

# Pursuit Policy Recommendations (Background Document)

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## Introduction

In light of recent tragedies and ongoing community concerns, the San Diego Commission on Police Practices embarked on a comprehensive evaluation of the vehicle pursuit policies at the San Diego Police Department (SDPD). This initiative was catalyzed by a series of tragic events, most notably the heartbreaking deaths of 8-year-old Malakai and 4-year-old Mason Orozco-Romero. Their untimely passing, along with serious injuries to their mother and aunt, underscored the urgent need for reform in police pursuit policies. Deeply impacted by these events, the Commission has worked tirelessly to understand and address the factors that led to these losses, with the goal of ensuring such incidents do not recur.

The formation of an ad hoc Pursuit Policy Committee reflects the Commission's dedication to re-evaluating SDPD's Procedure 1.03 – Pursuit Procedures, with a focus on aligning our policies with both national and international best practices. This document serves as the background and foundation for a forthcoming set of pursuit policy recommendations. Through this evaluation, the Commission has sought to shed light on the critical areas for policy improvement, informed by extensive research and an in-depth analysis conducted over the past months.

Since the initial tragic events, the Commission has continued to document the repercussions of vehicle pursuits within the San Diego community. Despite incremental progress, these pursuits have led to further harm, including the recent deaths of Officer Austin Marchitar and teen driver Edgar Oviedo, as well as serious injuries to Officer Zachary Martinez. Each incident amplifies the community's call for change and highlights the need for SDPD to prioritize the protection and preservation of human life in its policies.

While this document is not the final set of recommendations, it allowed the committee to gain invaluable insights from a multitude of perspectives. Through examining policies from 17 California agencies and seven others nationwide, alongside the latest best practices from international law enforcement bodies, the committee has developed a thorough understanding of what is required to foster public safety effectively. The resulting recommendations, presented here in preliminary form, set the stage for SDPD to take decisive action in the interest of community well-being.

In the following sections, we detail our findings, covering methodology, pursuit criteria, additional recommendations, training needs, and international best practices. The Commission, alongside the San Diego community, urges SDPD to act on these insights, to restore public trust, and to establish a future in which the safety of all citizens is paramount. This moment represents a pivotal opportunity for meaningful reform, and we hope SDPD will embrace it wholeheartedly.

## Methodology

Our approach was both thorough and multidimensional, involving a closer examination of data concerning pursuit-related incidents and their outcomes. This extensive analysis aimed to dissect the effectiveness of pursuits in terms of successful apprehensions, subsequent prosecutions, and convictions. For instance, national statistics reveal that while vehicle pursuits are relatively common, the rate at which they result in arrests and successful prosecutions varies significantly, pointing to the need for a more strategic approach. Specifically, data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicate that only about 30% of pursuits result in arrests, and an even smaller percentage lead to convictions, underscoring potential inefficiencies and the high risks involved.

**Furthermore, our analysis of pursuit data from major California police departments highlights concerning trends in both the frequency of pursuits and the associated risks:**

- **Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD):** In 2021, LAPD experienced the highest number of pursuits at 3,117, a significant increase from 1,756 in 2019. Correspondingly, collisions resulting in injuries rose from 184 in 2019 to 273 in 2021. Notably, fatalities due to collisions peaked at 21 in 2021, tripling the number from 2019.
- **San Diego Police Department (SDPD):** SDPD's pursuits increased from 439 in 2019 to 640 in 2021. Collisions resulting in injuries also saw an upward trend, from 43 in 2019 to 59 in 2022. While fatalities decreased from 4 in 2019 to 1 in both 2021 and 2022, the persistence of fatalities underscores ongoing risks.
- **San Diego County Sheriff's Department:** Pursuits rose from 124 in 2019 to 164 in 2022. Collisions resulting in injuries increased from 8 in 2019 to 15 in 2021, with fatalities first appearing in 2021 and 2022 at one per year.
- **San Francisco Police Department:** Pursuits more than doubled from 97 in 2019 to 201 in 2021. Collisions resulting in injuries increased from 9 in 2019 to 13 in both 2020 and 2022. Fatalities occurred in 2020 and 2022, each with one fatality.
- **Riverside Police Department:** Pursuits peaked at 607 in 2020, up from 460 in 2019. Collisions resulting in injuries increased from 41 in 2019 to 53 in 2021. Fatalities spiked to 4 in 2020 before dropping to zero in subsequent years.
- **Sacramento Police Department:** Pursuits increased from 477 in 2019 to 581 in 2022. Collisions resulting in injuries peaked at 50 in 2021. Fatalities were recorded in 2019 (1) and increased to 2 in both 2021 and 2022.

These statistics illustrate not only an increase in the number of pursuits but also a concerning rise in high-speed pursuits and associated injuries and fatalities. For example, the LAPD reported pursuits reaching speeds over 100 mph, with the highest recorded speed at 180 mph in 2020 and 2021. Similarly, SDPD documented pursuits exceeding 100 mph on both highways and surface streets, with maximum speeds reaching up to 170 mph.

This data underscores the significant risks that high-speed pursuits pose to public safety, officers, and suspects. The increase in pursuits and associated negative outcomes emphasizes the urgent need for policy reforms to mitigate these dangers.

Moreover, the committee meticulously evaluated the San Diego Police Department's (SDPD) pursuit policies against the latest best practices endorsed in the September 2023 report by the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). This report was developed with contributions from leading experts such as Dr. Geoffrey Alpert, Professor at the University of South Carolina and chair of the working group; Chief Jason Potts of the Las Vegas Department of Public Safety; and Colonel Matthew Langer of the Minnesota State Patrol. Their collective expertise, along with insights from other seasoned law enforcement professionals and researchers—including those from PERF staff like Executive Director Chuck Wexler and COPS Office specialists like Nazmia E.A. Comrie—provided a robust foundation for best practices in police pursuits. Our comparative analysis also drew upon wisdom from the PERF report, where they considered the policies from 48 different departments and utilized over 150 reference material, all stemming from a variety of professional studies on police practices, city reports and city policy documentation. This comprehensive review was instrumental in highlighting disparities and identifying areas ripe for reform and could not have been done without the hard work from many communities all over the U.S. .

In addition to statistical evaluation, our methodology encompassed legal scrutiny within the broader framework of California law, particularly focusing on compliance with statutes related to qualified immunity. This legal review ensures that any recommended modifications to pursuit procedures not only enhance operational effectiveness and safety but also adhere strictly to legal standards, thus protecting both the community and law enforcement personnel legally and physically.

## Looking Forward

Imagine a San Diego where every resident—regardless of background or neighborhood—feels secure and respected, where public safety policies are grounded in compassion, fairness, and a shared commitment to preserving life. As one of the world's most visited cities and the largest international border crossing, San Diego is uniquely positioned to model progressive, inclusive, and impactful community policing. The recommendations in this document represent a pivotal opportunity for our city to forge a path where community trust and mutual respect are at the core of every interaction between law enforcement and the public.

If the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) embraces these recommendations, we will step closer to a future where police pursuits are an infrequent necessity, conducted with care, transparency, and a focused regard for the safety of all involved. With cutting-edge tools, rigorous training, and a culture of accountability, our officers can approach every situation with purpose and clarity. This approach will reduce preventable tragedies, strengthen our international ties, and honor the shared values that bind our communities across the border and throughout the city.

As SDPD implements real-time oversight, inclusive review boards, and data-driven decision-making, the city will witness fewer injuries and fewer lives disrupted by high-risk pursuits. Inspired by best practices from across the globe, our police department can lead the nation in transforming pursuit policy and fostering a city where all residents feel protected and heard.

This vision for San Diego goes beyond policy; it is a blueprint for trust and community empowerment. Transparent communication, shared responsibility, and a commitment to our city's diverse residents will demonstrate that SDPD's highest priority is the well-being of every San Diegan. Together, we have the chance to create a safer, more united San Diego, building a legacy that will inspire future generations and show that our collective safety and trust are at the heart of every decision made. Let us make San Diego a global model of safety, respect, and collaboration.

## Criteria for Initiating or Discontinuing a Police Pursuit

When deciding whether to initiate or discontinue a police pursuit, law enforcement officers must weigh several critical factors to ensure public safety. This decision-making process hinges on a careful balance between the need to apprehend the suspect and the potential risk to bystanders, officers, and the suspect themselves. The following guidelines outline the key criteria for starting or stopping a pursuit:

### 1. Imminent Threat to Public Safety:

Officers may only initiate a pursuit when they reasonably believe that failing to apprehend the suspect poses an immediate and significant threat to public safety. This determination should be based on observable behaviors—such as violent actions or credible threats—not merely on reckless driving while fleeing from law enforcement. Pursuing officers must avoid acting on speculative threats, ensuring that their decision reflects real, present dangers. Law enforcement experts emphasize that "imminent threat" should be measured by the suspect's actual actions (e.g., armed robbery or attempted assault), as opposed to hypothetical risks.

### 2. Risk Assessment:

Every pursuit poses risks, both to the public and those involved in the chase. Before initiating or continuing a pursuit, officers must conduct a risk assessment, which includes considering factors such as traffic conditions, time of day, the presence of pedestrians, and weather conditions. The potential danger of the pursuit itself must be lower than the danger posed by allowing the suspect to remain at large. A structured tool like the Pursuit Decision Matrix can help officers quantify these risks, considering the severity of the suspect's crime and the likelihood of harm to bystanders or property. This tool also emphasizes that the safety of innocent civilians must remain the highest priority, and officers should err on the side of caution when the risks are unclear.

### 3. Supervisory Oversight

All pursuits should involve active and real-time supervisory oversight. Supervisors must continuously evaluate whether the pursuit remains necessary, considering the evolving conditions and the nature of the offense. This level of oversight mirrors that of other high-risk police actions, such as the use of lethal force. Research has shown that involving a supervisor in the decision-making process can lead to better outcomes and reduced pursuit incidents. Supervisors should monitor communication with the pursuing officers and intervene if the pursuit becomes too dangerous or if alternative methods of apprehension are available.

### 4. Unjustified Pursuits

Certain types of offenses generally do not justify the risks of a pursuit. Pursuits should be avoided for the following:

- **Property Offenses:** Crimes such as automobile theft or the operation of a stolen vehicle typically do not warrant a pursuit unless other aggravating factors, such as armed resistance, are present.



- **Misdemeanors:** Pursuits for misdemeanor offenses, including failure to yield, should be rare unless there is clear evidence that the suspect poses an immediate danger to the public.
- **Traffic Violations:** Unless reckless driving creates a direct and severe threat to public safety, traffic violations should not lead to pursuits. The pursuit of traffic violators often creates more danger than the initial infraction.
- **Non-Violent Warrants:** Pursuing individuals wanted on non-violent warrants should be avoided, as these cases generally lack an immediate threat to public safety.
- **Civil Infractions:** Pursuits for civil infractions should not be conducted under any circumstances, as the risks far outweigh the benefits.

## **5. Erratic or Dangerous Driving**

If a vehicle is being driven in an erratic or dangerous manner, such as in cases of suspected driving under the influence (DUI), officers may initiate a pursuit if they believe the suspect poses an immediate and serious risk to the public. However, even in these situations, a risk assessment must be conducted, and supervisory oversight is crucial. Pursuing a DUI suspect, for example, might be justified if the driver is swerving dangerously through a crowded area, but the pursuit should be terminated if it endangers more lives than it protects.

In summary, the decision to initiate or discontinue a pursuit should always prioritize public safety above all else. By adhering to these guidelines, officers can ensure that they are making informed, well-calculated decisions in high-pressure situations. These criteria are designed to minimize the risks inherent in police pursuits while ensuring that suspects who pose genuine threats to the community are apprehended effectively.

## **6. Supervisory Authority to Terminate Pursuits**

The Commission recommends that supervisors monitoring pursuits remotely should have the authority to terminate pursuits when they determine that continuing the pursuit poses unnecessary risks to public safety. Officers involved in the pursuit must acknowledge the supervisor's command to terminate and confirm that they have ceased the pursuit. Since supervisors are not directly involved in the chase and are less influenced by the adrenaline of the pursuit, they can make more objective decisions regarding the risk-to-reward ratio. While officers may initially feel frustrated when instructed to discontinue a pursuit, they may soon recognize that their supervisor's decision prioritizes their safety and that of the public. This approach balances the imperative of apprehending suspects with the need to maintain public safety.

## Pursuit Policy Recommendations

1. **Hot Pursuits:** SDPD should create a clear description of when a vehicle pursuit is no longer hot and the circumstances when, after termination of a pursuit, a new pursuit may be initiated. The Commission recommends that after a pursuit has been terminated, a new pursuit may only be initiated if a NEW Serious felony is committed or if a supervisor approves a new pursuit. This aligns with the COPS/PERF recommendation (1.3) and several cities have similar procedures (Boston and Seattle).
2. **Supervisory Monitoring:** The Commission recommends that supervisors must actively monitor and approve vehicle pursuits. If a supervisor is not available, the pursuit will be terminated. This aligns with the COPS/PERF recommendation (2.2), with multiple cities having similar policies (Anaheim, Bakersfield, Baltimore, Boston, Fresno, Houston, Long Beach, New Orleans, Oakland, and Seattle).
3. **Vehicle Pursuit Review Board:** SDPD should create a vehicle pursuit review board, with at least one member of the public or CPP, which will publish a publicly available quarterly report detailing vehicle pursuits SDPD officers engage or participate in. The Board would conduct a comprehensive review of pursuit data, identifying trends, evaluating tactics, and implementing improvements to pursuit policies based on the assessment. This aligns with the COPS/PERF recommendation (4.5, 4.6), with New Orleans having a very clear post-pursuit process.
4. **Pursuit Termination:** The procedure should explicitly state that the driving officer(s) may end a pursuit without authorization when they deem doing so is in the best interest of public safety. Officers who choose to terminate a pursuit will not be disciplined or reprimanded for a decision to terminate a pursuit. The pursuing officer is in the best position to assess the risks in real-time and should not have to wait for confirmation from supervisors to terminate a pursuit if they deem it unsafe. (Chula Vista clearly notes that “no officer or supervisor shall be criticized or disciplined for deciding not to engage in a vehicular pursuit because of the risk involved.”)
5. **Disagreement in Pursuit Termination:** Clarify the procedure regarding disagreements in pursuit termination. The policy should address when supervisors are not in agreement, leaving the decision to the Field Lieutenant or Watch Commander. The Commission recommends that if there is a disagreement among officers or supervisors on whether to continue or terminate a pursuit, the decision should default towards safety (terminate). If an officer involved in the pursuit determines the pursuit is not safe, it should be terminated even if others disagree. Officers who choose to terminate a pursuit will not be disciplined for a decision to terminate a pursuit.
6. **Degree of Care:** The procedures should emphasize that drivers, including exempt drivers under CVC 21055, must still operate their vehicles with the degree of care imposed by common law. CVC Section 21055 does not relieve the driver of a vehicle from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons using the highway. This ensures that their actions do not impose an unreasonable risk of harm on others.
7. **Reasonable and Prudent Behavior:** The Commission recommends examples of what constitutes reasonable and prudent behavior for police pursuit drivers under various circumstances to guide their decision-making during pursuits. For example, officers should consider time of day, traffic, pedestrians, or school zones nearby when determining if it is appropriate to engage in a pursuit. (San Francisco and Boston’s policy do a good job outlining these considerations.)
8. **Pursuit Intervention Tactics:** We recommend that the procedure be updated to detail the circumstances and conditions under which a supervisor may override procedure and approve pursuit intervention tactics like

blocking, ramming, boxing, and roadblocks. Provide clear guidelines on when and how these tactics can be used effectively and safely. SDPD's current procedure does not elaborate on when and/or under what circumstances these tactics are permissible. (This is required by CVC 17004.7 (c)(6))

9. **Speed Limits:** We recommend specific speed limits for pursuits in the policy to comply with the requirements of the CVC. Setting a speed limit helps mitigate risks and ensures the safety of all individuals involved in a pursuit. Chula Vista, San Francisco, and Stockton's policies list the factors that assist in determining the appropriate speed for a pursuit. (This is required by CVC 17004.7 (c)(7))
10. **Approved Vehicles:** Update the procedure to detail which police vehicles are and are not approved to be used in vehicle pursuits. The operation of Police Department Vehicle SDPD Procedure mentions that there are vehicles that are manufactured as "Police Pursuit Vehicles," including being equipped with speed-rated tires. The vehicle pursuit policy states: "Officers driving vans, trucks, and non-pursuit-rated sport utility vehicles should be aware that the vehicles may not handle as well as pursuit-rated vehicles. They should consider turning over the pursuit to the first available unit driving a pursuit-rated vehicle or terminating the pursuit." Since there are specific vehicles intended for vehicle pursuits, it is reasonable that a police vehicle that is not rated as a pursuit vehicle should not be used in a pursuit due to the risk to the officer and the public. (Chicago PD's procedure details the vehicle requirements clearly.)
11. **Revise the Purpose of the SDPD Pursuit Procedures** - The current policy indicates that the purpose is: "This Department procedure establishes guidelines to enhance the effectiveness of a pursuits and reduce the likelihood of incidents that could lead to potential liability." We recommend that "reduce the likelihood of incidents that could lead to potential liability" be replaced with "protect the lives and safety of officers and the public."

## Training Recommendations

1. **Interactive Training:** Incorporate interactive elements such as case studies, simulations, and scenario-based exercises into the training sessions to enhance engagement and facilitate active learning. This approach can provide officers with practical experience and help them apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations.
2. **Post-Pursuit Debriefings:** In coordination with the proposed Vehicle Pursuit Review Board, conduct post-pursuit debriefings or "lessons learned" discussions within the department to analyze the outcomes of past pursuits, identify areas for improvement, and reinforce key policy guidelines. This reflective practice can help officers learn from real scenarios and apply those insights to future pursuits.
3. **Policy Refreshers:** Implement regular policy refreshers after pursuits to reinforce the importance of adherence to vehicle pursuit procedures. These refresher sessions can serve as additional training and a reminder of the policy guidelines and promote consistency in decision-making among officers.
4. **Training Records:** Keep comprehensive training records that document mandatory department-wide required annual training, training when the pursuit procedure is updated, as well as a date when the policy was reviewed. This practice ensures that all officers are informed about policy changes and are accountable for staying up-to-date with the latest procedures.

## Expert-Recommended Methods for Assessing Risk

To further enhance the decision-making process, the following expert-recommended methods should be incorporated into pursuit policy:

1. **Pursuit Decision Matrix:** This tool allows officers to systematically evaluate the risk factors associated with a pursuit by assigning numerical values to different variables, such as the severity of the crime, road and traffic conditions, time of day, and the presence of pedestrians or other vehicles. By quantifying these factors, officers can make more objective decisions about whether to initiate or continue a pursuit. This matrix also helps to standardize the decision-making process across different officers and departments.
2. **Real-Time Risk Assessment Software:** Some law enforcement agencies have begun implementing real-time risk assessment software that integrates data from multiple sources, such as traffic cameras, GPS, and weather reports, to provide officers and supervisors with up to-the-minute information on the conditions of a pursuit. This technology aids in making more informed decisions and can help prevent pursuits from escalating to dangerous levels.
3. **Training on High-Risk Decision Making:** Regular training sessions focused on high-risk decision making under stress can prepare officers to better handle the complexities of initiating or continuing a pursuit. This training often includes scenario-based exercises that simulate real-life pursuit situations, helping officers to practice and refine their decision-making skills in a controlled environment.

## Regular Practices

1. **Lessons Learned Distribution:** The department should distribute lessons learned and outcomes of high-profile vehicle pursuits to all personnel. This dissemination of information fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement, enabling officers to apply insights from past pursuits to enhance future responses. By conducting thorough reviews and providing training summaries, outcomes, and overviews, the department can prevent the recurrence of similar incidents and improve overall response strategies.
2. **Periodic Policy Review:** Utilizing lessons learned from the Vehicle Pursuit Review Board, identify any areas for improvement in policy, training, or procedures. Evaluate pursuit outcomes to assess the effectiveness of the policy changes in reducing risks and protecting public safety.
3. **Technology:** Explore the use of technology such as GPS tracking, drone surveillance, pursuit management software, training simulations/virtual reality to aid in monitoring and controlling pursuits. Entertain implementing systems that can remotely disable a fleeing vehicle (OnStar, remote disabling devices) if deemed necessary to prevent further harm.

## Additional Recommendations

SDPD's existing pursuit procedures already include a post-pursuit review process. However, there are additional areas for improvement:

1. **Accident Report Analysis:** If a pursuit is initiated, terminated, and then results in injury, death, or property damage, this incident should still be included in SDPD's official pursuit report. Additionally, when filing accident reports following pursuits, it must be clearly stated whether the accident was a result of a terminated pursuit.
2. **Acknowledgment of Pursuit Termination:** Every officer involved in a pursuit must acknowledge the termination of the pursuit over the radio. This ensures that all involved officers are aware of the situation's status.
3. **Clarifying the Definition of a Pursuit:** SDPD should seek clarification on how a pursuit is defined, especially in relation to incidents that occur after a pursuit has officially ended. For example, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) includes a provision for injuries and fatalities sustained after a pursuit in their reporting. SDPD should ensure consistency and clarity in its own pursuit definitions.
4. **Post-Pursuit Reviews and Analysis:** SDPD Pursuit Procedures indicate that the Fleet Safety Sergeant conducts post-pursuit reviews and analysis of each Pursuit Report and provides feedback to division Captains where needed. The Fleet Safety Sergeant also provides statistical pursuit data on a quarterly basis, comparing current data to the prior year's activity. The Commission requests to receive this data on a quarterly basis once compiled. **Additionally, if past quarterly reports are available, the Commission requests to receive those for the last 5 years.**

## 5. Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA):

Pursuing accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) represents a major step in reinforcing the credibility, operational excellence, and accountability of any law enforcement agency, including the San Diego Police Department (SDPD). Established as a rigorous, professional benchmark, CALEA accreditation ensures that agencies adhere to recognized standards that foster public trust and demonstrate a commitment to high-quality law enforcement services.

1. **Enhanced Credibility and Public Trust:** Accreditation by CALEA is a visible commitment to ethical practices, transparency, and adherence to best practices in law enforcement. This enhances an agency's public reputation, reassuring the community that its police department operates with integrity and accountability. Agencies achieve this credibility by implementing a code of ethics and maintaining a stringent review and compliance process aligned with CALEA's standards.
2. **Operational Improvement:** CALEA accreditation involves the adoption of structured, evidence-based policies and practices, contributing to improved efficiency and service delivery. By engaging in CALEA's five-step accreditation process, which includes self-assessment, independent review, and continuous feedback, agencies streamline their operations and address potential gaps in their current procedures. Accredited agencies report better management of resources and enhanced interdepartmental coordination, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and responsiveness to the community's evolving needs.
3. **Risk Management and Safety Assurance:** Through CALEA's guidelines, accredited agencies are well-equipped to handle high-risk situations safely and effectively. Agencies must conduct an annual review and assessment of all policies, especially those related to pursuits and other critical operations, ensuring they meet CALEA's best practice standards. This focus on risk management reduces liability and enhances safety for officers and the public alike, as agencies implement structured training, risk assessments, and safety protocols.

In short, CALEA's standards provide a framework for law enforcement agencies to not only meet but often exceed regulatory expectations. For SDPD, achieving CALEA accreditation could serve as a catalyst for greater public confidence, enhanced community relations, and a more effective, modern police force. The accreditation requires a continuous commitment to accountability, aligning with the core values that SDPD upholds in service to San Diego.

## 6. Revise the Purpose of the SDPD Pursuit Procedures:

**Issue:** The current purpose statement in the SDPD Pursuit Procedures reads: "This Department procedure establishes guidelines to enhance the effectiveness of a pursuit and reduce the likelihood of incidents that could lead to potential liability." This statement focuses primarily on operational effectiveness and limiting liability but fails to mention the critical aspect of community safety and the protection of life.

**Recommendation:** We strongly recommend revising the purpose statement to explicitly include the commitment to safeguarding the lives and safety of both officers and the public. Emphasizing community safety aligns the department's policies with its core mission to protect and serve and demonstrates a proactive approach to addressing community concerns.

**Justification:**

- **Community Trust:** Including community safety in the purpose statement reinforces the department's dedication to the well-being of the public, which is essential for building and maintaining trust between law enforcement and the community.
- **Holistic Approach:** A purpose statement that encompasses safety, effectiveness, and accountability provides a more balanced foundation for pursuit procedures, ensuring that all critical factors are considered in operational decisions.
- **Alignment with Best Practices:** National and international best practices prioritize the safety of all individuals during police pursuits. Revising the purpose statement to reflect this priority aligns SDPD's policies with these standards.

#### **Examples of Revised Purpose Statements:**

- **Example 1:** "This Department procedure establishes guidelines to enhance the effectiveness of pursuits while prioritizing the safety and protection of the public and our officers."
- **Example 2:** "The purpose of this procedure is to provide clear guidelines for conducting vehicle pursuits in a manner that maximizes public safety, minimizes risk, and ensures accountability for all actions taken."
- **Example 3:** "This policy outlines the standards for initiating, conducting, and terminating vehicle pursuits, emphasizing the preservation of life and safety of the community and officers above all else."

### **7. International Perspective on Pursuit Policies:**

In developing the revised pursuit policies for the San Diego Police Department (SDPD), the committee has examined global law enforcement strategies. Best practices from countries with well-established pursuit guidelines provide crucial insights into enhancing public safety, minimizing risks, and ensuring accountability during police pursuits. Here, we explore key lessons from various countries, citing specific policies and approaches where available.

1. **United Kingdom:** In the UK, police pursuits are regulated by stringent guidelines that prioritize public safety above all. According to the College of Policing (2017), pursuits can only be initiated if there is a clear and imminent threat to life, and all efforts must be made to mitigate potential risks to bystanders and other road users. The policy emphasizes the role of command and control throughout the pursuit, ensuring that only highly trained officers engage in such operations. Commanding officers are required to monitor and, if necessary, terminate pursuits in real-time to prevent undue risk. The policy specifically states, "Pursuits must be immediately terminated if the risks outweigh the benefits" (College of Policing, 2017). This approach balances the necessity of capturing dangerous offenders with the imperative of public safety.
2. **Germany:** German pursuit guidelines, as outlined by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (2018), place a significant emphasis on de-escalation and avoiding direct high-speed chases whenever possible. Instead, German police are encouraged to use technology, such as GPS tracking and drones, to follow suspects. In situations where a pursuit is necessary, containment strategies—such as roadblocks and spike strips—are preferred over prolonged chases. These measures reduce the chances of accidents or injury to both officers and civilians. The policy explicitly notes, "De-escalation and containment are preferable to pursuits, which should only occur when technological alternatives have been exhausted" (Federal Ministry of the Interior,

2018). This technology-forward approach not only reduces risks but also preserves public confidence in law enforcement.

3. **Australia:** Australia takes a similarly cautious approach, with policies restricting pursuits to cases involving serious offenses, such as violent crimes or immediate threats to public safety. The Australian Institute of Criminology (2019) recommends using non-invasive technologies like GPS trackers or drones to monitor suspects' vehicles, allowing police to avoid direct engagements. Australian policy requires constant risk assessment during a pursuit, with officers instructed to discontinue if the danger to the public outweighs the need for immediate apprehension. The policy reads, "Pursuits should be avoided in favor of technological solutions unless there is an immediate threat to life or public safety" (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2019). The focus here is on reducing the reliance on high-speed chases, which have proven to be hazardous in urban areas.
4. **Canada:** In Canada, strict initiation guidelines govern police pursuits. As mandated by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (2020), officers must obtain approval from a supervisor before engaging in a pursuit, and a detailed post-pursuit report is mandatory. This emphasis on documentation and oversight ensures that pursuits are thoroughly evaluated for procedural adherence and any necessary reforms. The Canadian approach is built on accountability, with a focus on continuous improvement through post-incident analysis. The policy states, "Every pursuit must be followed by a comprehensive report, documenting the reasons for initiation, actions taken during the pursuit, and the decision-making process throughout" (Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). This not only holds officers accountable but also contributes to the development of safer pursuit practices over time.
5. **Sweden:** Sweden's policies are designed to centralize decision-making and increase oversight in pursuit situations. According to the Swedish National Police Board (2021), pursuits may only be authorized by senior officers, ensuring that such decisions are made by individuals removed from the immediate pressure of the situation. This hierarchical system reduces the frequency of pursuits and ensures that every action is thoroughly considered. The policy specifically states, "Pursuits are to be initiated only under direct authorization from a superior officer, following an assessment of the risks to public safety" (Swedish National Police Board, 2021). This model fosters a high level of accountability and reduces impulsive decision-making.
6. **Japan:** In Japan, police pursuits are extremely rare due to stringent restrictions on when they can be initiated. As outlined by the National Police Agency Japan (2020), only high-ranking officers can approve a pursuit, and this decision must be based on the presence of a serious threat, such as an imminent attack or a highly dangerous suspect. The policy stresses the need for careful oversight, stating, "Pursuits require the express permission of a senior officer, with continuous monitoring to ensure safety" (National Police Agency Japan, 2020). This conservative approach significantly minimizes the potential for high-speed chases, focusing instead on surveillance and interception methods.



7. **Netherlands:** In the Netherlands, police utilize negotiation tactics and early warning systems to avoid pursuits whenever possible. The Dutch Police Academy (2019) highlights that officers are trained in de-escalation techniques to communicate with suspects and encourage voluntary surrender before a chase begins. Additionally, the use of early warning systems allows officers to alert the public and coordinate responses with minimal disruption. The policy states, "Pursuit is a last-resort measure; officers are to prioritize negotiation and communication" (Dutch Police Academy, 2019). This approach reduces the frequency of dangerous high-speed chases and emphasizes conflict resolution.
8. **Norway:** Norwegian police place a significant emphasis on training officers to make informed decisions regarding pursuits. According to the Norwegian Police University College (2020), simulation-based training is a core component of pursuit decision-making education, equipping officers with the tools to assess risks accurately and decide whether to pursue or disengage. The policy notes, "Pursuit training includes regular simulation exercises to improve decision-making and risk assessment" (Norwegian Police University College, 2020). This method ensures that officers are prepared to handle pursuit situations calmly and professionally.
9. **Spain:** Spain's pursuit policies focus on clearly defined termination protocols. As stated by the Ministry of the Interior, Spain(2021), police officers must abandon a pursuit if it poses a significant risk to public safety. Spanish officers are also required to communicate their decisions in real-time with their superiors to receive approval for termination. The policy highlights the importance of public safety, noting, "Pursuits are to be terminated immediately when public safety is compromised" (Ministry of the Interior, Spain, 2021).
10. **Brazil:** In Brazil, the use of aerial surveillance is a key strategy for managing pursuits. The Federal Police of Brazil (2019) employs helicopters and drones to monitor suspects from above, reducing the need for risky high-speed chases. This strategy has proven effective in reducing accidents and injuries associated with pursuits. The policy specifically states, "Aerial surveillance is the preferred method of monitoring fleeing suspects, minimizing the need for direct vehicular pursuit" (Federal Police of Brazil, 2019).
11. **South Africa:** South Africa's pursuit policies integrate community policing principles, encouraging officers to work with the public to resolve pursuits safely. The South African Police Service (2018) emphasizes public cooperation and non-violent resolution techniques, using roadblocks and other containment strategies to avoid high-speed chases. The policy states, "Community cooperation and containment strategies should be prioritized over high-speed pursuits, reducing the risk to public safety" (South African Police Service, 2018).
12. **Italy:** Italy's pursuit policies focus on strategic roadblocks and coordinated control centers to manage high-risk situations. According to the Italian National Police (2020), officers are trained to use these methods as safer alternatives to high-speed chases. The policy reads, "The use of strategic roadblocks and coordinated control centers allows officers to apprehend suspects without engaging in dangerous pursuits" (Italian National Police, 2020). This reduces the need for direct engagement, keeping the public and officers safe.

13. **India:** India has embraced modern technology to manage pursuits without resorting to dangerous high-speed chases. The Ministry of Home Affairs, India (2021) outlines the use of GPS tracking and drones to monitor suspects, reducing the need for direct pursuit. The policy specifies, "GPS and drone technology should be used to track suspects, minimizing the necessity of engaging in high-speed pursuits" (Ministry of Home Affairs, India, 2021). By leveraging advanced technology, India ensures safer outcomes in pursuit situations.
  
14. **France:** France limits pursuits to cases involving serious felonies or imminent threats. The National Gendarmerie, France (2022) requires officers to continually assess the proportionality of their actions and abandon pursuits that do not meet these criteria. The policy mandates, "Pursuits are only to be initiated for serious offenses, with continuous risk assessments guiding whether to continue or terminate" (National Gendarmerie, France, 2022). This focus on proportionality ensures that pursuits are used judiciously.
  
15. **New Zealand:** In New Zealand, pursuits are treated as a last resort, with a strong emphasis on public safety. According to the New Zealand Police (2021), pursuits may only be initiated when all other methods of apprehension have failed, and even then, officers must prioritize the safety of the public. Post-pursuit analysis is mandatory, ensuring that each incident is thoroughly reviewed for possible improvements. The policy asserts, "Pursuits should only be initiated when absolutely necessary, with a strong emphasis on post-pursuit analysis to ensure best practices" (New Zealand Police, 2021).

These international examples provide a wealth of insights that can inform the SDPD's pursuit policies. From the UK's emphasis on imminent threats and command oversight to Brazil's use of aerial surveillance and Spain's strict termination protocols, these global practices demonstrate that effective pursuit policies prioritize public safety, de-escalation, and accountability. By incorporating elements from these proven strategies, SDPD can enhance its own pursuit guidelines to align with the highest standards of safety and professionalism.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on the comprehensive review of SDPD's Procedure 1.03 – Pursuit Procedures, the Commission on Police Practices has identified critical areas for alignment with nationwide best practices as well as some worldwide best practices. Our goal is to enhance both officer and community safety by incorporating proven, effective policies.

The policies outlined in this report also align and/or build upon recommendations from the COPS/PERF report as well as dozens of publications over the past 30 years.

However, before change is possible, it has become apparent that the police department's current method of providing data is hindering our ability to fully support the community and foster organizational growth. Disorganized data not only slows down our analysis but also impedes the implementation of meaningful policy changes. To truly understand and improve the impact of our policies, we must assess them through comprehensive data collection and analysis.

We strongly recommend that the department hires a data analysis firm or onboards an expert to help gain perspective on these critical situations. This step is crucial to ensure that our policies result in actual change and measured growth. By adopting a more structured approach to data management, the department can significantly enhance its ability to implement effective policies and ensure the safety of both officers and the community.

These recommendations matter for the entire city of San Diego because they directly impact public safety and trust in law enforcement. Effective vehicle pursuit policies can prevent unnecessary risks to both officers and civilians, reducing the likelihood of accidents and injuries. Additionally, clear and well-enforced policies demonstrate the department's commitment to accountability and transparency, which are essential for rebuilding and maintaining trust within the community.

Implementing these recommendations is not just about compliance with best practices; it is about demonstrating a genuine commitment to the safety and well-being of everyone in San Diego. The Commission remains dedicated to supporting these efforts for the betterment of our community, and we urge the SDPD to consider these policy recommendations seriously. By doing so, the department can take significant steps towards rebuilding trust and fostering a safer, more secure environment for all.

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