



Maple Shade Police Department
Township of Maple Shade
In the County of Burlington



Christopher J. Fletcher
Chief of Police

February 24, 2025

Prosecutor LaChia Bradshaw
Burlington County Prosecutor's Office
49 Rancocas Road
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2024 USE OF FORCE/VEHICLE PURSUIT ANNUAL REVIEW:

Background

The township of Maple Shade is the southernmost town in the western section of Burlington County with approximately 20,000 residents. The town itself is 3.6 square miles and contains over 20 apartment and condo complexes mostly positioned on the outskirts of the township along major roadways. The demographics for the town can be broken down in the following ways (see attached 2024 estimated US Census Data). The main body of the township is comprised of mostly Caucasians and does contain a small population of minority residents sprinkled throughout. The demographics for the apartment and condo complexes is very diverse and is also where the bulk of the minority population for the township resides. The largest of these complexes is the Fox Meadow Apartment Complex which consists of over 1490 units and 5,000 residents and is also where 2 of our 4 murder investigations took place in 2022. Its neighboring complex of Woods Edge also contains a large minority population and had one murder/shooting in 2019. The Township of Maple Shade does have a Main Street business district and several residential neighborhoods that surround it. There are 4 schools within Maple Shade ranging from grades Pre-K to 12th including a combined junior/senior high school. Our school resource officer supervises an armed SLEO officer at each of the 4 schools and makes certain they remain compliant with district safety practices. We also conduct annual Active Shooter and scenario training in the school district emphasizing threat neutralization and de-escalation response tactics. Maple Shade also has 3 major roadways that traverse the township which include Route 73, Route 38 and Route 41 and the town is in close proximity to Interstate Route 295 and the New Jersey Turnpike. With that said, there also exists a motel district off of Route 73 and Route 38 in which 1 of our 4 murders occurred in 2022. Lastly, Maple Shade has 1 medical facility in town which currently houses patients that include drug rehabilitation and mental health consumers and are a frequent source of calls for service. It is located in close proximity to one of our grade schools and this has been an issue over the years due to the nature of these calls. In 2021, a patient murdered another patient at this facility and was appropriately charged by our agency.

Our agency, under my leadership, has significantly increased our presence in the community starting with the fact that I attend 12 public council meetings a year to interface with our elected officials and the citizens of Maple Shade. In addition, our agency conducts foot and bike patrols

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throughout the community including Main Street, our township neighborhoods and the apartment/condo complexes. We have added SLEO I officers who also conduct directed patrols of our Main Street in the evenings as well as our parks and recreational areas interacting with and building positive relationships with the juvenile population within our town. Further, the Volunteers of America have 2 full-time IMPACT Specialists embedded within our agency based out of our record's division. In addition, and as you are aware, this agency signed an MOU to participate in the ARRIVE Program along side Burlington Township Police, Legacy Treatment Services, Oaks Integrated Care and your office for a much more robust mental health partnership as a more effective means of addressing concerns surrounding mental health consumers located within our community.

At your request, our agency has also added the Straight to Treatment program on Monday evenings as well as participating in the GAP Initiative under the umbrella of Operation Helping Hand in the transient areas in town to address addiction, human trafficking and mental health issues for the vulnerable populations located there. In addition, our agency also has a robust Police Chaplain Program consisting of 4 Chaplains who often assist and provide support to families during death investigations, family crisis issues, fire scenes, death notifications and during our active shooter training which we conduct within the school and business community. The Chaplains also exclusively handle all stationhouse adjustments as well, diverting youth from the Juvenile Justice System. Alongside the Chaplain Corp is a non-profit that I started called the Maple Shade Police Chaplain Association – A NJ Non-Profit 501c(3) Corporation which funds the activities of the Chaplains and has a board comprised of police, Chaplains and local political and business leaders. Lastly, our agency working with the Maple Shade Food Bank, has set up a Grab and Go food box in our police lobby to fill the immediate need of anyone struggling with hunger. All one needs to do is simply stop into the lobby and grab a large FREE bag of groceries. Inside each bag is also a VOA outreach card to contact them for program navigator assistance as well as a VOA personal grooming kit for their hygiene needs. This program has been a tremendous success and is known throughout our community.

Currently, our agency employs 40 full time officers, 2 SLEO II officers, 3 SLEO III officers and 1 SLEO I officer. I serve as the Chief of Police and have done so since January of 2020. Our additional command staff consists of a Captain and 2 Lieutenants. There are 5 Sergeants, 4 in the patrol division and 1 in the investigative division and 7 Corporals with 4 in the patrol division, 1 in the investigative division, our SRO and Community Affairs Officer are also both Corporals. We currently have 3 detectives with one focused on the Juvenile function and one focused on narcotics as well as 15 patrol officers. We have a dedicated Administrative Traffic Officer who focuses on traffic related issues within the township to include fatal crashes and in 2022, I created a new position with the support of our Township Manager and Town Council called the Community Affairs Officer (CAO). This officer is stationed on the township side of the building allowing the public access to the officer in a less formal environment. This



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specialized officer also coordinates many of our community engagement activities such as VOA Pop Up events, the National Night Out, Senior Citizen Police Academy, Coffee, Custard and Slices with a Cop, food and financial drives to support the Maple Shade Food Bank, school engagement, presentation requests from the community and building up our youth initiatives as we move towards the summer of 2025 by developing a SLEO II team coordinating directly with the CAO.

Lastly, Maple Shade PD has attained Accreditation status through the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police in October 2023 and did so with no “wet ink” policy changes or noted deficiencies during our on-site evaluation and commission appearance. This process has consistently helped our department develop and meet industry wide best practices and standards for the operation of our agency and we contracted with Lexipol to continue to assist us in these efforts. Further, we also contracted with Lexipol to provide our mandatory and voluntary training blocks throughout the year to make certain our officers remain fully aware of our policies and procedures at all times.

On the training front, this agency globally participated in the ICAT and ABLE training as required by the Attorney General as well as completing all annual CLEAR training. It is important to note that Captain Brian Weiss is one of six county wide ABLE instructors in Burlington County and has done an excellent job imparting these principles here at our agency. Beyond that and over the last several years, this agency has also completed multiple trainings on De-Escalation to include Verbal Judo (our current system), the Management of Aggressive Behaviors (MOAB), Dealing with the Developmentally Disabled and Autism and the First Responder. On an individual and instructor level, our agency has also participated in training on CIT (all supervisors and now expanding to line officers), Force Science Force Certification Course, Force Science Realistic De-Escalation Course, and the Force Science Body Worn Camera Course. It is important to note that this agency was also the sole PILOT program for Resiliency Training for officers in New Jersey. We are currently preparing for a new program being established with surrounding agencies in conjunction with a federal grant to promote officer wellness and resiliency under the direction of a licensed mental health professional.

Tactically, our agency currently carries and issues the following less lethal technology: Axon Taser 7's to now include most of the uniform patrol division, Sabre Red Oleoresin Capsicum (water based), Remington less lethal launchers with a bean bag drag stabilizer ammunition, expandable batons (SLEO I only) and I am currently exploring pepper ball technology having already certified 3 senior officers as instructors as well as the Bola Wrap once that comes on line from the Less Lethal Statewide Committee. Lastly, Detective Corporal Jeff Engel is a Master Level Taser trainer with both Axon and the Attorney General's Office and he is currently developing a training program for our agency based around our purchase of Taser's Virtual Reality Trainer.



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Analysis – Use of Force

The Maple Shade Police Department ended the 2024 calendar year with 26,541 calls for service. Many of these 26,541 calls for service centered on domestic disputes, disturbances, custody issues, assaults, mental health responses, overdoses, thefts, sex offenses, burglaries, robberies, traffic collisions and disorderly persons offenses. When comparing our calls for service to our use of force numbers, the Maple Shade Police Department uses force .001 of 1% which is outstanding and without a doubt proves that officers are in fact doing their level best to de-escalate situations unilaterally across the board. In addition, the transient nature of the highway area as well as the transient nature of the apartment complexes draws individuals from all walks of life, backgrounds, races, and experiences. Many of the challenges we face daily take place in these very diverse locations where the minority population has a significant presence when compared to the central hub of the township and that in turn translates into representing a larger portion of our use of force statistics even though they may physically represent a smaller portion of the overall population.

In analyzing our 2024 Use of Force data taken from both the Benchmark Analytics and our own internal documentation, here is the breakdown. There was a total of 32 officers (***noting one officer used force twice in one incident which could be considered 31 officers, but Benchmark considers it 32 officers and that is the number we will use for this report***) involved in using force while responding to total of 19 incidents (***Benchmark shows 20 incidents due to a difference in case entry numbers on one incident and our analysis is based on these 19 incidents for the purposes of this report***). The incidents in question are further divided into the following top 5 categories labeled “initial reason for incident” and they are mental health call (4), disturbance (4), domestic (2), welfare check (2) and suicidal person (1). The top 5 categories labeled “subject actions leading to force” based upon the 32 officers involved included resisting arrest and police control (28), spitting (12), verbal/fighting stance/threat (11), kicking (9) and threat to kick (7). It is important to note that more than one category can be chosen during the reporting process. A total of 6 officers were injured during these incidents with injuries ranging from complaint of pain, contusion or bruise, abrasion/laceration, and fracture/dislocation. A total of 8 subjects were injured during the force incidents with 3 having pre-existing injuries before the encounter with police. Their injuries ranged from abrasion/laceration to complaint of pain to contusion/bruise. There were no significant injuries noted and EMS was called when requested and appropriate.

When it comes to incident-based arrests, 18 subjects were arrested and 1 was not. The main reason this subject was not arrested was listed as being due to a mental health condition. The top 5 “force used by officers” based on the 32 officers involved included and ranked in order were a take down to the ground (15), used hands/arms (9), used an arm bar (2), used pressure points (2) and deployed OC (1). Alcohol/drugs were a confirmed in over 50% of the incidents a factor which poses a unique challenge to officers when attempting to de-escalate situations. ***In 100% of all the incidents the***



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subjects involved ignored repeated police commands and more than the majority of these incidents the police were called to the scene. When examining the days of the week with respect to force being used per incident, Sunday and Monday were the highest with 4 each, followed by Tuesday with 3, and Wednesdays through Saturday with 2 apiece. Lastly and when it comes to time, 12 use of forces happened between 7pm and 7am and 7 happened between 7am and 7pm (our designated assigned shifts).

Racial and Gender Comparisons

In analyzing the race of the actors against whom force was used in comparison to the 19 incidents reported, here is the breakdown: 13 incidents involved whites, 5 incidents involved white Hispanics and 3 incidents involved blacks (***note 2 incidents had two different individuals involved in the use of force bringing the total to 21***). Of the incidents involving whites and white Hispanics, 9 took place in town, 8 took place on the highway area including the apartment complexes and 1 took place out of town. Of the incidents involving blacks, all 3 took place in the highway area including the apartment complexes. In comparison to our US Census Data for Maple Shade, 66.3% of the population is white, 9.9% is black, 8.1% is Asian, 7.9% is two or more races and 12.2% is Hispanic or Latino. From a gender perspective, force was used against 18 males (white, white Hispanic and black) and 3 females who are all listed as white. In comparison to our US Census Data for Maple Shade, 49.9% of the population is male and 50.1% of the population is female. It is important to note that no racial animus or discriminatory practices were detected in any of our reviews of our officer's use of force.

Continuing with our internal review process, we have found officers spending anywhere between under 1 minute to over 3 hours on average PRIOR to using force, a statistic we will continue to monitor in 2025. As noted above, many of these instances required officers to take immediate action in close proximity to arrival due to the nature of the call and the actions of the subject upon whom force was used. It is important to note as stipulated above that our level of response to mental health crisis calls and disturbances alone, where alcohol and drugs are on board for the subject at the center of these calls, often dictates the time and investment an officer can make in de-escalating a situation before they are required to use force to contain, control, secure or arrest a subject.

Conclusions

Maple Shade PD has been conducting Use of Force reviews for years. This requirement is not anything new to us. As the Acting Chief since early 2019 and the permanent Chief since early 2020, I have reviewed every Use of Force to ensure compliance and best practices exist (unless there was a conflict of interest or I was unavailable to review them). Under the current directive and policy, I have continued that practice and included myself formally in the chain of command reviews. We conduct the



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same model of reviews for Show of Force and Vehicle pursuits. All of the force reviews were deemed justified after a meaningful command level review and 6 were listed as Justified with Counseling. The counseling provided focused on avoiding banter with subjects, maintaining a professional demeanor, using profanity and tactical considerations with respect to weapons handling.

This agency is also currently preparing to bring the Pepperball System on line with our agency within the next few months. We have already purchased the necessary equipment and certified several instructors to take on this new task of training our team. I will be securing the necessary approval from the Burlington County Prosecutor to go live when we are ready to roll out the new less-lethal technology in our continuing effort to preserve human life.

Analysis – Show of Force

Of the 3 Show of Force incidents involving 4 officers, we were called to the scene 100% of the time. The calls involved in the Show of Force included a subject with a gun, assault and flight, and theft and flight. In 2 of the incidents, the subject in question ignored verbal commands. An arrest was made in 2 of the incidents and 100% of the incidents took place in the highway area of the township. Examining the issue of race, 100% of all Show of Force reports involved whites and white Hispanics. All of the subjects listed were male. The level of subject's resistance encountered by the officer upon contact included active and passive resisters. The officer's in turn displayed a handgun along with verbal commands 100% of the time. Lastly, all of the Show of Force incidents were deemed justified after a meaningful command level review with 1 listed as Justified with Counseling over a weapons handling issue. Much like with the Use of Force, Officers are spending considerable time attempting to de-escalate situations in an attempt to lower the temperature on scene and gain compliance of the subjects involved. Our agency puts as much effort into our Show of Force reviews as we do our Use of Force reviews always looking to improve on tactics, techniques and procedures.

Year to Year Comparison

In comparison to 2022, 2023, and 2024, our overall force reports and incidents are split as demonstrated in the trend analysis report. In 2022, our agency had 18 incidents involving force with 41 officers filing reports with 27,000 calls for service as compared to 2023 where we had 15 incidents involving force with 30 officers filing reports with 25,000 calls for service. In 2024, we had 19 incidents of force involving 32 officers, demonstrating a slight increase over 2023 but a split result for 2022. Maple Shade Police also catalogued 287 arrests and wrote well over 2,000 traffic summonses and written warnings in 2024. Through the reviews that we conduct daily of our calls for service, our officers are spending considerable time de-escalating situations to avoid force as a last resort. No doubt our



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officers deal with a high number of mental health and addicted individuals and our outreach work with the Volunteers of America (VOA) gives our officers a softer first contact in many of these encounters and I believe that strategy has helped. We have also utilized our pilot program with ARRIVE in partnership with Legacy Treatment Services and the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office for mental health and addiction interventions, where we pair a mental health professional with a CIT trained officer to intervene where appropriate. The model we have adopted is called the "close follow up" model and we are provided additional support from Oaks Integrated Care for those who may not need to be transported to the hospital but appear to need some follow up care. Lastly, both myself and my Operations Lieutenant have been asked to sit on the newly formed ARRIVE Mental Health Board and the County Mental Health Working Group as part of our mission to address issues in real time and with lasting solutions.

For 2024, our "officer force applied" showed an uptick in tackling or taking the subject down to the ground. This is usually very effective in avoiding more serious encounters and allows multiple officers to secure a subject. For this category, we went from 16 in 2023 to 19 in 2024. Further and with this said, we saw an increase in the use of arms/hands from 10 in 2023 to 19 in 2024. Lastly, arm bars were also down slightly from 6 in 2023 to 3 in 2024. In examining officer injuries over the last 3 years, the numbers have consistently hovered around 5 to 6 and thankfully none were too serious to our officers. When talking about subject injuries, there were 8 that were reported in 2024. Most were minor in nature amounting to abrasions or lacerations. It was a decrease from 2023, but it is important to note that many of the subjects our officers dealt with were aggressive, violent, and threatening and the ground is often the safest place to secure these subjects to either take them into custody or secure them for transport to the hospital for a mental health screening. With that said, contacting the ground can cause abrasions and lacerations depending on the surface, surroundings and atmosphere upon which this takes place. To prepare for this, our officers are training annually in defensive tactics including a combination of Krav Maga and Gracie Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu for law enforcement, which is our latest edition to the program. We have several Level II Gracie instructors and plan to continue their development in this system as additional levels are released. Further, we also have one PTC certified Defensive Tactics instructor who will work with our Gracie instructors in the development of our in-house training program.

In comparing "initial reason for the incident" from 2023 to 2024, two categories that stand out are mental health incidents (21% in 2024 versus 43% in 2023) and disturbances which usually include being under the influence of alcohol/drugs/both (21% in 2024 versus 38% in 2023). Even though these percentages are down slightly, they still account for almost half of our force encounters which continue to reinforce the need for our programs focused on mental health and addiction related services. Expanding on this category, domestic violence and wellbeing checks represented 11% in 2024, with a suicidal person rounding out the top 5 at 5%.



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Another category within this section that I am going to address is the one which showed a significant decrease in 2024 with just 2 contacts is welfare checks. In 2023, we had 5 welfare check contacts and in 2022 we had 15 welfare check contacts tied to force and again, I attribute the outreach work we have been doing in the community interjecting assistance before it reaches a point where a person may be spiraling downward into a crisis mode combined with our de-escalation training in convincing folks to seek assistance without the need for force.

The last category I will examine for a year to year analysis is the "subject actions leading to force over-time". The top classification displayed was resisted arrest and officer control with 28 listed for 2024 in comparison to 19 in 2023. For the remainder of 2024, none of the categories aligned to 2023 for comparison and they are spitting (12), verbal/fighting stance/threat (11), kicking (9), and threaten to kick (7). As you can see, many of these contacts surround violent or threatening behavior often directed at or towards law enforcement or another and which requires action on the part of the officer. De-escalation techniques will only work if a person is open to talking or conversing versus someone determined to physically act or harm themselves or another. The action taken by our officers is the least amount necessary to make certain the subject is appropriately controlled and secured based upon the situation at hand.

Recommendations:

Our officers overall have done an excellent job considering we handled 26,541 calls for service and had only 19 incidents involving 32 officers using force. Statistically, this is tremendous. As I noted earlier in my report, the challenges we face in the apartment complexes, motel and highway districts are many due to the transient nature of the population that resides there. Forming lasting, meaningful and significant relationships can be difficult when most residents move in and move out on a regular basis. As was highlighted in the 21st Century Policing model, by knowing the community well that we engage with stands to reason that police will be less likely to engage in behaviors that could be considered abusive, excessive or unethical. With this in mind, we plan to continue our engagement either way by utilizing our Community Affairs Officer and building out a SLEO team to support our engagement efforts. A recent example in support of this is our continued efforts in the area of food insecurity by providing a measure to close this gap with the food drives we run through the fall in the school district, the town wide food drive and the youth groups/sport team's food drives. This is done in conjunction with our Chaplain non-profit (MSPCA) and PBA Local #267 (union) where the food bank receives a large amount of food donations and funding to support their efforts in the community.

We also plan to continue our de-escalation training in Verbal Judo for our officers which continues to show its benefits to our team, as well as investing in our officer's future by engaging in



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continuing education and training through the various police academies and reputable private training groups. By investing in our officers, by having clear policy statements through Accreditation and by showing the community our commitment to them through many of our charitable works and engagement efforts, I am hopeful that the times that we have to use force remain minimal and that the force we must use also remains minimal.

Vehicle Pursuit Review:

In 2024, there was one vehicle pursuit conducted in Maple Shade Township by our agency in the area of Rt. 73 North by Stiles Avenue on Tuesday 1/2/2024 @7:12pm. The officer involved responded to a wanted person and vehicle in the area of the CVS by Rt. 73 North and Fox Meadow Drive. As the officer as was pulling into the shopping complex, he witnessed the suspect vehicle pulling out in a rapid manner striking a portion of another officer's body and nearly striking a second officer standing nearby in close proximity. As the officer pulled out onto Rt. 73 North, the officer closed the distance and attempted to stop the vehicle in question. The suspect vehicle failed to stop when signaled and quickly sped away. The pursuit was eventually terminated by a supervisor and the driver/suspect vehicle remained outstanding. After a command level review, the pursuit was ruled as Justified with Counseling and several issues were addressed with the involved officer over procedural issues regarding the pursuit.

Recommendations:

Since we had only one pursuit in 2024, there is really no analysis to be completed. As an agency, we will continue to discourage pursuits by our officers unless the situation is so extreme that it requires one to be permitted. The one caution I would note is the continuing challenge of officers following a vehicle that is refusing to stop or feigns stopping and then speeds off again. This behavior by suspects creates issues for officers attempting to find a bright line of "am I in pursuit or not". We had several eluding incidents where officers did not pursue, but were very concerned about being called out by our administration or outside entities trying to say they were pursuing. Our administrative team has done our best to continue to drill down on these points so we remain compliant with our policy while understanding suspects are doing their best to create unwinnable situations for law enforcement, knowing full well how restrictive the policy continues to be in New Jersey.

Internal Affairs Overview:

Our agency had a total of 8 Internal Affairs complaints filed against 11 officers for 2024 in conjunction with handling 26,541 calls for service. 6 complaints were filed by citizens and 2 were opened by the agency to take a deeper look at an incident or encounter. As far as dispositions go, 5



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officers were Exonerated following proper policy/procedures. 3 complaints were Sustained against officers for violating departmental policy or procedure receiving minor discipline such as oral counseling, or an oral or written reprimand, and 3 complaints were carried over into 2025 as of this writing. None of the complaints involved Excessive Use of Force or Vehicle Pursuit Violations and there was no major discipline listed for 2024.

Body Worn Camera (BWC)/Video Audit:

In accordance with our BWC policy, our supervisors conduct a meaningful BWC review for any use of force, motor vehicle or foot pursuit, officer involved collision or officer involved injuries. These reviews are forwarded up through the chain of command to the Chief of Police as well to make certain all policies and procedures are being followed as a measure of quality control. Further, supervisors are also required to conduct random BWC reviews to make certain the patrol officers on their shifts are conducting themselves in accordance with our performance standards and utilizing their cameras as required by our directives. Crashes involving officers will also go before the Crash Review Board which is run by a Lieutenant with a disposition recommendation made to the Chief of Police through the chain of command. Lastly, whenever an officer is injured on the job, there is a risk-based assessment completed in order to determine what if anything could have been done differently to prevent the injury to the officer or to change the outcome of the event in question.

Respectfully submitted,
Christopher J. Fletcher
Chief Christopher J. Fletcher