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PRESS RELEASE

Chester County Law Enforcement Is Prepared for Active Threat Incidents

In the wake of the Florida school shooting, many people have asked whether Chester County law enforcement is prepared for such an incident. On behalf of the Chester County District Attorney's Office, Police Chiefs Association, and Department of Emergency Services, the response is simple: we are prepared, but hope never to be called on to use that preparation.

Below we describe some of the basic steps that we take to deal with an active shooter or active threat scenario. These tactics include monitoring and prevention, the initial response, and dealing with a mass casualty event. At the conclusion, we offer a few common sense suggestions.

A. Monitoring and Prevention

Chester County law enforcement spends a significant amount of time monitoring and preventing potential threats. We may receive information that an individual is unstable or threatening violence through tips from family or friends, social media, or direct police contact. We check to see if the individual has a

history of violence, psychological issues, and/or access to weapons. We then seek to intervene before any violent action happens.

Sometimes a conversation is enough. Sometimes treatment and counseling is required. Sometimes further monitoring is called for or other law enforcement strategies. Whatever tactic we use, the point is to deter the potential threat, all while working within the United States and Pennsylvania Constitutions.

Monitoring and prevention is hard work. For every 100 tips we receive, maybe one tip actually represents a viable threat. But every tip must be followed up and investigated. When District Attorney Hogan was a federal prosecutor, he worked extensively with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force. The prosecutors and agents understood that their job was to stop crime before the bombs went off and the bullets started to fly. The unofficial motto of the group was, "If we succeed, you will never hear about us. If we fail, nobody will ever forget our names." The JTTF quietly took off groups that were planning attacks on police stations, places of worship, government buildings, and other civilian targets. This sort of work places extraordinary pressure on law enforcement to keep the public safe. Chester County law enforcement works with local, state, and federal agencies at all levels to monitor and prevent active shooters.

B. Response

If an active shooter incident happens, all 46 law enforcement agencies in Chester County have received the same training. The first officer to arrive at the scene immediately enters the building, finds the shooter, and neutralizes the threat. The officers do not wait for back-up and do not hesitate. Every second that goes by represents another life potentially lost.

Depending on where you are in Chester County, a local police officer will be on the scene as quickly as 90 seconds after the initial 911 call. During such a shooting incident, jurisdictional lines do not matter. The nearest police officer from any area will respond, and police will keep responding from all over until the threat is neutralized.

Under the old model of responding to an active shooter, the first officer would wait for back-up or SWAT to arrive. The Chester County Police Chiefs Association and District Attorney's Office created a working group in 2012 to address this issue and form a detailed response plan. After studying hundreds of active shooter incidents across the globe in the last 30 years, as well as meeting

with police agencies who had experienced active shooter events, Chester County law enforcement instead adopted an immediate engagement strategy. That strategy has subsequently been adopted by the FBI, various state police organizations, and the majority of law enforcement in the United States.

The Chiefs Association and District Attorney then sponsored and ran live training for every police officer in Chester County to confront and neutralize an active shooter immediately. Chief Jerry Simpson of the Southern Chester County Regional Police Department and the Chester County SWAT teams were key leaders in creating and implementing this program. The officers have been instructed, drilled, recorded, critiqued, and drilled again on how to respond. This training continues every year.

The following link shows a training exercise where a Chester County police officer responds to a 911 call for an active shooter in a school. <https://youtu.be/ha6eVYgcoWU>. The recording picks up with the officer getting out of his police car. He knows the shooter is in the school, but not where. He has to follow the sounds of the shooting. He has been trained to ignore victims, because he must neutralize the shooter before the victims can be treated. When he finds the shooter, he must act decisively and immediately, or he will be another victim. This recording shows a highly trained and disciplined police officer responding according to our Chester County protocol.

Simply put, if there is an active shooter in Chester County, the first police officer at the scene will enter the building and neutralize the threat as fast as possible. This will put the officer's life in danger, but that is part of the job of a police officer.

C. Mass Casualty Events

An active shooter event usually ends quickly, lasting only a few minutes. But the aftermath of a mass casualty event is a complex and painstaking process. The Chester County Department of Emergency Services ("DES") has played a crucial role together with law enforcement in creating the plans to deal with a mass casualty event.

After a shooter has been neutralized by the police, the first priority will be medical treatment for the injured. Then there will be crime scene issues, interviews of survivors, reunification with families, addressing the media, traffic management, and numerous other logistical details. DES has taken the

responsibility of spearheading these duties, which includes coordinating with law enforcement, other first responders, and the medical community. Every year, DES runs a full-scale mock event or table top exercise for everybody to practice, review their roles, and address any problems. DES also works directly with schools to do vulnerability assessments, emergency response planning, training for teachers and staff, and providing funding for school safety issues like creating remote access for law enforcement to school security cameras.

Thus, from prevention through reaction through after-action planning, Chester County is and has been prepared for an active shooter.

D. Suggestions

In order to help us deal with active threats, we have three common sense suggestions. First, have school students practice the “run, hide, fight” protocol for an active shooter at least twice every year. Kids in the 1950’s practiced getting under their desks for a potential atomic bomb. Students practice fire drills all the time. Practice minimizes fear and leads to better responses.

Second, do not arm teachers. Our law enforcement and military go through extensive and ongoing training to address active shooters; most teachers lack that training. In addition, teachers may lose a gun or have their guns stolen, creating more danger. Finally, when responding to an active shooter situation, our officers are trained to neutralize the threat. If a police officer charges into a school in response to an active shooter and finds an adult wielding a gun, that person is going to be treated as a threat and neutralized, which may mean being shot. The police officer will not find out until later that the person with the gun was a teacher. Instead of arming teachers, schools need better engineered security (such as a single secured entry point) and, if economically possible, an armed and trained school resource police officer in the building.

Third and finally, help us to prevent these threats. Lock up your firearms. Let us know if a friend or family member is a potential threat. Pay attention to your surroundings.

We all hope that we never lose a single child to an active shooter, much less go through what happened in Sandy Hook or Parkland. But if an active shooter event happens here, rest assured that Chester County is prepared. Our children are worth it.

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