

2023 ANNUAL PURSUIT REPORT

Montgomery County Department of Police



May 15, 2024

Prepared by
The Policy and Planning Division

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

As you will see in this report, there were 95 pursuits in 2023, 28 more than in 2022.

This is the highest total in 10 years and much higher than the average of 51 yearly pursuits. To put this in a larger perspective, there were 40,123 traffic stops, so the 95 pursuits amount to 0.2 percent, similar to past rates.

The increase in pursuits tracks with an increase in auto thefts. Pursuits related to auto thefts were 42 percent of the total, as opposed to 28 percent in 2022.

This trend differs markedly from past years when almost half of the pursuits by officers were for individuals suspected of driving under the influence.

Of the total pursuits in 2023, 37 involved suspects aged 21 and under. Again, following recent trends, 17 involved juvenile suspects under 18, with 12 involving a report of a stolen vehicle.

As in past years, most pursuits lasted less than five minutes and covered three miles or less.

Under the Montgomery County Department of Police (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, 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.

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

In addition, a supervisor will monitor and decide 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) 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 level of accountability that the MCPD brings to each police pursuit in which we engage.

2023



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. G. Jones'.

Marcus G. Jones
Chief of Police

VEHICLE PURSUIT POLICY

OVERVIEW

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

The Department's policy defines a vehicle pursuit 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 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 (FC) 0135).

Per Function Code 0135, Vehicle Pursuits, the pursuit of a vehicle is authorized only when the offense for which the suspect is being pursued is one of the following:

Criminal:

Felony or the officer has reason to believe a felony has occurred or is occurring.

Note: 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."

Traffic:

- Driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics (misdemeanor).
- Hit-and-run, personal injury collision when the officer has reasonable cause to believe serious physical injury has occurred (felony).

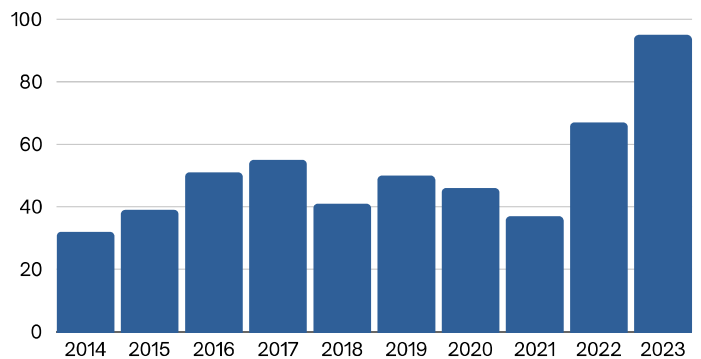
Policy Review:

Regular policy review and revision is an important part of maintaining operational efficiency and consistency with changes in legislation and/or the environment.

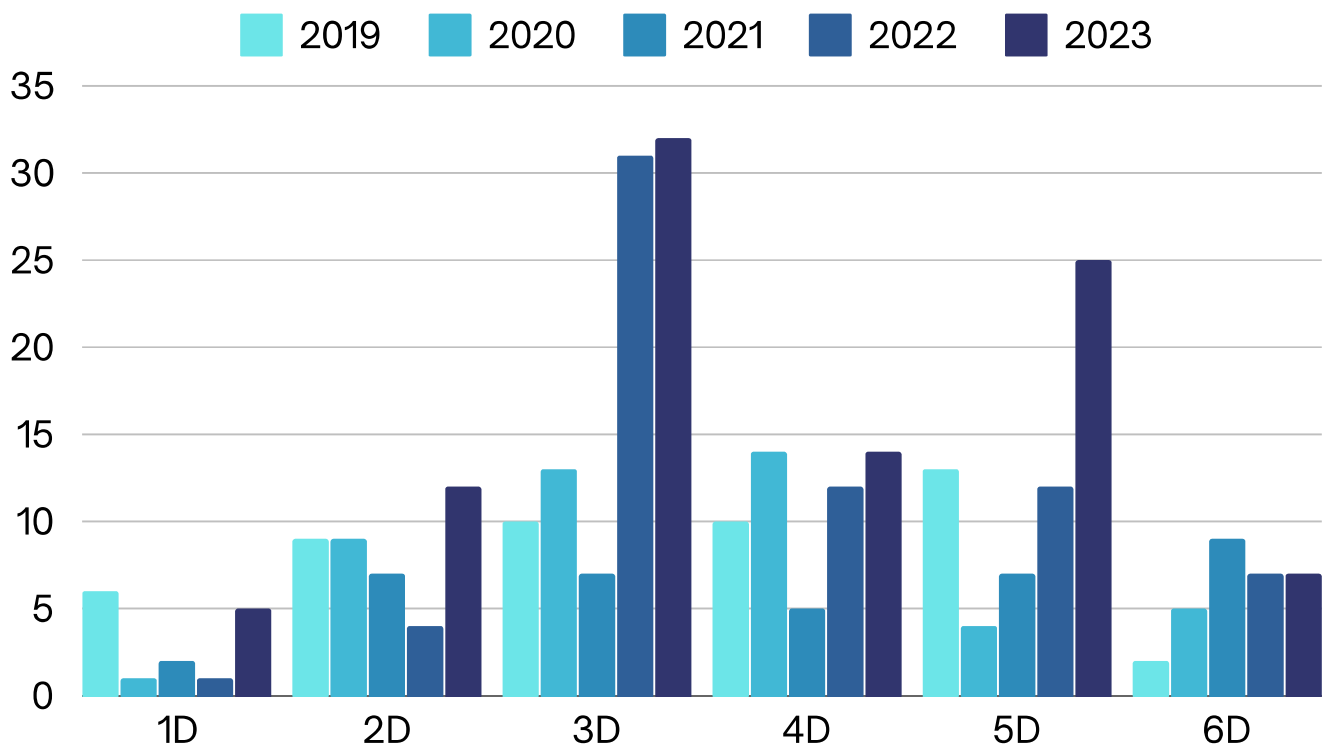
In 2024, the Department's Pursuit Policy is set to undergo revisions based on updated safety outcomes and best practices.

A YEAR IN REVIEW 2023

In 2023, there were 95 pursuits, twenty-eight (28) more pursuits than reported in 2022, or an increase of 42%. This is the highest number of pursuits in 10 years and is above the Department's 10-year pursuit average of 51 per year. In 2023, one pursuit was deemed non-compliant with department policy, as outlined in FC 0135 (Vehicular Pursuits). There were no injuries reported and corrective action was taken for the officer involved in the non-compliant pursuit.



PURSUIT BY DISTRICT



LOCATION

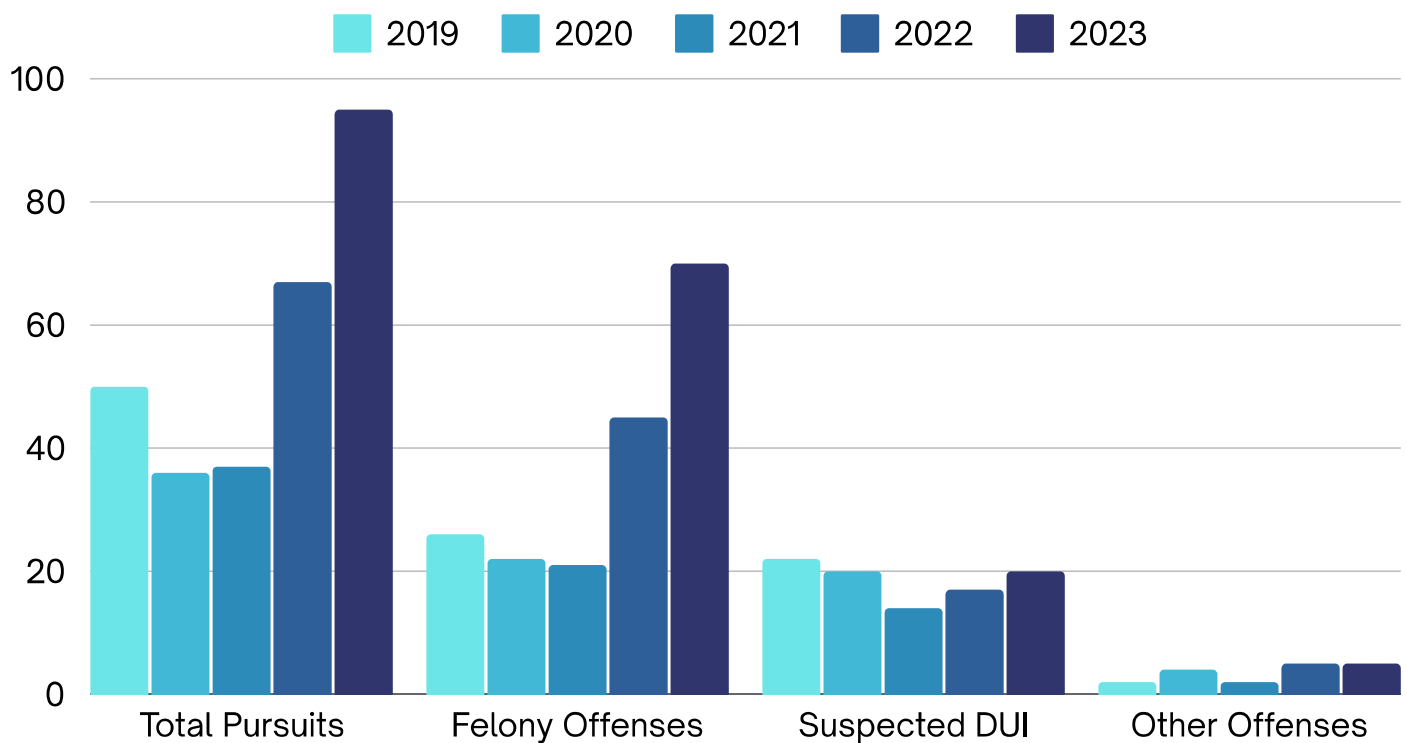
Function Code 0135 states, “Officers may pursue into a neighboring jurisdiction only when an officer has probable cause to believe the crime committed was a felony of a violent type.”

In 2022, there were eight incidents in which Montgomery County police officers pursued suspects outside the county’s jurisdictional boundaries. In 2023, in compliance with FC 0135, ten (11%) incidents crossed the county boundary, and five pursuits were terminated at or before the county line.

PURSUIT JUSTIFICATION

In 2023, apprehension of suspects engaged in various felony offenses and suspected of driving under the influence (DUI) were the primary reasons officers initiated pursuits (74% and 21%, respectively). The remaining five pursuits (6%) were initiated for traffic-related offenses and pursuing a wanted subject.

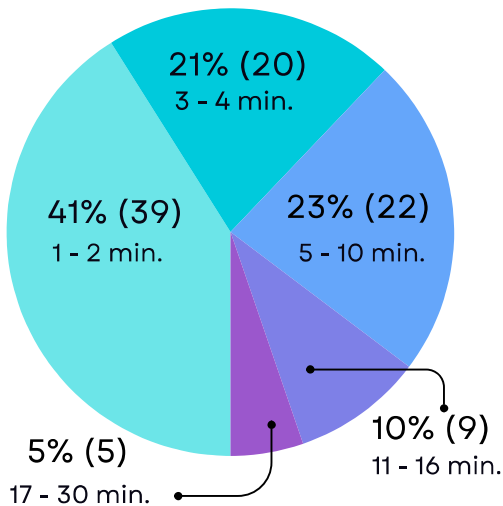
Since 2019, 32% of pursuits by officers were for individuals suspected of driving under the influence; 63% were for subjects eluding police who were involved in felony offenses such as stolen vehicles; and the remaining percentage were for other offenses or violations, such as weapons offenses and narcotics-related offenses.



PURSUIT DURATION AND DISTANCE

DURATION

NUMBER OF MINUTES

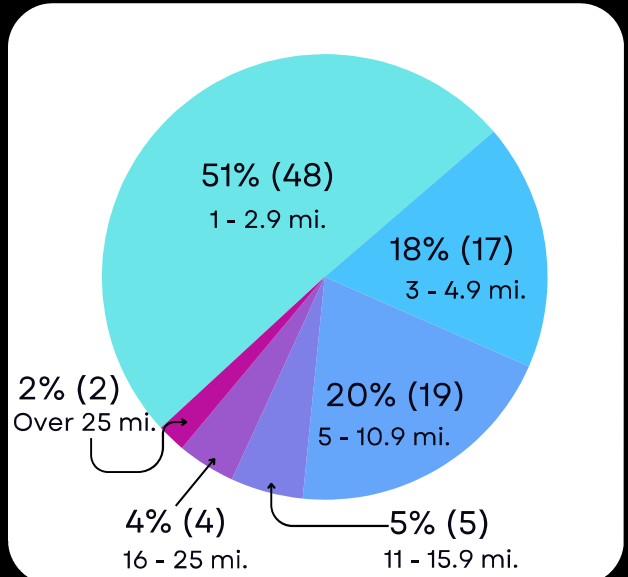


The duration of pursuits in 2023 was similar to those from 2022, in which 62% of the pursuits in Montgomery County lasted less than five minutes, compared to 57% in 2022. There was a 37% increase in pursuits lasting five to ten minutes and a 10% decrease in pursuits lasting between eleven and sixteen minutes. Eight pursuits lasted more than 15 minutes, with the longest pursuit lasting 34 minutes, traveling 26 miles.

In 2023, 51% of pursuits traveled less than three miles, compared to 54% in 2022. Seventeen (18%) pursuits traveled three to five miles, and nineteen (20%) pursuits traveled five to ten miles, compared to 2022, with eight and thirteen pursuits, respectively. The longest pursuit traveled 30 miles and lasted 27 minutes. Two pursuits traveled across MCPD Police district lines and ended in a different MCPD Police district from which they were initiated.

DISTANCE

NUMBER OF MILES



SUSPECT ANALYSIS

DATA SUMMARY

Number of times suspects evaded police

54

Percentage of known suspects

63%

Average age of suspect

22

Youngest age of suspect

12

Most frequent reason for pursuit

Felony - stolen vehicle

Number of apprehension/arrests

70 individuals

Apprehension is not the primary aspect of a police vehicle pursuit; the safety of the officer and the public is the most important aspect since the risks are high for all. Officers and supervisors must balance the inherent safety risks with the urgency to apprehend the suspect.

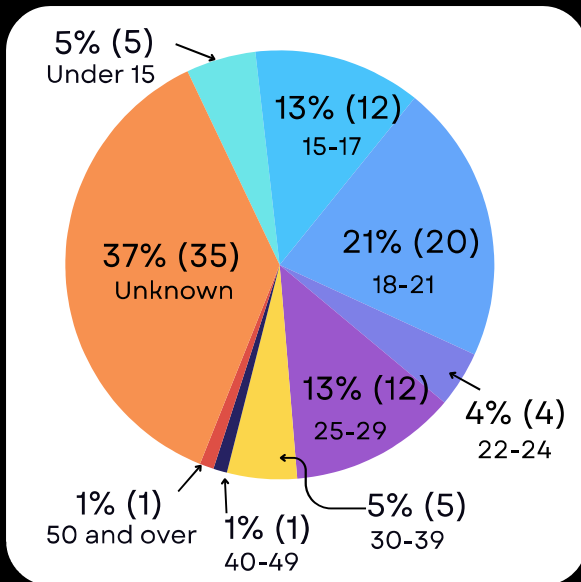
In 2023, suspects successfully evaded police officers in 54 of the 95 pursuits (57% of the time) compared to 51% in 2022. Typically, successful evasion occurred when the pursuit was terminated by police supervisors for safety reasons or for crossing jurisdiction boundaries, or the suspect fled on foot once the vehicle stopped or crashed.

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

**Note: Race categories were standardized in 2022 to reflect the terms: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific Islander (API), and Native American. Categories were previously listed as Caucasian, African American, Latino, Asian, or American Indian. It should be noted that these categories are not exhaustive and do not capture the diversity within and among different racial and ethnic groups. Some individuals may not identify with any of these or may identify with multiple categories.*

SUSPECT DEMOGRAPHICS

AGE



5%
Female

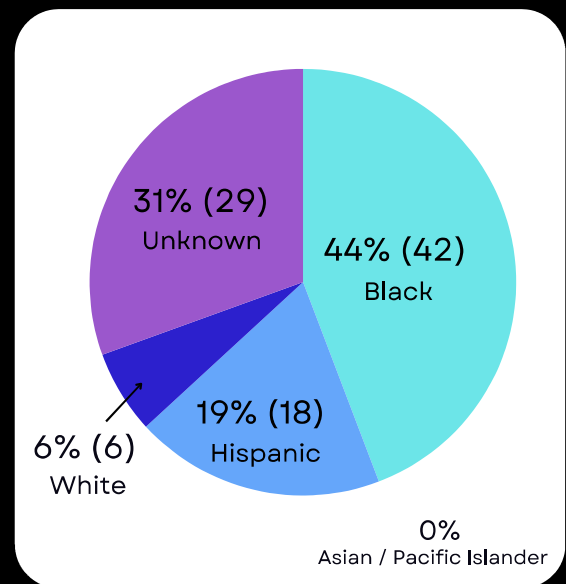


67%
Male

28%
Unknown

GENDER

RACE



In 2023, the number of known suspects ages 15 to 29 increased by 37% compared to 2022, and over the two years, accounted for 77% of the known individuals involved in police pursuits. Known suspects in the 30 to 39 and 40 to 49 age groups decreased by 29% and 67%, respectively, from 2022. In 2023, there were five known suspects under the age of 15, with the youngest being 12.

Male suspects accounted for most known individuals involved in pursuits (67%) in 2023 compared to 74% in 2022. From 2022 – 2023, males accounted for 70% of the known suspects involved in pursuits.

In 2023, 44% of the known suspects involved in police pursuits were Black, compared to 53% in 2022. White suspects accounted for 6% of the known individuals involved in pursuits in 2023, compared to 8% in 2022. Hispanic suspects accounted for 19% of the known suspects involved in pursuits in 2023, compared to 15% in 2022.

For the two years 2022– 2023, the data shows the following when the subject's race was known:

- Black suspects were involved in 48% of police pursuits.
- White suspects were involved in 7% of police pursuits.
- Hispanic suspects were involved in 17% of pursuits.
- In 26% of police pursuits, the suspect's race/ethnicity was unknown.

COLLISION DATA

Pursuit collisions can damage suspect vehicles, civilian vehicles, and department vehicles. They may result in injuries to suspects, civilians, police officers, and property damage.

Thirty-six (36) of the 95 pursuits (38%) in Montgomery County, MD in 2023 resulted in a “bailout,” which occurs when the suspect(s) stop or crash the vehicle and flee on foot, compared to 27% of the pursuits reported in 2022. Suspects were subsequently apprehended in approximately 78% of these instances. Nineteen bailout incidents (53%) also involved collisions, compared to 9 incidents in 2022.

Of the 95 pursuits in 2023, 34 (36%) resulted in a collision, compared to 23 collisions (34%) reported in 2022. A detailed breakdown by district of the 34 collisions related to pursuits in 2023 is provided in the table below.

PURSUITS INVOLVING COLLISIONS SUMMARY							
DISTRICT	COLLISIONS	DAMAGED SUSPECT VEHICLES	SUSPECTS INJURED	DAMAGED CIVILIAN VEHICLES	CIVILIANS INJURED	DAMAGED MCPD VEHICLES	POLICE OFFICERS INJURED
1	2	2	2	1	2	1	0
2	5	4	0	3	0	0	0
3	10	9	4	5	3	4	0
4	5	5	2	6	3	0	0
5	10	8	0	5	0	1	1
6	2	2	0	1	0	0	0
TOTALS	34	30	8	21	8	6	1

DETAILED PURSUIT ANALYSIS

Of the felony offenses, auto theft was the most frequent offense, accounting for 42% of pursuits in 2023, compared to 28% in 2022. Overall, crime data shows an increase of 133% of all auto theft crimes throughout the county in 2023. Carjacking accounted for only 2% of pursuits in 2023, compared to 8% in 2022. Additionally, six handguns were recovered as a result of four pursuits.

Although most pursuits involved standard passenger vehicles, other less common vehicles, such as four SUVs, one motorcycle, one rental truck, and one pickup truck with a trailer and an all-terrain vehicle (ATV), were also pursued. Consistent with the overall rise in Kia and Hyundai thefts, these vehicle brands were the most frequently pursued.

Of the 60 suspects whose ages were known, 37 (62%) involved suspects ages 21 and younger—seventeen of those involved juvenile suspects under 18, fifteen of whom were apprehended. Of the 17 pursuits involving juveniles, 12 (71%) pursuits were initiated for the report of a stolen vehicle. In addition to the 17 juvenile suspects, 12 additional juvenile passengers were apprehended (27 juveniles total).

In addition to the 95 suspects, there were 29 additional passengers or vehicle occupants. In one incident, a suspect chase vehicle intercepted a police pursuit to aid the initial suspect's escape.

On July 1, 2023, the recreational use of cannabis was legalized. Before this date, the Montgomery County Department of Police (MCPD) had already been at the forefront of training officers to recognize impaired drivers. Unlike alcohol, which has quantifiable measurements such as Breathalyzer Instruments, cannabis intoxication is largely measured by visual cues of impaired behavior. Police are trained to recognize impairment using Green-Labs, where participants intentionally become intoxicated and go through a series of tests for police to observe behavioral and physiological signs of impairment. Green-Labs are similar to Wet-Labs used for studying the effects of alcohol intoxication¹. As more states move toward cannabis legalization, advancements in technology for quantifiable measurement of impairment are also likely to come.

¹www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/02/17/driving-high-police-marijuana-training/

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 86% of the pursuits in 2023, no special tactics or additional resources were used, compared to 83% in 2022.

Thirteen (14%) of the pursuits reported in 2023 involved using other resources, including allied police agencies, K9 teams, or aircraft. In seven incidents (7%), the police department deployed tire-deflating devices (TDD) to end the pursuit safely and successfully. While MCPD policy prohibits rolling roadblocks and tactical vehicle intervention, it does allow tire-deflating devices by officers trained to use them. The authorized usage of one form of a tire-deflating device, stop-sticks, was suspended in October 2023 due to concerns for officer safety. Other tire-deflating devices, primarily used to prevent pursuits from occurring, remain authorized.

After attempting to utilize TDDs, suspects evaded the police in two instances, while five were apprehended. Of the seven instances in which TDDs were utilized, collisions occurred three times. This resulted in damaged vehicles belonging to the suspect, the department, and civilians. Of the three referenced collisions, one suspect and two civilians were injured.

Supervisors terminated 32 of the 95 pursuits (34%) in accordance with Function Code 0135 when the dangers to the officers and the public outweighed the continuation of the pursuit. Pursuits were also terminated when the suspect(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. This number increased by 39% from the twenty-three (34%) pursuits terminated for similar reasons in 2022.

USE OF FORCE IN RESPONSE TO RESISTANCE

Overall, there were 33 pursuits in 2023 (35%) in which force was used by police officers in response to resistance by suspects, consistent with the 34% of pursuits in 2022.

These instances were the result of bail-outs or vehicle collisions in which the occupants attempted to flee and/or resist arrest.

SUMMARY

With more than one million people living in Montgomery County and thousands more traveling through the county each year, police pursuits are a rare occurrence. Nearly 36,000 traffic stops were made in 2022, yet only 67 pursuits resulted from these encounters, an occurrence rate of 0.2%. Similarly, in 2023, there were 40,123 traffic stops, but 95 pursuits still occurred, a consistent rate of 0.2%. Although there was an 11% increase in traffic stops in 2023, the increase in pursuit frequency is likely due to an overall increase in felony offenses such as stolen vehicles, drug/narcotic offenses, and weapons offenses from the previous year. The number of DUI-related events increased by 18% from the previous year. It is still too early to infer any correlations between the new cannabis law and the frequency of DUI-related events.

The Montgomery County Department of Police continues to be proactive in driver safety to reduce the number of law enforcement officer deaths, disabilities, and injuries caused by traffic-related incidents. In 2020, The Public Safety Training Academy (PSTA) introduced a three-hour driving in-service class for all sworn officers focused on vehicle maneuverability, parallel parking, and a review of proper vehicle operations during pursuit driving. The class has continued into 2021, and a biennial version began in 2022. 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.

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 that may be necessary on an operational level.

Questions may be directed to MCP.PolicyandPlanning@montgomerycountymd.gov.

