



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

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Re: High Priority Event Notification for Private Schools and Day Centers

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In response to several requests from our Facebook followers, the Hernando County Sheriff's Office will now offer "high priority event notifications" for private schools, day care centers, etc.

In July 2019, the HCSO announced the launch of our new mobile app. The mobile app, which is available via the App Store or Google Play, serves as a way for the HCSO to notify citizens, quickly and efficiently, of high priority events and/or important information. The custom app is paid for with Crime Prevention Funds.

For more about the app, please read the original media release, available at https://www.hernandosheriff.org/Applications/PressReleases/PressReleases/20190703_Hernando_County_Sheriff%E2%80%99s_Office_Unveils_New_Mobile_App.pdf.

The Hernando County Sheriff's Office does not have access to a list, database, etc., of all private schools and day care centers in the county. Further, it is not feasible for deputies and/or telecommunicators to manually search for (based upon location and distance from crime scene) and notify representatives from said entities while handling a high priority event.

In an effort to make urgent notifications possible for these entities, we reached out to developers at the Sheriff'sApp. Within minutes, a solution was presented; within less than 24 hours, the technology was in place for users to receive said notifications via the Hernando County Sheriff's Office app.

The High Priority Event Notification was created for private schools, day care centers, at-home day care services, etc., but is available to anyone who would like to receive the alerts.

The user must first download the Hernando County Sheriff's Office app via the App Store or Google Play. As soon as the app downloads to your device, a pop-up message appears, asking if you want to allow notifications – you must SELECT ALLOW in order to receive notifications. Once downloaded, the user must open the app and select the **"Settings"** function, which is located on the top right side of the screen (it looks like a little wheel). Once settings opens, the user must select **"Notification Settings."** Once Notification Settings opens, the user must select **"Private Schools/Day Care Notifications."** The user may also select any other notifications they prefer to receive. When finished, select the small "x" on the top left side of the screen, then click the "back arrow" on the top left side of the screen. This brings the user back to the main menu.

Having selected **Private Schools/Day Care Notifications**, the user will receive "push alerts" pertaining to high priority events throughout the county. When a push alert is sent, the user receives a notification on the home screen of their smartphone or tablet (very similar to other notifications). Basic information regarding the incident will be sent in this manner (location and incident type). It will be the responsibility of the user to determine how close or how far away from their location the incident is taking place and to react accordingly (lock down the facility, bring children in from outside, etc.)

Once a situation has been resolved, a follow-up alert will be sent.

Some of you may already be familiar with the app and with receiving alert notifications. The HCSO only uses the app to send such notifications when the event is of a very high priority, as we do not want citizens to receive too many alerts via the app, that they begin ignoring them. The Private Schools/Day Care Notifications may be more regular, as the purpose is to notify a select group when higher priority events occur, so they may take appropriate measures to protect the children in their care.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis said, "It is important for our citizens to remember it is very unlikely that they will become a victim of a violent crime, assuming they are not involved in high risk behavior. When violent crimes do occur, the suspect almost always flees the scene and gets as far away from the crime scene as possible. When a violent crime occurs, it takes a lot of resources to determine what happened, whether a crime actually occurred, and who might be involved in that crime as a victim, witness, or suspect. If we determine that the suspect fled on foot, our first concern is setting a perimeter and getting air support and K-9 to assist in locating that suspect. While all that is occurring, and in the unlikely event that a person does stay in the vicinity of the crime, this feature will allow those facilities in the area to be vigilant for unusual activity and to err on the side of caution with regard to securing those facilities or homes."

PARENTS – Please share this information with your day care center, private school, etc., and strongly encourage their participation.

DAY CARE CENTERS and PRIVATE SCHOOLS – Please have all individuals who are responsible for the care and safety of children download the app and subscribe to **Private Schools/Day Care Notifications**.

Every effort will be made to send alerts when the threat of danger is or may be possible; however, caregivers should not rely solely on the app to make decisions regarding the safety of children in their care.

The HCSO will provide a weekly test message/alert to the Private Schools/Day Care Notifications group, so users may confirm they are in fact receiving notifications. Weekly messages will be sent on Wednesday mornings between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. If you do not receive the weekly message, please check the app to be sure notifications are enabled, you may also have to check the internal settings on your device.

The Office of Sheriff:

The Office of the Sheriff is established by the Florida Constitution. As a constitutional officer, the Sheriff has the exclusive authority to administer his or her agency and is responsible for preserving the peace throughout the entire county, carrying out the laws of the state, the orders of Florida courts, and the ordinances of the Board of County Commissioners. The Sheriff is the chief law enforcement and correctional officer of the county.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis was initially appointed as the Sheriff of Hernando County by the Governor in January of 2011. He was then elected by the people of Hernando County in 2012, ran unopposed in 2016, and was re-elected in 2020. Sheriff Nienhuis remains accountable to the people of Hernando County.