

Memo



To: Chief Kelley
From: Captain Lavoie
CC: Deputy Chief Dalton
Date: 1/6/2026
Re: 2025 Pursuit Analysis

An analysis of our motor vehicle pursuits for the 2025 calendar year indicates the Durham Police Department had three motor vehicle pursuits. The Durham Police Department has been involved in ten pursuits in the past 25 years. Our pursuit policy was last updated in 2023. The last pursuit was on December 6, 2025.

As shown in the chart below, the Durham Police Department is rarely involved in pursuits. Although there was a dramatic increase in 2025, there is no obvious trend suggesting why this is happening or that it will continue in future years. With previous years having so few or no pursuits, conducting an analysis to find meaningful trends is problematic. However, two major points of interest continue to stand out when evaluating the department's participation in pursuits.

- 1) **A strong policy:** The policy leaves no room for interpretation and provides clear direction to supervisors and officers alike. The 2023 policy updates removed several options available to officers in the past and instead provides clear direction and limitations regarding pursuits. I believe it continues to play a role in our decrease or lack of pursuits and places the preservation of life as the utmost priority.
- 2) **Training:** A policy has limited practical value unless it is reviewed, reinforced, and integrated into daily operations on a regular basis. Durham officers are required to review the pursuit policy annually and to formally acknowledge their understanding through PowerDMS by way of a "roll call sign off." In addition, Use of Force instructors consistently incorporate the policy's core principles into their annual lesson plans and corresponding written examinations. This repeated exposure, combined with ongoing reinforcement by supervisors and field training officers, fosters an organizational culture that places the preservation of human life above all other considerations. As a result, officers' decisions to initiate or decline a vehicle pursuit are guided by these firmly established values. In my assessment, the two factors discussed above are as significant in explaining our low incidence of pursuits.

Critique and Analysis of Pursuits

I have conducted an analysis of the motor vehicle pursuits that took place in 2025. They are summarized and critiqued as follows:

Pursuit #1 – On 11/29/2025, at approximately 11:30 PM, an officer observed a speeding vehicle on Newmarket Road. The speed of the vehicle was 61 MPH in a posted 35 MPH zone. When the officer activated his emergency lights, the operator began to signal with his hand out the window in a manner that the officer thought he was trying to motion that he was finding a safe location to pull over. The suspect continued driving at 35 MPH for about a half of a mile, where he then stopped at a red light and turned north onto Dover Road. The vehicle then continued to drive at 35 MPH on Dover Road and then Route 4 east. Another officer and Sergeant joined behind the initiating officer as the operator continued to fail to stop or yield to his emergency lights.

On Route 4, the Sergeant who did a pursuit analysis documented that he observed the suspect vehicle had lane control issues. Officers were notified by Dispatch that the registered owner was wanted by the New Hampshire State Police and had an active warrant for Reckless Conduct, Disobeying an Officer, and Reckless Operation.

On Route 4, the suspect vehicle was driving between 55 MPH and 60 MPH in a 45 MPH zone. Based on their observations of the driving, officers suspected the operator may be intoxicated or impaired.

At the Scammel Bridge and the Dover town line, the patrol Sergeant terminated all units from the pursuit. Information about the vehicle had been transmitted to New Hampshire State Police who picked up the pursuit in Dover as the vehicle was entering the Spaulding Turnpike. Eventually the operator struck several New Hampshire and Maine State Police vehicles, when it was rendered disabled on Interstate 95 in Maine. The operator resisted arrest, but was taken into custody with several additional charges.

- Traffic was reported by all officers involved at the time of the pursuit to be light and sometimes non-existent.
- Communication was noted to be excellent in relaying information both to other Durham Police officers and to the New Hampshire State Police.
- The pursuit continued after the officer initially tried to stop the vehicle because of the concern that the operator was impaired. The Sergeant noted specifically that the danger to the public did not outweigh the opportunity to apprehend the operator.
- The pursuit was terminated as it left the jurisdiction of the Town of Durham.
- A written report and administrative review of this pursuit were completed.

Pursuit #2 – On 12/06/2025, at approximately 10:29 PM, Durham Police Officers were notified of a BOLO (Be On the Look Out) for a wanted individual driving a Dodge pickup truck. The suspect was wanted by the Belmont Police Department for a Sexual Assault involving a juvenile. It was reported that the suspect may have the victim of the assault with him in the pickup truck.

The vehicle was located in the Town of Strafford, NH, and police there initiated a motor vehicle pursuit. New Hampshire State Police joined and ultimately became the primary law enforcement agency pursuing the suspect. During the pursuit with State Police, the juvenile victim escaped from the vehicle, leaving the suspect as the sole occupant. The vehicle continued to evade police and the pursuit continued.

During the pursuit, State Police and other involved agencies successfully deployed tire deflation devices against the suspect vehicle. The pursuit entered Durham and two Durham officers joined the end of the pursuit behind numerous State Police cruisers. Other officers on shift, aware of the pursuit coming through Durham via radio frequency communications, relayed that they were setting up to block traffic for the pursuit to safely pass through Town.

The suspect vehicle became mechanically disabled due to the damage caused by the tire deflation devices and came to a stop on Route 4 near the Bagdad Road overpass. Durham officers continued to assist by blocking the road from other traffic entering the now active scene. Ultimately this incident turned into a barricaded subject call with the suspect refusing to exit his vehicle and threatening harm against himself and others with a knife.

- There was a high level of communication during this pursuit, in preparation for it to enter the jurisdiction, as well as once it did, by on duty supervisors (Sergeants).
- Although the involvement was that of a support role, policies were followed by all Durham officers involved.
- A shift supervisor completed a written report and administrative review of the pursuit. He documented that officers displayed an “extreme level of competency,” and “humbly followed all orders, even though they were ordered away from the scene,” due to the primary responsibility belonging to State Police.
- It was reported that traffic was light, and there was no adverse weather or road conditions during the pursuit within the jurisdiction of Durham.
- One factor that was noted in this review was that no “Signal 1000” was requested by radio, as is instructed in policy. The shift supervisor at the time noted this was unnecessary as all units on shift at the time were involved in the incident and there were no other calls for service or radio traffic that needed to be stopped or delayed.

Pursuit #3 – On 12/17/2025, at approximately 7:57 AM, Strafford County Dispatch notified dayshift officers of a BOLO (Be On the Look Out) from Dover Police for a theft that had just occurred at a daycare facility in their city. A vehicle description was aired to both dayshift units.

One patrol officer was in the area on another call, and responded toward Route 4 and Back River Road (an area he believed the suspect vehicle might come from in Dover), with his lights and sirens activated. As he approached the traffic light controlled intersection, he noticed a Dover Police vehicle in the line of traffic without any emergency lights activated. Seeing this, he shut off the emergency lights on his patrol car.

As traffic began to move, the officer spotted the BOLO suspect vehicle turning from Back River Road to Route 4 east. The officer activated his emergency lights in an attempt to stop the suspect vehicle, based on the information given to him by Dover Police.

When the officer activated his emergency lights again to conduct a motor vehicle stop, he noted that the Dover Police vehicle made a u-turn and went back toward Dover.

The suspect vehicle did not stop and continued east on Route 4 and back into Dover, out of the jurisdiction of Durham. Another officer arrived in the area and observed the initiating officer with his emergency lights activated and the suspect vehicle in front of him, continuing to drive east. The second officer activated his emergency lights and joined behind the initiating officer, now pursuing the suspect vehicle. As the three vehicles (suspect, Officer one, and Officer two) crossed the Scammel Bridge and into Dover, Officer two de-activated his emergency lights and terminated his involvement in the pursuit.

The initiating officer transmitted several updates via radio to dispatch reporting the location, direction of travel, and speed of the vehicle. He radioed that the vehicle was now traveling south on the Spaulding Turnpike toward Newington. He requested the New Hampshire State Police be notified and take over the pursuit, however he was advised that they were not in the area. The initiating officer updated dispatch that the suspect vehicle was traveling 70 MPH, increasing up to 107 MPH, and was passing several vehicles (approximately eight) while traveling at speed exceeding 100 MPH. The officer updated his location to getting on Interstate 95 north, toward Maine.

Dispatch, without any prompting or direction, called a member of the command staff, the Captain, at his residence, as he was off duty at the time. There was no supervisor on, or scheduled to be on, at that time. The Captain, upon being briefed of the pursuit by the dispatcher, immediately radioed directly to the initiating officer and told him to discontinue the pursuit, which the officer did and acknowledged. The suspect was not located or stopped.

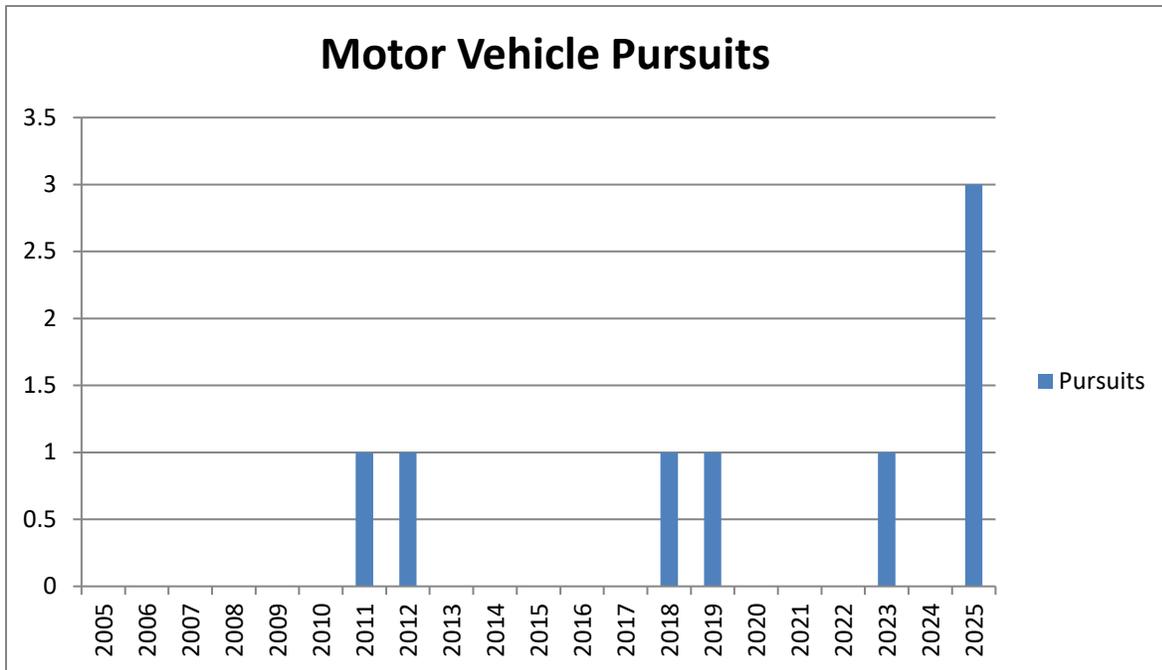
- A dayshift supervisor reviewed reports, dispatch audio, and had conversations with the initiating officer to complete a written report and administrative review of this pursuit.
- In the review, the supervisor indicated that the officer attempted to stop the vehicle based on the Dover Police BOLO and believed he had probable cause to stop and hold the driver based on a misdemeanor or felony level theft from a motor vehicle. Based on this information, a motor vehicle stop was justified.
- Pursuant to policy, the initiating officer should have realized the pursuit was not reasonable due to multiple factors:
 - The crime alleged did not pose a substantial risk to the public if the operator was not immediately apprehended.
 - There was heavy commuter/morning rush hour traffic.
 - The suspect had extreme disregard for public safety by illegally passing multiple vehicles, traveling in excess of 100 MPH and generally driving recklessly in an active attempt to evade and avoid police.
 - The pursuit left the jurisdiction of the Town of Durham.
- At the time of this pursuit there was no on duty supervisor. Officers are trained and should know to contact the Deputy Chief of Police, who oversees all patrol operations, in the absence of a supervisor. This notification should have been completed for two reasons. One, the Deputy Chief must be notified of all pursuits, and two, a supervisory decision to continue a pursuit out of the jurisdiction of the Town of Durham must be made.
- A positive of this pursuit was the initiative Dispatch made by contacting a superior officer (off duty), in this case, the Captain, who called off the pursuit and made appropriate notifications to the Deputy Chief of Police.
- The initiating officer was counseled on the mistakes. He was required to review and understand the Pursuit Policy in its entirety, which was in addition to the annual review requirement he had completed earlier in the year.

- A review of the pursuit policy after this incident found no policy change recommendations.

Analysis of Related Factors

1. (Geography): The annual analysis of Response to Resistance by the Durham Police Department has proven that the highest crime area requiring extensive patrol coverage and other police services continues to be the area centered on the Downtown/Madbury Road/Garrison Avenue area (the north sector), to include adjacent roadways. However, most of the offenses detected as part of officers' self-initiated activity are committed by offenders that are; (a.) on foot and (b.) without immediate access to motor vehicles. There remains no noticeable impact regarding enforcement of motor vehicle laws west of the downtown area.
2. (Date and Time): The time, monthly activity, and days of the week remain the same as are detailed in our Response to Resistance analysis when identifying our busiest activity periods. Activities that would generate conditions conducive to a criminal choosing to flee occur largely on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, between the hours of 9PM and 3AM. Our activity increases during the first ten weeks and last eight weeks of the UNH school year (The number of weeks fluctuates to some degree based on UNH Commencement and Homecoming.) The Durham Police Department takes exhaustive steps to prevent such an atmosphere from developing by employing tactics that substantially increase patrol presence in these areas of town prone to illegal behavior. This increase in police officer presence in the form of cruiser, motorcycle (UNH Police), bicycle and foot patrols creates the illusion that attempts to flee would likely be fruitless. Two of the motor vehicle pursuits occurring in 2025 were on a Wednesday. This shows that a proactive approach to patrolling may continue to deter attempts to flee during these times, as the majority of fleeing did not take place during those times of high police presence and enforcement.
3. (Enforcement): Motor vehicle violations resulting in summonses being issued to the violator are followed by swift and just prosecution; poor judgment/driving habits are immediately addressed by a police officer at the time of violation and shortly thereafter affirmed by the court. Additionally, as motor vehicle laws change, either by legislation or judicial review, our officers are trained on the changes and are expected to enforce the laws using appropriate discretion.
4. (Conduct): Durham Police Officers treat violators with a professional demeanor, dignity, respect, and compassion, thus minimizing the anxiety often associated with an encounter with the police. This theory is furthered by the absence of citizen complaints of alleged police officer misconduct associated with motor vehicle enforcement.
5. (Outreach): The Durham Police Department community policing efforts target age groups that are most likely to engage in high-risk behaviors. We have been successful in establishing a two-way dialogue with those age groups. As the community grows, so should our programs. Our school resource officer continues to do an outstanding job of rapport building with students at all levels.
6. (Training): Ongoing roll call training that includes repetitive review of the department's Mission and Values Statements, the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics,

and Response to Resistance standards as they relate to pursuit and/or forcible stopping. This includes the clearly stated provisions of the pursuit and gives our staff the necessary understanding of what is expected and what limitations they have before they initiate a dangerous pursuit. The result of this agency-wide effort is effective enforcement without unnecessary risk.



As part of the 2025 analysis, I conducted a review of our pursuit policy and all policies, procedures and practices associated with the reporting process. I believe our policy is timely and comprehensive. Currently, the changes we made in 2023 were very positive, and I do not recommend any additional changes to this policy in 2025.