

# Northampton Police Department



Date: February 28, 2018  
To: Mayor David Narkewicz  
From: Chief J. Kasper  
Re: CIP Equipment Request

To Mayor David Narkewicz,

When I first came on the job nearly twenty years ago, I was issued a riot helmet and gas mask, along with a variety of other equipment. Based on the condition and manufacturing date of the equipment I was given, I could tell that this had been issued to NPD officers for decades before me. That was 1998 and then in 2003, after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, there was a renewed focus on preparedness for mass casualty and large-scale events and on the protection of first responders at those scenes. Our outdated helmets and gas masks were replaced as we realized the potential for new threats including biological and chemical warfare (this was in the anthrax era), bombings, active shooter incidents, and other events which were becoming commonplace. To ensure that our officers were best prepared and best protected, former Police Chief Sienkiewicz began asking for tactical money from capital improvements to purchase and replace this type of equipment. The request for equipment has remained almost identical to the original. The only change is that in my most recent request I specifically added in funding for training primarily so that we could pay the hefty costs associated with our annual active shooter training. Beyond that, this request for FY19 does not represent anything new or any change in our plans to properly equip our staff. The following is a table that illustrates the history of this CIP request and affiliated funding.

## History of CIP Protective/Tactical Equipment Requests

| FY   | Request   | Outcome    |
|------|-----------|------------|
| FY06 | 0         | NA         |
| FY07 | 0         | NA         |
| FY08 | 0         | NA         |
| FY09 | 0         | NA         |
| FY10 | \$120,000 | Not funded |
| FY11 | 0         | NA         |
| FY12 | \$60,000  | Funded     |
| FY13 | \$60,000  | Not funded |

|      |          |         |
|------|----------|---------|
| FY14 | \$55,00  | Funded  |
| FY15 | 0        | NA      |
| FY16 | 0        | NA      |
| FY17 | \$67,500 | Funded  |
| FY18 | 0        | NA      |
| FY19 | \$75,000 | Pending |
| FY20 | 0        | NA      |
| FY21 | \$75,000 | NA      |

When I was appointed chief in 2015 I continued to request this critical CIP funding because I too understand the need to prepare our officers for worst case situations and for situations that are part of our daily jobs. To be clear, the vast majority of this money is used to replace existing equipment that has been used or to replace any equipment that has expired. Items like gas mask canisters and aerosol sprays expire, while other items like ammunition, tyvec suits, and other protective items are used and require replacement. To better understand how this account is used, the following table is an overview of the expenditures from the account since 2012:

**Overview of CIP Protective/Tactical Equipment Expenditures from 2012 to Present**

| Category                                     | Amount   | Description   |
|--|----------|---|
| Ammunition                                   | \$30,851 | This is replacement of existing equipment. This category includes ammunition for handguns, ammunition for the less-lethal launcher, and simmunition used for active shooter training. We are required to qualify with our firearms each year, so this is replacing used ammunition.   |
| Gas Masks, Filter Canisters, and Tyvec Suits | \$19,161 | This is replacing existing equipment. Gas masks are issued to every officer upon being hired and the filter canisters require replacement every seven years. Tyvec suits are used for HazMat scenes that are contaminated by either biological or chemical agents.  |
| Weapons, Parts, and Accessories              | \$33,398 | This is a mix of replacement equipment and new technology. Over the past few years we have added EO Tech sights to our weapons. Of the total amount in this category \$13,391 was used on sights including mounts and batteries. An additional notable purchase was 18 new Glock firearms in 2015 for \$5,297. These replaced firearms that had faded sights and we traded the old guns for the new ones. Other purchases in this category include grips, slings, carrying handles, rails, lights, and less-lethal launchers. |
| Training                                     | \$8,492  | This category is a mix of new equipment (targets) and training. The firearms range rental was \$6,400 of this total amount.   |
| Medical                                      | \$5,724  | This is a combination of replacement and new equipment.   |

|          |          |  |
|----------|----------|--|
|          |          | Around 2015 we began carrying tourniquets and combat gauze. We've already had one tourniquet save at a car accident scene. The bulk of this total amount includes these items as well as chest seals and medical "go-bags" to be used at active shooter scenes.  |
| Holsters | \$15,628 | Our department recently transitioned to a new holster model. Our former holsters were a model that was initially created in the 1980's. It had become outdated and expensive. We transitioned over to newer holsters that are made out of a more durable material, are less expensive, and are safer for officers. |

Since becoming a police officer I have witnessed many things change. Internally, we have purchased additional equipment to expand our force options when dealing with subjects. Most notably, we purchased pepperball guns, 40mm less lethal launchers, and patrol rifles. The pepperball gun and 40mm launcher provide officers with more options when dealing with barricaded subjects, violent subjects, and subjects who are armed with a knife or a gun. The intent of these additional force options is to provide officers more choices as they move up and down the use of force continuum along with the subjects they are interacting with. For example, the less-lethal launcher may serve as an alternative in certain deadly force situations. If a subject is armed with a knife, one officer will have a firearm drawn while a second may opt for the less-lethal launcher. This is an impact weapon that fires a large rubber bullet. In this type of situation our staff will spend time communicating with the person and working to de-escalate them. If they are not able to do that and the subject advances on the officers or another citizen, using the less-lethal weapon serves as an alternative to firing a sidearm and is less likely to result in serious injury or death.

I should add that coinciding with this tactical training and equipment we have dramatically increased our training curriculum that focuses on de-escalation strategies, effective communication, and recognizing and best responding to people in mental health crisis.

I understand that some citizens have expressed concern about particular items that may be purchased with this funding. I will address a few of those items.

### **Shields**

Notably, when looking back at the expenditures since 2012, no shields have been purchased. Some people may only associate shields with crowd control and riots. Although we have had them for decades, I cannot think of a time that we have used them in that way. Although they are rarely used, we do have occasions where they are a critical tool to protect all involved. One recent event that comes to mind is the service of a search warrant on Main Street. We had knowledge that the subject inside was armed with an assault rifle. Our officers used our ballistic shield when they made entry to protect themselves from being shot. I cannot imagine asking any member of my staff to engage in this type of high-risk activity without providing them the ballistic protection provided by the shield. Although our officers are wearing ballistic vests, the vest only covers a portion of the torso. The shield provides increased personal protection for these officers who put their lives in jeopardy by going into these high risk areas. Finally, during large scale gatherings such as protests, marches, or other events that draw thousands of people,

we often have a small number of shields on standby in nearby cruisers in case a peaceful event turns into something else. Again, for the two decades I have been policing in Northampton we have had some shields on standby during First Night but we have never needed to use them in that capacity.

### **Helmets**

Notably, when looking back at the expenditures since 2012, no helmets have been purchased. Every officer is issued a helmet upon being hired and this account is only used to replace damaged helmets if the need arises. Tactical helmets are also a critical component of an officer's protective equipment. We may use them on search warrant raids when weapons are known or suspected to be present or other high-risk incidents involving weapons. We also keep them on standby during large scale events including First Night or large marches and protests. Further we occasionally assist nearby communities with mutual aid for large scale events. In early March we assist Amherst PD with monitoring the crowds at Blarney Blowout. In years past officers have been injured by bottles and other objects that people threw at them during this event. Again, while the officers do not wear their helmets while working Blarney, they typically have them secured nearby in case the crowd becomes violent.

### **Ammunition**

The Municipal Police Training Committee (MPTC) requires by law (c140 s131L) that all Massachusetts police officers meet minimum annual firearms standards to ensure competency and proficiency with all weapons that we carry. This includes a minimum number of discharged rounds (bullets) for both training and for qualification. This is required for sidearms, rifles, and our less-lethal launchers. With 65 full-time sworn police officers and nine special police officers, we go through a lot of ammunition each year. We use the tactical fund to replace and replenish used ammunition.

### **Gas Masks and Similar Protective Equipment**

Every officer is issued a gas mask and canister upon being hired. The gas masks are to protect us from any number of threats including biological and chemical agents. The canisters that attach to the masks expire every seven years and must be replaced. Over the past few years members of our staff have responded to a number of cases involving suicides in confined spaces with the use of chemical agents. We also responded to a clandestine drug lab that quickly turned into a HazMat scene. These scenes pose an incredibly high risk to responders and exposure can result in death. Protective equipment including filtered masks is a must. An additional change we have seen in the past year is an increase in exposure to fentanyl and other potentially deadly drugs. In 2017 we had two officers exposed to high potency narcotics who needed to be transported to the hospital. We then had a HazMat scene that required complete personal protection including tyvec suits, gloves, and masks. Finally, masks and protective suits are sometimes required when handling death scenes that involve advanced stages of decomposition. Exposure to bodily fluids on these scenes can pose a health risk for members of our staff.

## Training

A portion of this money is also used to support tactical training including active shooter response. As we see more and more of these incidents unfold across the country, we are continually challenged to do our best to prepare to respond to these large-scale and mass casualty incidents that often target schools, colleges, and large crowds. I would be remiss if I did not provide my staff with the training, equipment, and supplies that they need to best respond to the wide range of incidents that occur so frequently across this country. In March, 2018, we have our annual active shooter training. In order to reduce the costs we split our staff into two and have each group train every other year. This full-day training is expensive. The single nine hour training day for half of our staff can cost as much as \$9,000. This cost of the training and overtime will come from the tactical budget.

Over the past few years we have witnessed chilling increases in active shooting events with high numbers of casualties. As recently as two weeks ago we heard of yet another school shooting that left 17 dead and many more injured. Incidents of domestic terrorism continue to occur throughout our country in cities large and small. Behind the scenes our officers face new and continuing challenges involving chemical agents, exposure to deadly narcotics, and diseases passed on through needles or other exposure to bodily fluids. I'm not confident that everyone understands what we are asking our officers to do and what risks they readily take on. The equipment purchases and the training that are supported by the CIP serve to best protect our staff and our citizens.

To be clear, this request represents no change in how we do our jobs or in the equipment that our citizens might see on the street. There is no change in our philosophy related to handling demonstrations and protests. Our officers have decades of experience handling protests and marches professionally and respectfully. We generally have excellent relationships with community organizers and we work with them to ensure that there is good communication from both sides. We emphasize traffic diversion, traffic safety, and scene security with the overall goal of the safety of all involved, including members of public safety. Despite what rumors are swirling through social media, I have absolutely no intent of purchasing all of our staff riot suits and shields or in changing the way that we manage protests and marches. Incidentally, we don't even own one riot suit and I have no plans to purchase any. Instead, this request, as it has for many years, serves to replace existing protective and tactical equipment when necessary, to support training initiatives related to active shooter and mass casualty events, and to ensure that our staff are best protected and prepared for the many challenges that they face each day.

What has changed? We have focused training priorities on de-escalation, implicit bias, and best practices in mental health response. We have joined and completed the IACP's One Mind Campaign, again displaying our commitment to best practices in police response to people with mental health issues. As part of that campaign we ensured that 100% of our staff completed the Mental Health First Aid class and exceeded one of the other requirements by having 54% of our staff complete the 40-hour Critical Incident Training. Our Drug Addiction Response Team (DART) has grown and more and more officers have volunteered to be part of this team that seeks to help people facing addiction by connecting them to local resources and service providers. The intent is to help people get clean so that they avoid entering the criminal justice system and/or die from an overdose.

I recognize that pictures of police in riot gear and the insinuation that we're looking to transition our department to a militarized entity may be a frightening concept for some. Of course, this assertion is an absolute falsehood and the FY19 CIP request is instead illustrative of NPD conducting business as usual. I hope you find this memo helpful in helping people to develop an understanding of what this money is actually used to support.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,

Chief J. Kasper #160