

MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE



**ANNUAL PURSUIT REPORT
2020**

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

As you will see in this report, there were 46 pursuits in 2020, 4 fewer than in 2019 but 5 more than in 2018. Most were in pursuit of someone suspected of a serious crime, lasted less than five minutes, and covered three miles or less.

This is much different from show-business police chases, which can go on for quite a few minutes over long distances, ending in some sort of dramatic conclusion. However, in real life, police chases are much different.

Under MCPD policy, a criminal pursuit is justified if an officer believes a serious crime has been committed or is being committed. A traffic-related pursuit is justified if the officer sees someone driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics, or if there is a hit-and-run or personal injury collision, or when the officer has reasonable cause to believe a serious physical injury has occurred.

Since 2016, 49% of pursuits by officers were for individuals suspected of driving under the influence; 45.5% were for subjects eluding police who were involved in felony offenses such as stolen vehicles; and the remaining percentage were for other offenses or violations, such as weapons offenses and narcotics-related offenses.

The MCPD conducts an in-depth review of every vehicular pursuit to make certain those guidelines are followed, and if not, appropriate follow-up actions are promptly taken.

In addition, a supervisor will monitor and decide on whether to allow the chase to continue. Safety is the primary concern, whether the safety of the public, the safety of the officer, or the safety of the person(s) who are fleeing.

Again, as you will note in this report, most of our pursuits end without incident. But when a police pursuit ends with a crash or someone getting injured or killed, the public will ask questions and demand accountability. Rest assured; those are the same questions and the same level of accountability that the MCPD brings to each police pursuit we engage in.



OVERVIEW

The information contained in this report is obtained from the MCP 610, *Motor Vehicle Pursuit Report*, the form completed by a supervisor from the district where a police pursuit originated. All reports are reviewed to verify compliance with department policy by the supervisor, a District executive, and the Assistant Chief of the respective bureau.

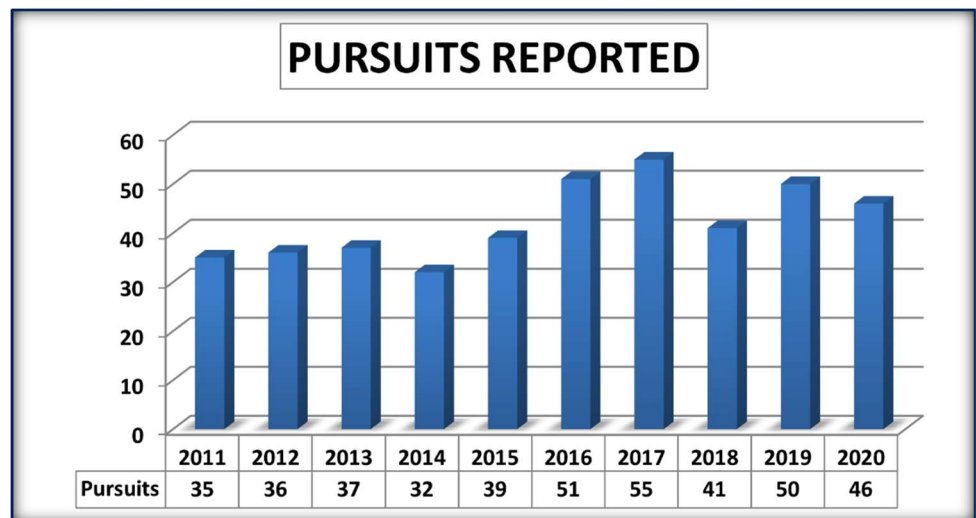
A vehicular pursuit is defined by policy as *an active attempt by an officer in a vehicle to apprehend an occupant of a moving motor vehicle who exhibits a clear intention to avoid apprehension by maintaining elevated speed, increasing speed, and/or using evasive tactics.*

On an annual basis, the Montgomery County Department of Police reviews and analyzes the data collected from the MCP 610 forms obtained in that calendar year and the pursuit policy (Function Code 135).

Per Function Code 135, *Vehicle Pursuits*, pursuit of a vehicle is authorized only when the offense for which the suspect is being pursued is one of the following:

1. **Criminal:** Felony or the officer has reason to believe a felony has occurred or is occurring. Note: In order for 2nd Degree Assault on a Police Officer to be a felony, physical injury means “any impairment of physical condition, excluding minor injuries”, and “a person may not intentionally cause physical injury to another if the person knows or has reason to know that the other is a law enforcement officer engaged in the performance of the officer’s official duties.”
2. **Traffic:**
 - a. Driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics (*misdemeanor*).
 - b. Hit-and-run, personal injury collision when the officer has reasonable cause to believe serious physical injury has occurred (*felony*).

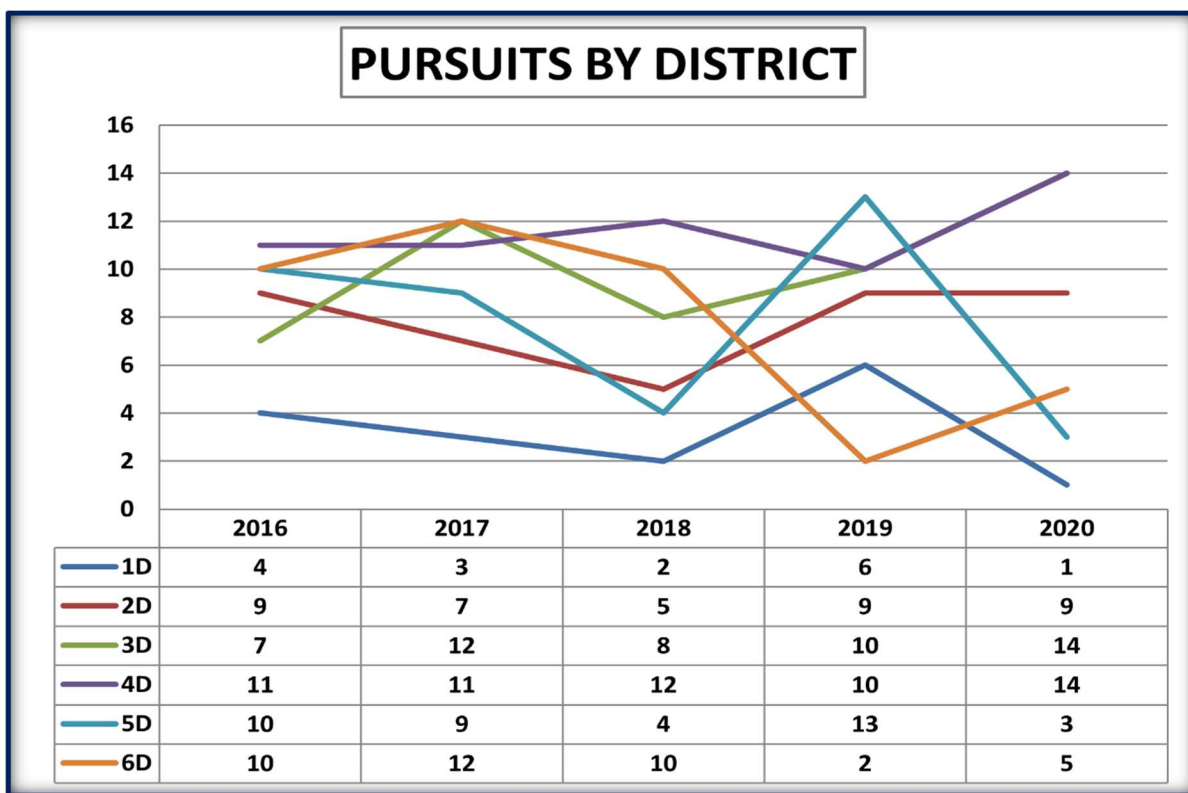
In 2020, there were 46 pursuits, four fewer pursuits than reported in 2019, or a decrease of 10.0%. However, the number of pursuits remains higher than the department’s 10-year pursuit average of 42.2 pursuits per year. In 2020, there were zero pursuits that were deemed to be non-compliant with FC 135.



2020 PURSUIT ANALYSIS

By District

The graph below illustrates the frequency by district in which Montgomery County police officers initiated a pursuit in 2020 and highlights trends over the last five years. In 2020, the number of pursuits increased in all districts except 1D (*Rockville*) and 5D (*Germantown*), while remaining consistent in 2D (*Bethesda*). The largest decreases in pursuits (83.3% and 76.9% respectively) occurred in 1D (*Rockville*) and 5D (*Germantown*). The *Silver Spring*, and *Wheaton* districts recorded totals higher than their five-year averages in 2020, while *Montgomery Village* district totals increased from 2019 but remained below its five-year pursuit averages. One pursuit initiated in 2020 crossed into another district. Since 2016, the total number of pursuits has decreased 11.6%.

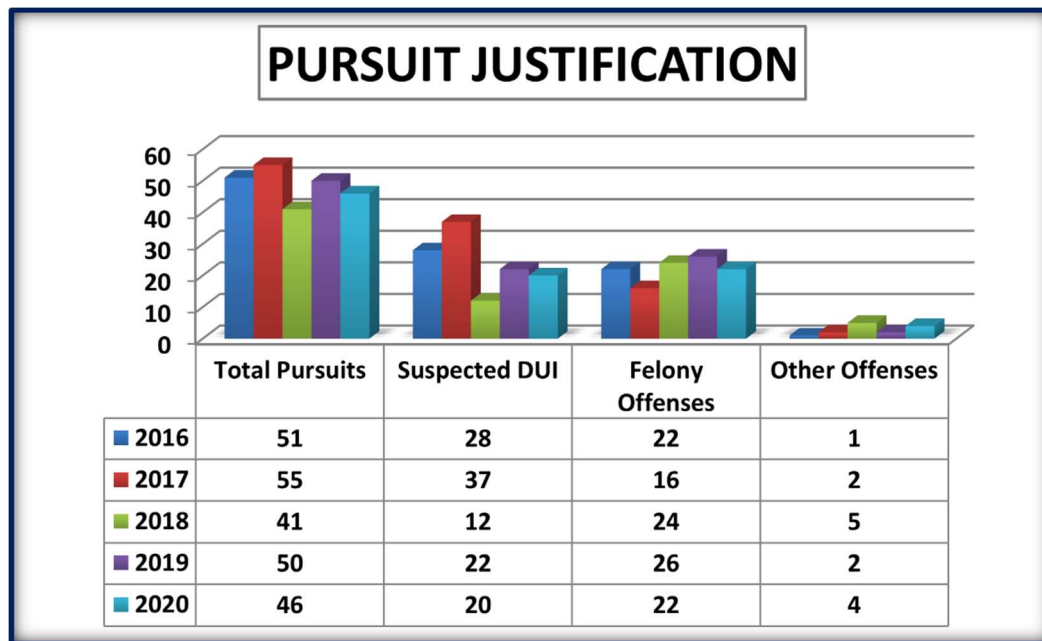


The following table shows the five-year pursuit averages (2016 – 2020) for all districts.

DISTRICT	AVERAGE NUMBER OF PURSUIT
1	3
2	8
3	10
4	12
5	8
6	8

By Justification

In 2020, apprehension of suspects engaged in a variety of *felony offenses* and suspected of *driving under the influence* (DUI) were the primary reasons that officers initiated pursuits (49% and 43%, respectively). The remaining four pursuits (9%) were initiated for purposes including assisting another agency in pursuit, a traffic offense, and monitoring suspicious activity and gang investigation enhancement.



Since 2016, 49% of pursuits by officers were for individuals suspected of *driving under the influence*; 45.5% were for subjects eluding police who were involved in *felony offenses* such as stolen vehicles; and the remaining percentage were for other offenses or violations, such as *weapons offenses* and *narcotics-related offenses*.

By Location

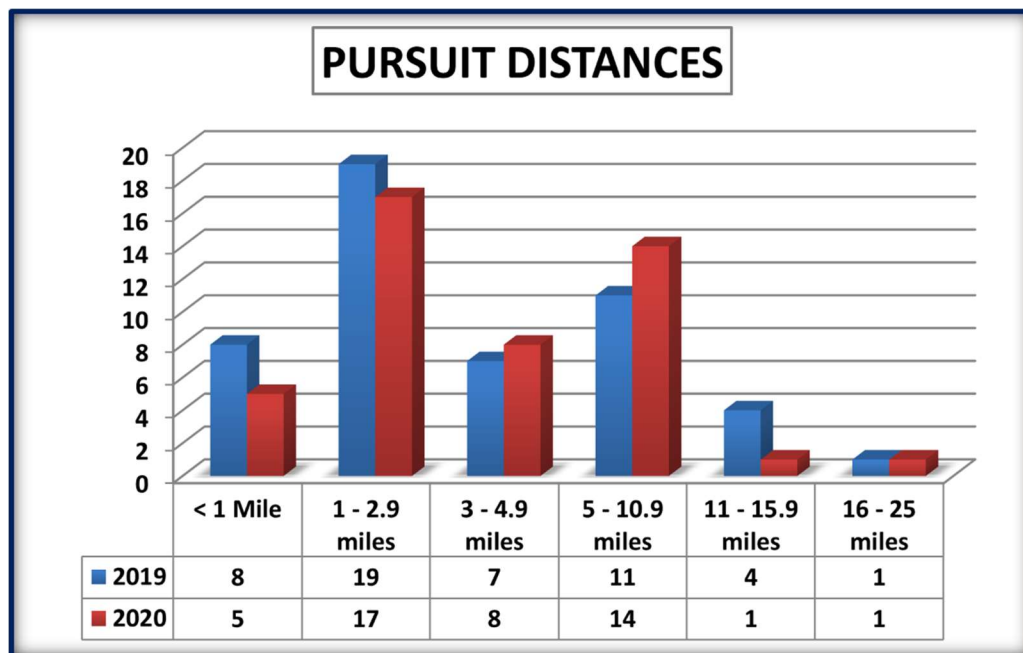
Function Code 135 states that “Officers may pursue into a neighboring jurisdiction only when an officer has probable cause to believe the crime committed was a felony of a violent type.”

In 2019, Montgomery County police officers pursued suspects outside the county’s jurisdictional boundaries in three incidents (6%). In 2020, there were zero incidents which crossed the county boundary, eight pursuits were terminated at or prior to the county line in compliance with FC 135.

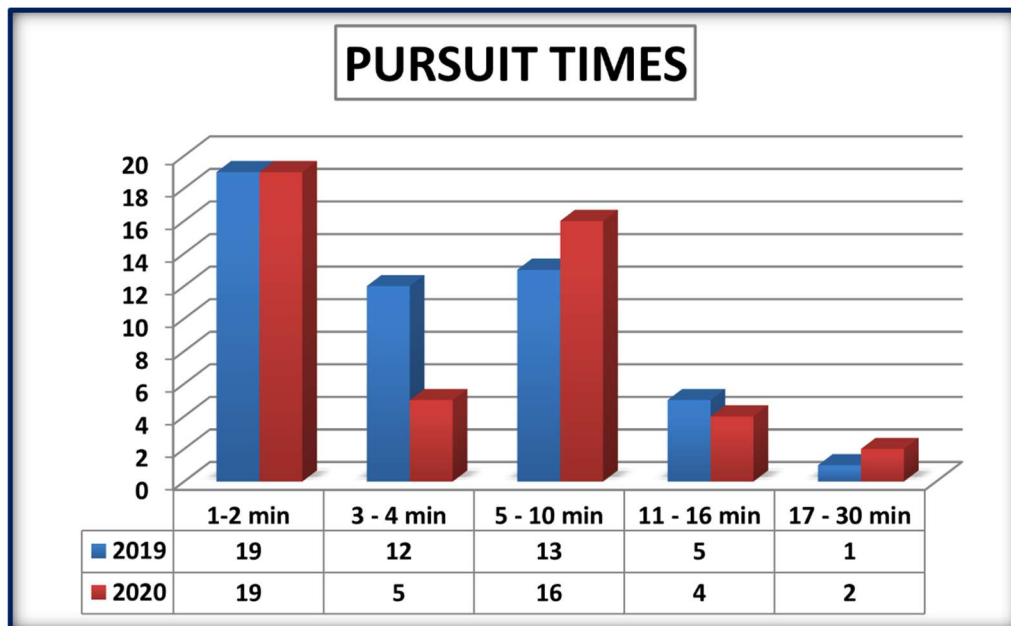
By Distance & Duration

The frequency of pursuit *distances* and *times* in 2020 saw a shift from those in 2019, in which approximately 52% of the pursuits in Montgomery County lasted less than five minutes, compared to 62% in 2019. There was a significant decrease (58.3%) in pursuits lasting three to four minutes in 2020, however, a 23% increase was noted in pursuits lasting between five and ten minutes. There were only six pursuits that lasted longer than 10 minutes in 2020, which were the same number of pursuits reported in 2019. The longest pursuit in 2020 was 20 minutes long and traveled a distance of 27 miles.

The *distances* and *times* for all pursuits reported in 2020 are reflected in the following charts.



The data shows that on average from 2019 - 2020, most vehicle pursuits ranged from *one* to *three* miles.



The data shows that on average for the two-year period, most pursuits (39.6%) ended within *one* to *two* minutes or within *five* to *ten* minutes (30.2%).

SUSPECT ANALYSIS

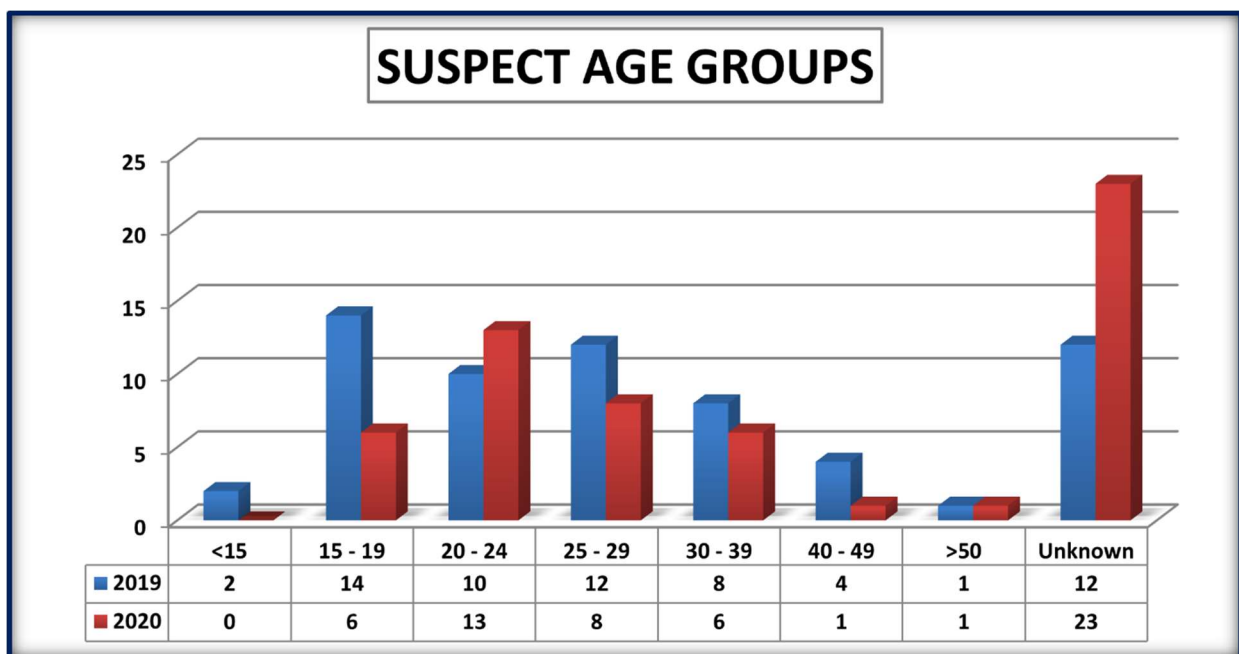
Apprehension is not the primary goal of a police vehicle pursuit; *the safety of the officer and the public are the most important aspects since the risks are high for all.* Officers and supervisors must balance the

inherent safety risks with the urgency to apprehend the driver.

In 2020, suspects were able to successfully evade police officers in 24 of the 46 pursuits (52% of the time) compared to 26% of the time in 2019 by driving at extremely high rates of speed, fleeing on foot once the vehicle stopped or was involved in a collision, or the pursuits were terminated by supervisors for various reasons, generally due to crossing jurisdictional boundaries, traffic conditions, or public safety concerns.

The demographic data in the chart below reflects information for the suspects that were apprehended during the pursuits, as well as the random data that was known about the suspects who were able to elude apprehension.

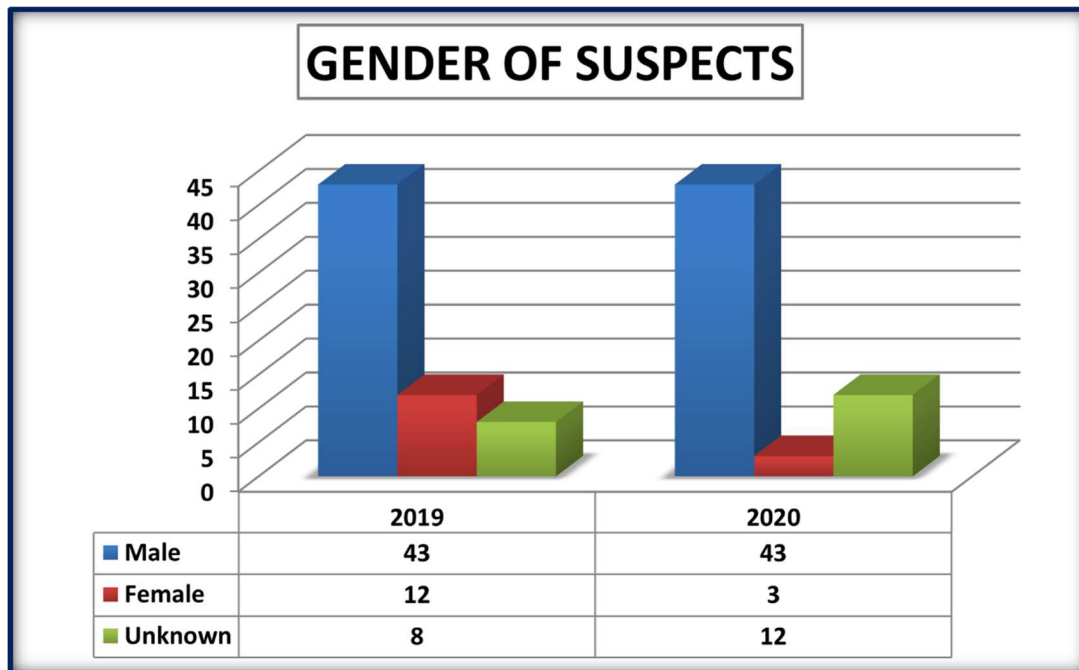
Suspect Age Groups



In 2020, the number of suspects ages 15 to 29 decreased 25% compared to 2019. Suspects in the other age groups over the two-year period generally remained consistent. Historically, suspects ages 15 to 29 account for approximately two-thirds of the individuals involved in police pursuits.

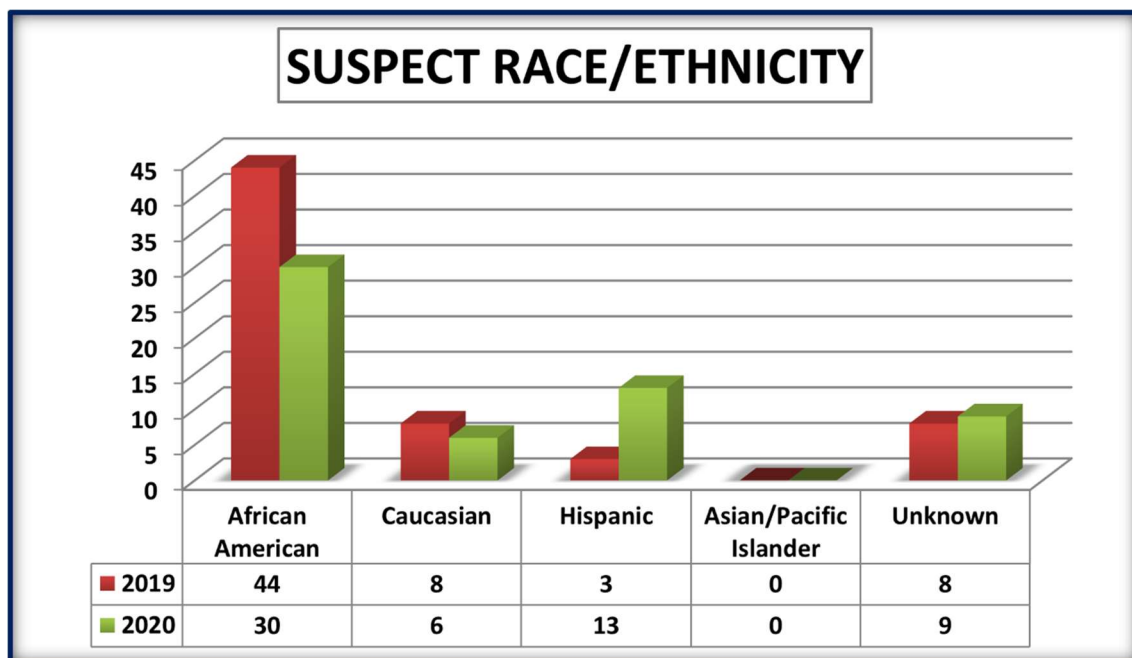
The charts on the following page summarize the *gender* and *race/ethnicity* of the *suspects* involved in pursuits within the past two years.

Suspect Gender



Male suspects accounted for the majority of individuals involved in pursuits (74%) in 2020, compared to 68.3% of pursuits in 2019. From 2019 – 2020, *males* accounted for 71.1% of the suspects involved in pursuits.

Suspect Race/Ethnicity



In 2020, 51.7% of the suspects involved in police pursuits were *African American* compared to 69.8% in 2019.

Caucasian suspects accounted for 10.5% of the individuals involved in pursuits in 2020 compared to 12.7% in 2019. *Hispanic* suspects accounted for 22.8% of the suspects involved in pursuits in 2020 compared to only 4.8% in 2019. For the two-year period from 2019 – 2020, the data shows the following:

- *African American* suspects were involved in 44.9% of police pursuits.
- *Caucasian* suspects were involved in 8.5% of police pursuits.
- *Hispanic* suspects were involved in 9.7% of pursuits.

Note: In 10.3% of police pursuits, the suspect's race/ethnicity was unknown.

NOTABLE ANALYSIS

Additional Resources

Police pursuits can be dangerous. In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis nationally on utilizing tactical maneuvers to end police pursuits. In 82% of the pursuits in 2020, there were no special tactics or additional resources used, compared to 88% in 2019.

Seven of the pursuits reported in 2020 (15.5%) involved the use of other resources, including other agencies, K9 teams or aircraft, and in three incidents (6.7%), the police department deployed stop sticks to end the pursuit. MCPD policy prohibits the use of rolling roadblocks and tactical vehicle intervention, but does allow tire deflating devices (*e.g. stop sticks*) to be used by officers trained in the use of such devices. Suspects were still able to evade the police in two of these instances, while the suspect in the third instance was apprehended. One collision occurred during a pursuit in which stop sticks were deployed, which resulted in damage to both the suspect and department vehicles, but no injuries were reported.

Supervisors terminated eighteen of the 46 pursuits (39.1%) in accordance with *Function Code 135*, primarily when the subject(s) left the county, exited onto an interstate highway, or fled at a high rate of speed which increased the risk associated with the pursuit, and the dangers to the officers and the public outweighed continuation of the pursuit. This more than doubled (125%) the eight (16%) pursuits that were terminated for similar reasons in 2019.

Use of Force in Response to Resistance

Overall, there were 7 pursuits in 2020 (15.2%) in which force was used by police officers in response to resistance by suspects, compared to 20% of pursuits in 2019.

Twelve (12) of the 46 pursuits (26%) in Montgomery County in 2020 resulted in a "*bailout*", which occurs when the suspect(s) stop or crash the vehicle and flee on foot, compared to 36% of the pursuits reported in 2019. Suspects were subsequently apprehended in approximately two-thirds of these instances. Nine incidents involving bailouts (75%) also involved collisions, compared to 12 incidents in 2019. These collisions involved damage to suspect vehicles, civilian vehicles and department vehicles, which also caused injuries to suspects, civilians, and police officers, as well as related property damage.

Collisions

Of the 46 pursuits that occurred in 2020, 22 (47.8%) resulted in a collision, compared to 27 collisions (54%) reported in 2019. A detailed breakdown by district of the 22 collisions related to pursuits in 2020 is provided in the table on the next page.

PURSUITS INVOLVING COLLISIONS SUMMARY							
DISTRICT	COLLISIONS	DAMAGED SUSPECT VEHICLES	SUSPECTS INJURED	DAMAGED CIVILIAN VEHICLES	CIVILIANS INJURED	DAMAGED MCPD VEHICLES	POLICE OFFICERS INJURED
1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0
2	5	6	0	3	0	1	0
3	5	5	0	3	0	1	1
4	7	7	0	0	0	5	0
5	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
6	2	3	0	0	0	1	0
TOTALS	22	24	1	6	0	9	1

Of the 22 pursuits that ended in a collision in 2020, the suspect's vehicle was involved in nearly all (95.5%), compared to 96.3% of the collisions reported in 2019. One person (suspects/passengers) was injured in collisions in 2020, compared to nine people in 2019. Six privately-owned civilian vehicles were damaged and two civilians were injured in 2020, compared to four civilian injuries reported in 2019. Nine police vehicles sustained damage and there was one police officer injured during the pursuits in 2020, compared to six police vehicles damaged and zero injuries to officers in 2019.

SUMMARY

With more than one million people living in Montgomery County and thousands more travelling through the county each year, pursuits rarely occur. There were more than 106,000 traffic stops made in 2019, yet only 50 pursuits resulted from these encounters, an occurrence rate of 0.05%. Conversely, in 2020, there were only 39,407 traffic stops but 46 pursuits still occurred, a rate of 0.1%. The significant decrease in traffic stops is likely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the closure of schools and business, increasing home and virtual work, thereby reducing the need for travel and volume of cars on the road. Surprisingly, instances of individuals suspected of driving under the influence (DUI) and felony offenses, such as stolen vehicles, remained fairly consistent with the previous year. Living in a time of uncertainty and isolation may have triggered adverse behavior among individuals as a coping mechanism.

The Montgomery County Department of Police continues to be proactive in the area of driver safety, in an effort to reduce the number of law enforcement officer deaths, disabilities, and injuries caused by traffic-related incidents. The Public Safety Training Academy (PSTA) increased staffing in 2019 to include a full-time Driving Training Program Manager to coordinate emergency vehicle operator course training and refresher training to increase and reinforce safe driving habits and skills for safe vehicle operation. The department has also taken measures to focus on more in-depth data collection and analysis to identify root causes of collisions so targeted intervention and preventive measures can be instituted to reduce the potential for collisions and injuries in general.

The Montgomery County Department of Police remains dedicated to creating a culture of safety and accountability. As such, a copy of this report will be distributed to all Patrol Services Bureau Commanders and the Director of the Training and Education Division for review and identification of

any additional training or policy review which may be necessary on an operational level.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

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