

# WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE STOPPED BY A POLICE OFFICER?



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August 2010

# WHY SHOULD A POLICE OFFICER WANT TO QUESTION ME?

When an officer questions someone, there is an underlying reason, such as:

- Checking out a complaint from a citizen.
- Responding to a report of criminal activity.
- Looking for potential witnesses to assist in an investigation.
- Thinking that you are having trouble and need assistance.

# WHY WOULD A POLICE OFFICER WANT TO QUESTION ME?

- To clarify the situation, they will ask you questions.
- Officers have a responsibility to properly investigate matters that may threaten public safety or involve breaking the law.
- Questions are not necessarily an accusation.
- Cooperative responses can alleviate potential conflict.

# WHEN YOU ARE STOPPED BY A POLICE OFFICER, THEY WILL...

- Provide their name upon request.
- If in plain clothes, identify themselves when taking action.
- Inform a person about the reason for being stopped or questioned.
- Only use the amount of force necessary to affect the arrest of a suspect.
- Excessive force is not tolerated by the Department.

# WHAT TO DO IF A POLICE OFFICER STOPS YOU ON THE STREET?

- Be courteous.
- Follow the officer's instructions.
- Keep your hands visible to the officer.
- Ask to have a supervisor respond if you believe the officer's actions are improper.
- Don't run. It makes you look guilty of something and you could fall and injure yourself.

## ...STOPS YOU ON THE STREET?

- Don't lie. You may be charged with opposing an officer.
- Don't get in the way if an officer is taking someone you're with into custody. You could be arrested for interfering.

# WHY WERE YOU STOPPED?

- Police may have a minimal description of a suspect, which you might resemble.
- You might be in an area where a crime has just been committed.
- Your actions may appear to be suspicious and you act even more suspiciously when you see the officer.
- Someone may have pointed you out as a suspect.

# WHAT TO DO IF A POLICE OFFICER STOPS YOU IN YOUR VEHICLE?

- Safely pull over to a place out of traffic flow as soon as emergency lights are activated.
- Sit calmly, with your hands visible on the steering wheel.
- If you have a passenger, ask them to sit quietly with their hands visible.



## ...STOPS YOU IN YOUR VEHICLE?

- Avoid sudden movements or ducking in the seat; these actions can unnecessarily alarm the officer.
- At night, turn on your inside light when you pull the vehicle over.
- Do not get out of your vehicle unless the officer asks you to step out. If you are asked to do so, comply in a calm manner.

## ...STOPS YOU IN YOUR VEHICLE?

- Communicate your actions in advance by telling the officer what you will be doing before you move.
- If requested, you must give the officer your driver's license, vehicle registration and proof of insurance. (*Tell the officer where it is before reaching for it.*)

## ...STOPS YOU IN YOUR VEHICLE?

- If you are issued a citation, you will be asked to sign for it.
  - This is not an admission of guilt.
  - Clarifies the circumstances, but guilt or innocence can only be determined in court.
  - Arguments over the citation or protests about the situation cannot be resolved in the street.

# WHAT TO DO IF A POLICE OFFICER COMES TO YOUR DOOR?

- Typical reasons the officer may be there:
  - To interview you or a member of your household as a witness to an incident that is being investigated.
  - To make a notification.
  - To serve an arrest warrant.
  - To serve a search warrant.

## ...COMES TO YOUR DOOR?

- You may ask for identification. The officer should willingly provide identification and state the purpose for being there.
- If the officers have a warrant, you may ask to see a copy of it. Arrest warrants are centrally filed and the officers may not have it in their possession. A copy can be provided at a later date.

# ...COMES TO YOUR DOOR?

- Search Warrant
  - Any time of day or night.
  - Knock and announce unless emergency circumstances exist.
  - Owner need not be present for warrant to be served. (A copy will be left prominently displayed.)
  - A list of seized property will be provided.

# ...COMES TO YOUR DOOR?

## ➤ Arrest Warrant

- Commands the officer to arrest the person named in the warrant.
- Reviewed by the State Attorney's Office.
- Signed by a judge.
- Search of the person arrested and their area under their immediate control.

# IF YOU BELIEVE YOU WERE NOT TREATED CORRECTLY?

- Politely ask questions of the officer to clarify the situation, but do not argue the issue.
- Ask to speak to a supervisor.
- Call or come to the Police Department after the incident is over to speak with a supervisor.
- File a citizen's complaint.



*The Sarasota Police Department will investigate all complaints against the agency and its members. Since this agency is accountable for the acts and omissions of all members, an obligation exists to our members and our citizens to investigate allegations of misconduct. All complaints shall be investigated fairly and impartially.*