



UMB News

Social Work Interns to Join UMBPD This Fall

May 12, 2021 | By [Carin Morrell](#)

For the past three years, the University of Maryland, Baltimore Police Department (UMBPD) Community Outreach and Support Team (COAST) has made great strides to connect with the communities it serves. In 2019, UMBPD's COAST [won the Governor's Award for Outstanding Proactive Crime Prevention](#). "We work hard to provide resources to vulnerable populations," says interim chief **Thomas Leone**, "but we can always do more."

That's where the [Social Work Community Outreach Service \(SWCOS\)](#) comes in.

SWCOS works to promote social justice, encourage well-being, and build community-university partnerships. The service provides [University of Maryland School of Social Work \(UMSSW\)](#) students with hands-on training in the field. "SWCOS sits in the academy of learning, but we're really community organizers," says **Becky Davis, MSW**, assistant director of SWCOS.

The partnership between SWCOS and UMBPD began when Leone and UMSSW Dean **Judy L. Postmus, PhD, ACSW**, met to discuss community policing.

"If we're going to be a progressive, community-oriented police department, we have to use all the tools at our disposal," Leone says. "We have experts here at the School of Social Work. Let's learn from them. Let's work together."

Starting this September, two social work students will join UMBPD two days a week. A licensed clinical certified social worker, who will serve as the students' field instructor, will join UMBPD this summer to prepare for the students. The students will shadow UMBPD officers, identify needs, and provide emergency benefits and resources to vulnerable populations. The partnership is a blessing for busy police officers.

"Our officers talk with our community members and really get to know them, but they don't always know the best resources to provide," says **Lt. Matthew Johnson**, who leads COAST and is helping to coordinate the partnership. "These two SWCOS students and the instructor will be able to fully evaluate each situation, provide support, and follow-up. This collaboration allows us to be better officers and to better serve our community."

While the partnership is a welcome addition to UMB, both departments recognize that this is not a quick fix for decades of systemic injustice.

"There's a recognition that the way the system is set up is not working," says **Lane Victorson, MSW, LMSW**, SWCOS director of community organizing and field education. "This is just one step in a large journey."

The upcoming internship with UMBPD is just one small part of what SWCOS does. Each year, 30 to 50 social work students go into the community for field learning. Their learning areas are broad (individual, group, community, and administrative), but provide tangible, quality services and opportunities to local communities.

Some students work in Baltimore City schools to make sure families have what they need so that students can learn. That partnership is so successful that Baltimore City has schools on the waiting list to partner with SWCOS' Positive Schools Center, with future planned expansion into Baltimore County and Howard County schools. Other students work with home-based programs to prevent evictions and keep children out of the child welfare system.

"The communities we serve are amazing and inspiring," says SWCOS executive director **Wendy Shaia, EdD, MSW**. "Our role is to empower them and to help them bridge some of those systemic gaps."

Leone is eager to welcome the SWCOS students in the fall.

"It's about transparency and accountability," he says. "It's an incredible opportunity for our police officers to learn a new perspective and experience different kinds of community outreach. I'm excited for this next chapter here at UMB."

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