



Policy Number: 1008 – Commendations and Awards
Effective Date: August 19, 2026
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Approved By: Brandon Gatlin, Chief of Police

1008.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides general guidelines for recognizing commendable or meritorious acts of members of the Montana State University Billings Police Department (Department) and individuals from the community.

1008.2 POLICY

It is the policy of this Department to recognize and acknowledge exceptional individual or group achievements, performance, proficiency, heroism and service of its members and individuals from the community through commendations and awards.

1008.3 COMMENDATIONS

Commendations for members of the Department, or for individuals from the community, may be initiated by any Department member or by any person from the community.

1008.4 CRITERIA

A meritorious or commendable act may include, but is not limited to:

1. Superior handling of a difficult situation.
2. Conspicuous bravery or outstanding performance.
3. Any action or performance that is above and beyond typical duties.

1008.4.1 DEPARTMENT MEMBER DOCUMENTATION

Members of the Department should document meritorious or commendable acts. The documentation should contain:

1. Identifying information:
 - a. For members of the Department - name, unit, and assignment at the date and time of the meritorious or commendable act
 - b. For individuals from the community - name, address, telephone number
2. A brief account of the meritorious or commendable act with report number(s), as appropriate.
3. The signature of the member submitting the documentation.

1008.4.2 COMMUNITY MEMBER DOCUMENTATION

Documentation of a meritorious or commendable act submitted by a person from the community should be accepted in any form. However, written documentation is preferred. Department members accepting the documentation should attempt to obtain detailed information regarding the matter, including:

1. Identifying information:
 - a. For members of the Department - name, unit, and assignment at the date and time of the meritorious or commendable act.
 - b. For individuals from the community - name, address, telephone number.
2. A brief account of the meritorious or commendable act with report numbers, as appropriate.
3. The signature of the person submitting the documentation.

1008.4.3 PROCESSING DOCUMENTATION

Documentation regarding a meritorious or commendable act by a Department member or community member shall be forwarded to the Assistant Chief for review.

Upon receipt, the Assistant Chief will convene an Award Committee to review the documentation. The committee will consist of one Department member and a minimum of two additional individuals selected by the Assistant Chief. Additional members may be appointed at the Assistant Chief's discretion, as appropriate.

The Award Committee will review all submitted documentation and make a recommendation regarding recognition or award to the Assistant Chief and Chief of Police.

The Assistant Chief and Chief of Police will review the committee's recommendation and determine the appropriate level of recognition.

Once approved, the commendation or award will be presented at an appropriate venue or ceremony. Documentation of the recognition will be maintained in the member's personnel file, or in a designated file for community member recognitions, as appropriate.

1008.5 AWARDS

Awards may be bestowed upon members of the Department and individuals from the community. These awards include:

1. Medal of Honor
2. Medal of Valor
3. Medal of Merit
4. Lifesaving Award
5. Distinguished Service Medal
6. Purple Heart Medal
7. Meritorious Service Medal

8. Achievement/Appreciation Award
9. Specialty Assignment Ribbon
10. POST Status
11. Educational Award
12. Expert Firearms Ribbon

1008.6 INDIVIDUAL AWARD CRITERIA

A. MEDAL OF HONOR:



1. The Medal of Honor is the University Police Department's highest honor and is awarded by the Chief of Police. It is awarded to a sworn member who, in the line of duty, performs an act of extraordinary heroism involving conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, clearly above and beyond the call of duty.
 - a. Criteria:
 - i. Involves imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm
 - ii. Voluntary action not required by policy, assignment, or expectation
 - iii. Actions clearly distinguish the member from others in similar circumstances
 - iv. Results in the preservation of life or prevention of catastrophic harm
 - b. A posthumous award may be given to an individual who has lost his/her life under conditions where the officer endangered themselves in circumstances consistent with good police practices.
 - c. This award shall be issued only in the most exceptional circumstances.
2. Medal awarded. (MD110) with (RP17) or (RL1)
 - a. Ribbon: 1/3 red, 1/3 white, 1/3 blue. (SAB3_21) (#1/#28/#20)
 - b. Commendation awarded.

B. MEDAL OF VALOR:



1. The Medal of Valor is the University Policy Department's second highest honor and is awarded by the Chief of Police. It is awarded to a sworn member who demonstrates exceptional courage and decisive action while facing immediate and life-threatening danger.
 - a. Criteria:
 - i. Substantial risk of serious injury or death
 - ii. Courage, composure, and professionalism exceed normal duty expectations
 - iii. Actions directly contribute to saving life, preventing serious injury, or resolving a dangerous incident
 - iv. Recognize bravery and courage in the face of danger
 - v. Used for officer involved shootings, armed confrontations, rescues under fire or other life-threatening events
 - b. The distinction between Medal of Honor service and Medal of Valor service is made in the beyond the call of duty circumstance and in the degree of risk involved to the officer.
2. Medal awarded. (MD117) (RL4_51)
 - a. Ribbon: Blue with blue, red and white stripes on left and right 1/3. (SAB3_162) (#20/#1/#28/#20/#28/#1/#20)
 - b. Commendation awarded.

C. MEDAL OF MERIT:



1. The Medal of Merit is awarded by the Chief of Police. It is awarded to a sworn or non-sworn member for exceptional performance during a specific incident or event that reflects sound judgment, initiative, and professionalism.
 - a. Criteria:
 - i. Performance exceeds normal expectations
 - ii. May involve complex, stressful, or high-liability situations
 - iii. Does not require imminent threat to life
2. Medal awarded. (MD116) (RL4_73)
 - a. Ribbon: Blue with white, red, white stripes in the center.
(SAB3_34) (#20/#28/#1/#28/#20)
 - b. Commendation awarded.

D. LIFE SAVING AWARD:



1. The Life Saving Award is awarded by the Chief of Police, or their designee. It is awarded to a sworn or non-sworn member whose direct and immediate actions result in the saving or preservation of a human life.
 - a. Criteria:
 - i. Recognizes direct actions that save a life
 - ii. Clear cause-and-effect between the members' actions and the lifesaving outcome
 - iii. May include medical intervention, rescue efforts, or emergency response
 - iv. Often awarded for CPR, AED use, rescues, overdose reversals or medical intervention
 - v. Personal risk may or may not be present
2. Medal awarded. (MD107) (RL4_54)
 - a. Ribbon: 1/3 Blue, 1/3 White, 1/3 Blue. (SAB3_21)
 - b. Commendation awarded.

E. DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL:



1. The Distinguished Service Medal is awarded by the Chief of Police. It is awarded to a sworn or non-sworn member for sustained, exceptional service that significantly enhances the Department's effectiveness, reputation, or mission.
 - a. Criteria:
 - i. Demonstrated over an extended period of time, recognizes sustained or career level excellence
 - ii. Reflects leadership, innovation, or exemplary dedication
 - iii. Results in measurable and lasting benefit to the Department or community
 - iv. Often awarded at retirement or for multi-year impact
2. Medal awarded. (MD114) (RL2_19)
 - a. Ribbon: 1/2 blue, 1/2 red. (SAB3_19) (#20/#1)
 - b. Commendation awarded.

F. PURPLE HEART MEDAL:



1. The Purple Heart is awarded by the Chief of Police. It is awarded to a sworn member who, in the line of duty, is seriously injured or killed as a direct result of a hostile or intentional act while performing official law enforcement duties.
 - a. Criteria:
 - i. Injury or death occurs while the member is acting in an official capacity

- ii. Injury is the result of a violent or hostile act, including but not limited to assault, gunfire, stabbing, vehicular assault, or other intentional act directed at the member
 - iii. Injury requires professional medical treatment beyond routine first aid, or results in death
 - iv. The injury or death is not the result of negligence, accidents, or routine training activities, unless directly caused by a hostile act
 - v. Incident is documented through official reports and medical records
 - vi. May be awarded posthumously to the member's next of kin
2. Medal awarded. (MD118) (RL2_11)
- a. Ribbon: Purple ribbon. (SAB3_1) (#22)
 - b. Commendation awarded.

G. MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL:



1. The Meritorious Service Medal is awarded by the Chief of Police. It is awarded to a sworn or non-sworn member for noteworthy service or achievement that clearly exceeds normal job expectations, but falls short of the criteria of the Distinguished Service Medal.
- a. Criteria:
 - i. Recognizes above average performance
 - ii. May recognize a specific project, assignment, or period of performance
 - iii. Demonstrates initiative, professionalism, and commitment
 - iv. Produces a meaningful positive impact on operations or service delivery
2. Medal awarded. (MD105) (RL2_30)
- a. Ribbon: 1/2 red, 1/2 white. (SAB3_19)(#1/#28)
 - b. Commendation awarded.

H. ACHIEVEMENT/APPRECIATION AWARD:

1. May be awarded at the supervisory or command level. It is awarded to a sworn or non-sworn member, individual, or organization in recognition of noteworthy contributions, assistance, or performance that support the Department's mission, values, or operations but do not meet the criteria for a formal medal or commendation.
- a. Criteria:
 - i. Recognizes a specific act, contribution, or period of service

- ii. May be awarded for internal or external support to the Department
 - iii. Actions demonstrate professionalism, cooperation, initiative, or commitment
 - iv. Contribution provides a meaningful benefit to departmental operations, community safety, or service delivery
 - v. Does not require extraordinary performance or exposure to risk
 - vi. May be awarded to non-employees, volunteers, students, community members, partner agencies, or vendors
 - vii. May be issued as a Certificate of Achievement (performance-based) or Certificate of Appreciation (support-based)
 - viii. Not required to be processed through the awards committee
2. Guidelines:
- a. Certificate of Achievement is typically used for above-average performance or completion of a significant task, project, or initiative
 - b. Certificate of Appreciation is typically used to recognize assistance, cooperation, or support, including one-time contributions
3. Commendation awarded.

I. SPECIALTY ASSIGNMENT RIBBON:



1. It is awarded to a sworn member who is formally assigned to and actively serves in one or more designated specialty or extra-duty assignments that require advanced training, certification, and ongoing responsibility beyond normal patrol or primary job duties.
- a. Criteria:
- i. Member is formally appointed by the Chief of Police or designee to a recognized specialty assignment
 - ii. Assignment requires specialized training, certification, or instructor qualification
 - iii. Member performs duties in addition to regular assigned responsibilities
 - iv. Member remains in good standing within the specialty assignment
 - v. Assignment is documented through official appointment orders, training records, or assignment rosters
2. Eligible Specialty Assignments may include, but are not limited to:
- a. Firearms Instructor
 - b. TASER / Less-Lethal Instructor
 - c. Field Training Officer (FTO)
 - d. Defensive Tactics Instructor
 - e. Emergency Medical / First Aid Instructor
 - f. Other approved instructor or specialty assignments as designated by the Chief of Police
3. Guidelines:
- a. Ribbon is awarded upon initial appointment to a qualifying specialty assignment

- b. Ribbon and devices may be retained permanently once awarded, regardless of future reassignment
 - i. Temporary, acting, or short-term assignments do not qualify unless formally designated
- 4. Ribbon Awarded: Red Ribbon with: (SAB3_3) (#1)
 - a. Gold Electroplate 1 Gold Star.

J. POST STATUS:



1. It is awarded to a sworn member in recognition of professional achievement and career progression through attainment of Montana P.O.S.T. certification levels, reflecting increased training, experience, leadership competency, and commitment to professional law enforcement standards.
 - a. Criteria:
 - i. Member holds a current and valid P.O.S.T. certification issued by the Montana Public Safety Officer Standards and Training Council
 - ii. Certification is verified through official P.O.S.T. records
 - iii. Certification was obtained while the member was employed in a sworn capacity
 - iv. Certification remains in good standing at the time of award
2. Guidelines:
 - a. Ribbon is awarded upon official confirmation of certification
 - b. Ribbon and devices may be retained permanently, even if the member later transfers or changes assignments.
 - c. Certification obtained prior to employment with the Department may be recognized if verified and approved by the Chief of Police
 - d. Lapsed, revoked, or expired certifications do not qualify
3. Ribbon Awarded: Blue ribbon with:
 - a. Intermediate: Gold Electroplate 1 Star. (SAB3_3) (#20)
 - b. Advanced: Gold Electroplate 2 Star. (SAB3_4) (#20)
 - c. Supervisory: Gold Electroplate 3 Star. (SAB3_5) (#20)
 - d. Command: Gold Electroplate 4 Star. (SAB3_6) (#20)
 - e. Administrative: Gold Electroplate 5 Star. (SAB3_7) (#20)

K. EDUCATIONAL AWARD:



1. It is awarded to a sworn member in recognition of formal academic achievement through completion of an accredited post-secondary degree, reflecting a commitment to professional development, critical thinking, and lifelong learning in support of the Department's mission.

a. Criteria:

- i. Degree is awarded by an accredited college or university recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or an equivalent accrediting body
- ii. Degree is verified through official transcripts or diploma documentation
- iii. Degree may be in any discipline
- iv. Degree may be earned prior to or during employment with the Department
- v. Degree must be fully conferred at the time of award

2. Guidelines:

- a. Ribbon is awarded upon verification of degree completion
- b. Ribbon and devices may be retained permanently
- c. Honorary degrees do not qualify
- d. Partial degree completion or certificates do not qualify

3. Ribbons awarded: Green Ribbon with:

- a. Associate: Gold Electroplate 1 Star. (SAB3_3) (#12)
- b. Baccalaureate: Gold Electroplate 2 Star. (SAB3_4) (#12)
- c. Masters: Gold Electroplate 3 Star. (SAB3_5) (#12)
- d. Doctoral: Gold Electroplate 4 Star. (SAB3_6) (#12)

L. EXPERT FIREARMS RIBBON:



1. It is awarded to a sworn member who demonstrates exceptional proficiency, accuracy, and firearms safety by achieving an expert-level score during an official Department-approved firearms qualification course.

a. Criteria:

- i. Member successfully completes a department-approved firearms qualification
- ii. Qualifications are conducted under the supervision of a certified firearms instructor
- iii. Member achieves a score meeting or exceeding the expert qualification standard of 97/100 or better
- iv. Qualification includes safety, accuracy, and weapon handling components
- v. Results are documented through official qualification records

2. Ribbon Awarded: Solid Gold. (SAB3_1) (#8)

M. AWARD DESIGN:

1. For commendations that include a medal, the medal and ribbon for each award is described in parenthesis next to the award. These awards will be Gold Electroplate, with Blue Block Lettering with a Blue Box. A picture of the Medal and Ribbon are included next to the award.

2. For awards that include a ribbon only the ribbon is described in parentheses next to the award. The ribbon will be Gold Electroplate with a bar holder attachment. A picture of the Ribbon is included next to the award.
3. Description of awards in parentheses are from the E Police Supply website:
<https://epolicesupply.com/>

1008.7 ORDER OF PRECEDENCE

Department awards shall have precedence over other agency awards. Higher ribbons are worn to the left of and above lesser ribbons from the uniform center chest area. Ribbons are worn in rows of three unless an officer has fewer ribbons. The Medal of Honor ribbon may be worn above the other ribbons as a solo ribbon.

Order of Precedence:

1. Medal of Honor
2. Medal of Valor
3. Medal of Merit
4. Life Saving Award
5. Distinguished Service Medal
6. Purple Heart Medal
7. Meritorious Service Medal
8. Achievement/Appreciation Award
9. Specialty Assignment Ribbon
10. POST Status
11. Educational Award
12. Expert Firearms Ribbon

1008.8 DEPARTMENT AWARD PLAQUE RECOGNITION

The purpose is to formally recognize members of the Department who have demonstrated exceptional performance, bravery, meritorious service, or sacrifice in the line of duty. Recognition will be provided through permanent placement on official Department award plaques displayed within the department facility.

1008.8.1 AWARDS ELIGIBLE FOR PLAQUE RECOGNITION

Department members who are formally awarded any of the following Department awards shall be recognized by having their name, award title, and date of award inscribed on an official department award plaque:

1. Medal of Honor
2. Medal of Valor
3. Medal of Merit
4. Life Saving Award
5. Distinguished Service Medal
6. Purple Heart Medal
7. Meritorious Service Medal

These plaques shall be prominently displayed in designated Department hallways or common areas as determined by the Chief of Police or designee.

1008.8.2 RECOGNITION OF AWARDS ISSUED BY OUTSIDE FIRST RESPONDER AGENCIES

Department members who are formally recognized by an outside law enforcement agency, fire department, emergency medical service, or other recognized first responder organization may also be eligible for plaque recognition within the Department.

To qualify for inclusion on a department award plaque:

1. The external award must be formally documented and verifiable.
2. The nature and criteria of the external award must substantially mirror the intent and level of distinction associated with department awards listed above.
3. The award must be earned while the member is actively employed by this Department. Awards received for service performed while employed at another agency do not qualify for department plaque recognition.
4. Final determination for plaque eligibility shall be made by the Chief of Police or a designated awards review committee.

When approved, the members' name, external awarding agency, award title, and date shall be inscribed on the appropriate department recognition plaque.

Criteria for each award and the recipients are determined by the Chief of Police.

(Cancels and Replaces 108.2 – Commendations and Awards; 108.2.1 – Award Nomination Form; 108.2.2 – Award Citation Form; and 108.2.3 – Award Illustration)