

News Release

Aberdeen Police Department
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Aberdeen Police Department Leads Effort to Support the Homeless Through Compassionate Outreach Program

The Aberdeen Police Department (APD) is proud to highlight the early successes of a groundbreaking initiative that is changing lives and strengthening the bond between officers and the community. Through the Law-Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program, APD is offering hope, not handcuffs, to those struggling with homelessness, mental illness, and substance use.

The LEAD program, launched in August 2024, enables officers to refer individuals who commit low-level offenses or are at high risk of arrest to case managers and social services rather than jail. With the support of partners at the University of Maryland, Upper Chesapeake Health, and the Klein Family Center, APD officers are helping people access housing, mental health care, substance use treatment, and vital services, including food assistance and school enrollment.

"Not every situation calls for an arrest," said Lieutenant Douglas Reitz, who leads the department's LEAD efforts. "Sometimes what someone needs is a hand up, not a handcuff. That's what LEAD is all about."

Since the program's launch:

- 47 homeless individuals have been identified in Aberdeen.
- 27 referrals were made to the LEAD program, with 23 individuals actively participating.
- 5 people were placed in permanent housing, and 8 more received temporary housing.

- Others received mental health care, substance use treatment, and support navigating social services.

Case Manager Monique Burgess works closely with APD, riding along with officers and meeting individuals in parks, on the street, and during police calls. She says many of the people they help “felt like they had reached the end of their rope.” Thanks to LEAD, they now have hope and support.

One family, new to Aberdeen, was connected with mental health services, got their children enrolled in school, and found community stability through the program. Another family experiencing homelessness while awaiting disability benefits was helped into affordable housing thanks to coordinated follow-up and support.

This compassionate approach is also enhancing community trust. Officers are not only keeping neighborhoods safe; they’re becoming a vital link between people in need and the services that can help them rebuild their lives.

The Aberdeen Police Department believes that effective policing means protecting public safety and investing in people. By addressing the root causes of homelessness and addiction, APD is proving that community-based solutions can work, and they’re working right here in Aberdeen.

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