will allow MCSO to continue seeking feedback about community relations, accountability, and deputy interactions. The SCIC will be given the chance to provide direct input to current topics with the department, reviewing policies, and taking part in a thorough explanation of what the police do every day for the community
- ★ **Pledge to Continue NYSLEAP Accreditation** – MCSO is currently accredited and has been since 1992 by this independent body. The MCSO plans to continue this high standard of excellence for years to come. This process subjects our agency to a thorough external evaluation to ensure we meet or exceed general expectations of quality in the field. Obtaining accreditation standards ensures appropriate training, promotes public confidence in law enforcement agencies, and increases the effectiveness and efficiency of law enforcement agencies utilizing personnel, equipment, and facilities
- ★ **Educational Opportunities for the Public** – Deputies and the community would like the MCSO to become more transparent in sharing information with the public. Sharing information about critical incidents and body camera footage from the beginning will help fact based narratives. In addition, MCSO will begin to offer opportunities for ride alongs, participation in reality based training, defensive tactics, and de-escalation techniques to the public so they can provide better input about the role of law enforcement. Providing additional knowledge and education to the public about the role of the police will help support a fact based dialogue when discussing police matters

## 2) LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING

*The MCSO has identified we can achieve significant improvement in regards to training and preparing our deputies and future leaders for the challenges they will face. Our intent is to ensure our membership and leaders exhibit the characteristics the public desires in its police force*

- ✦ **Embracing a Guardian Mindset** – MCSO has identified improvement needs to be made for deputies to continue embodying the guardian mindset, placing a greater emphasis on selfless service and compassion in our work. The first step towards this goal will be to implement procedural justice training, called “Principled Policing” through NYS DCJS. This program focuses on the way police interact with the public and is one-step towards ensuring our deputies believe in and represent a guardian mindset. Although a guardian mindset is essential, being capable of operating in a warrior mode is as critical so deputies can perform during high risk, lifesaving operations such as active shooter events
- ✦ **Multi-Cultural Training** – MCSO will expand on educating our deputies about diversity in the various communities we police. For example, engaging with people who have developmental disabilities such as autism, African American history and culture, marginalized communities such as Deaf and Hard of Hearing, LGBTQI, and immigrant communities, etc. MCSO will offer thorough and transformative diversity training on a yearly basis to help our deputies better engage and provide services to a multicultural society
- ✦ **Preparing our Future Leaders** – MCSO is currently researching opportunities for a more formal, external leadership program that better prepares and supports our leaders to be able to handle today’s complex issues. The program’s key focus’ would be effective communication, human relations, and our role in the community

## 3) INSTILL A VALUES BASED CULTURE

*In order to break down organizational silos, MCSO has completely redesigned and implemented a new values based culture to build upon our professional, inclusive, and dignity based workplace amongst all of our bureaus (Police, Jail, Civil and Court). MCSO commits to securing a safe and prosperous community and cultivating the trust and respect of all those we serve by providing exemplary law enforcement services that reflect our core values of respect, integrity, teamwork and excellence*

- ✦ **Creation and implementation of a new evaluation format** – A new performance evaluation is currently under development for the upcoming year. The efforts to reformat and reconstruct our evaluation design will help change the trajectory of an employee’s career, set expectations, and highlight positive performances. Sergeant level and above will perform 360 evaluations to focus on core competencies and developmental opportunities
- ✦ **Changes to the promotional process** – Currently, NYS Civil Service testing dictates the next leaders in our organization. With additional standards added to our promotional process, we can promote individuals based on desired traits and not just a test score. During the promotional process, a member will submit along with their NYS Civil Service Assessments, a 360-degree feedback form from their subordinates (if applicable), peers, supervisors, and a self-evaluation. The process will begin to build trust, performance, and productivity amongst the staff.

- ✦ **Building an Inclusive Workplace** – Recruitment efforts to attract, and retain exceptionally qualified and diverse applicants, to include, but not limited to, diversity of thought, experience, ethnicity, age, gender, race, abilities, and sexual orientation are at the forefront of our staffing efforts. Creating a diverse workforce is necessary in the steps to effective police reform. Our recruiting teams will continue their efforts in retaining diverse applicants and candidates to promote different talents, and bring different perspectives to our department
- ✦ **Evidenced Based Policing for Transparency and Service** – In 2021 an independent labor study will be conducted at the MCSO to analyze data, and research on all bureaus of the department to provide the best possible police service to our communities. The study will identify statistics on call volume, identification of the types of calls, staffing, deployment of resources, etc. The goal of this effort is to determine appropriate staffing and deployment methods of what works and what does not. Conducting a study such as this will promote trust and legitimacy within the community. The MCSO is also working with Measures for Justice, an independent third party whom analyzes county data including bail, incarceration, police data, racial ethnic disparities, age, race, and offense types, etc. to provide information for discussion on decisions made for the future

#### 4) COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*As we made our way through this review process, the communities we serve and our own members have made it clear; in order to build positive and trusting relationships between the public and our deputies, we must continue to expand our community engagement efforts and search for new and innovative opportunities. The following objectives have been collected from our community forums, community engagement survey, and conversations with the public*

- ✦ **Steps with Deps** – MCSO will schedule dates where several deputies, supervisors and/or command staff can walk the neighborhood to talk with the people who live there. Engaging with the public in a positive light and having non-emergency engagement will start to develop relationships and trust with community members
- ✦ **Big's in Blue** – Big's in Blue is a one to one mentoring program which would connect MCSO Deputies with local school aged youth. The goal of this program is to begin building relationships and trust between the youth and law enforcement. Creating strong bonds between law enforcement and the youth will begin to bridge the gap between the police and our younger population
- ✦ **Open Houses / Community Fairs** – Community outreach events have been a consistent trend among the requests in our reform plan. These events will allow the Monroe County Sheriff's Office to display what they offer and allow the public to interact with deputies first hand. Open houses will provide the community an opportunity to communicate with deputies whom patrol their area, ask questions, and gain explanation of specialized units in the department
- ✦ **Building Youthful Relationships** – In addition to the latter efforts, the MCSO plans to redesign our community engagement efforts and expand our community liaison program, specifically towards the youth. This will be accomplished by dedicating personnel and resources to building positive and healthy relationships with the youth

## 5) CRISIS INTERVENTION SUPPORT

*MCSO has identified a significant need for a better-structured mental health support system for both responding deputies and the public. There are currently multiple successful examples of programs that provide such support, such as the Officer Wellness Program and the Monroe County Forensic Intervention Team. We will pledge to continue to support and embrace these programs while searching for additional opportunities to expand their reach*

★ **Interdepartmental Mentoring Programs** – New deputy recruits will receive an interdepartmental mentor to set the standard for professional growth and performance from the beginning. Recognizing the importance of demonstrating those characteristics from the start will show what the MCSO desires our members to exhibit.

★ **Professional Support for Deputies Post Critical Incident** – Currently, there is no consistency with services available for deputies after critical incidents. MCSO does provide a peer support program and takes part in the Officer Assistance Program, yet still there are significant voids in opportunities to help our members deal with the significant and often daily stressors of the job. The MCSO pledges to devote critical resources (time and money) in order to expand the quality of care offered and the ability to reach every member in need. This will require significant external support from qualified professionals who are familiar with law enforcement

### ★ **Multi-discipline Response**

- The FIT (Forensic Intervention Team) team has had a significantly positive impact on the relationship between individuals in crisis and law enforcement. MCSO will continue to support this effort with conversations to expand services, hours, and staffing
- The MCSO is currently collaborating with Roberts Wesleyan College to research a collaborative effort of social work, psychology and law enforcement in efforts to responding to a person in crisis. Two follow on long-term goals are to provide educational opportunities that prepare service professionals for work alongside law enforcement, as well as create a law enforcement certificate program for deputies and officers that wish to pursue advance training in mental health

### **Conclusion**

*Throughout this review process, the MCSO has collaborated with several community groups and key stakeholders, including our deputies, who have helped us evaluate and identify opportunities for growth. As an agency, we are extremely proud of the progress and achievements we have accomplished over the years, and those yet to come. Our law enforcement accreditation success since 1992 is a testament to the commitment and hard work of our deputies and civilian staff. We will always be open to honest conversations regarding new opportunities as we strive to achieve the highest level of mutual trust and respect within our communities*

*“The police are the public and the public are the police.” - Sir Robert Peel*