

Asset Forfeiture

602.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy describes the authority and procedure for the seizure, forfeiture and liquidation of property associated with designated offenses.

602.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Fiscal agent - The person designated by the Chief of Police to be responsible for securing and maintaining seized assets and distributing any proceeds realized from any forfeiture proceedings. This includes any time the Louisville Police Department seizes property for forfeiture or when the Louisville Police Department is acting as the fiscal agent pursuant to a multi-agency agreement.

Forfeiture - The process by which legal ownership of an asset is transferred to a government or other authority.

Forfeiture reviewer - The department member assigned by the Chief of Police who is responsible for reviewing all forfeiture cases and for acting as the liaison between the Department and the assigned attorney.

Property subject to forfeiture - Property may generally be subject to forfeiture under the Public Nuisance Abatement Act and the Contraband Forfeiture Act when (CRS § 16-13-303; CRS § 16-13-307; CRS § 16-13-504):

- a. There has been a conviction or a negotiated plea of a specified offense (see statutes), or the owner fled from an arrest warrant charging one of those offenses.
- b. Possession of the property was unlawful or the owner of the property was a party to the offense that led to the property's use or purchase.
- c. The property was instrumental in the commission or facilitation of a specified crime, or the property constitutes traceable proceeds of the crime or related criminal activity.

Seizure - The act of law enforcement officials taking property, cash or assets that have been used in connection with or acquired by specified illegal activities.

602.2 POLICY

The Louisville Police Department recognizes that appropriately applied forfeiture laws are helpful to enforce the law, deter crime and reduce the economic incentive of crime. However, the potential for revenue should never compromise the effective investigation of criminal offenses, officer safety or any person's due process rights.

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It is the policy of the Louisville Police Department that all members, including those assigned to internal or external law enforcement task force operations, shall comply with all state and federal laws pertaining to forfeiture.

602.3 ASSET SEIZURE

Property may be seized for forfeiture as provided in this policy.

602.3.1 PROPERTY SUBJECT TO SEIZURE

The following may be seized upon review and approval of a supervisor and in coordination with the forfeiture reviewer.

- a. Real property pursuant to a court order (CRS § 16-13-302).
- b. Non-real property when there is probable cause to believe that it will qualify as property subject to forfeiture and the seizure is incident to a lawful search (CRS § 16-13-315; CRS § 16-13-504).

Whenever practicable, a court order for seizure prior to making a seizure is the preferred method.

A large amount of money standing alone is insufficient to establish the probable cause required to make a seizure.

602.3.2 PROPERTY NOT SUBJECT TO SEIZURE

The following property should not be seized for forfeiture:

- a. Cash and property that does not meet the district attorney's current minimum forfeiture thresholds should not be seized.
- b. The owner of the property is an "innocent owner" and did not have knowledge of the illegal conduct prompting the seizure (CRS § 16-13-303; CRS § 16-13-504).
- c. Rental vehicles, unless the seizing agency has probable cause to believe the motor vehicle rental company, at the time of rental, had knowledge or notice of the criminal activity for which the rental car was used (CRS § 16-13-315; CRS § 16-13-504).

602.4 PROCESSING SEIZED PROPERTY FOR FORFEITURE PROCEEDINGS

When property or cash subject to this policy is seized, the officer making the seizure should ensure compliance with the following:

- a. Complete applicable seizure forms and present the appropriate copy to the person from whom the property is seized. If cash or property is seized from more than one person, a separate copy must

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be provided to each person, specifying the items seized. When property is seized and no one claims an interest in the property, the officer must leave the copy in the place where the property was found, if it is reasonable to do so.

- b. Complete and submit a report and original seizure forms within 24 hours of the seizure, if practicable.
- c. Forward the original seizure forms and related reports to the forfeiture reviewer within two days of seizure.

The officer will book seized property as evidence with the notation in the comment section of the property form, "Seized Subject to Forfeiture." Property seized subject to forfeiture should be booked on a separate property form. No other evidence from the case should be booked on this form.

Photographs should be taken of items seized, particularly cash, jewelry and other valuable items.

Officers who suspect property may be subject to seizure but are not able to seize the property (e.g., the property is located elsewhere, the whereabouts of the property is unknown, it is real estate, bank accounts, non-tangible assets) should document and forward the information in the appropriate report to the forfeiture reviewer.

602.5 MAINTAINING SEIZED PROPERTY

The Property and Evidence Section supervisor is responsible for ensuring compliance with the following:

- a. All property received for forfeiture is reasonably secured and properly stored to prevent waste and preserve its condition.
- b. All property received for forfeiture is checked to determine if the property has been stolen.
- c. All property received for forfeiture is retained in the same manner as evidence until forfeiture is finalized or the property is returned to the claimant or the person with an ownership interest.
- d. Property received for forfeiture is not used unless the forfeiture action has been completed.

602.6 FORFEITURE REVIEWER

The Chief of Police will appoint an officer as the forfeiture reviewer. Prior to assuming duties, or as soon as practicable thereafter, the forfeiture reviewer should attend a course approved by the Department on asset forfeiture.

The responsibilities of the forfeiture reviewer include:

- a. Remaining familiar with forfeiture laws, particularly CRS § 16-13-501 et seq. and CRS § 16-13-301 et seq., in addition to the forfeiture policies of the district attorney.

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- b. Serving as the liaison between the Department and the district attorney and ensuring prompt legal review of all seizures.
- c. Making reasonable efforts to obtain annual training that includes best practices in pursuing, seizing and tracking forfeitures.
- d. Reviewing each seizure-related case and deciding whether the seizure is more appropriately made under state or federal seizure laws. The forfeiture reviewer should contact federal authorities when appropriate.
- e. Ensuring that responsibilities, including the designation of a fiscal agent, are clearly established whenever multiple agencies are cooperating in a forfeiture case.
- f. Ensuring that seizure forms are available and appropriate for department use. These should include notice forms, a receipt form and a checklist that provides relevant guidance to officers. The forms should be available in languages appropriate for the region and should contain spaces for:
 - 1. Names and contact information for all relevant persons and law enforcement officers involved.
 - 2. Information as to how ownership or other property interests may have been determined (e.g., verbal claims of ownership, titles, public records).
 - 3. A space for the signature of the person from whom cash or property is being seized.
 - 4. A tear-off portion or copy, which should be given to the person from whom cash or property is being seized, that includes the legal authority for the seizure, information regarding the process to contest the seizure and a detailed description of the items seized.
- g. Ensuring that officers who may be involved in asset forfeiture receive training in the proper use of the seizure forms and the forfeiture process. The training should be developed in consultation with the appropriate legal counsel and may be accomplished through traditional classroom education, electronic media, Daily Training Bulletins (DTBs) or General Orders. The training should cover this policy and address any relevant statutory changes and court decisions.
- h. Reviewing each asset forfeiture case to ensure that:
 - 1. Written documentation of the seizure and the items seized is in the case file.
 - 2. Independent legal review of the circumstances and propriety of the seizure is made in a timely manner.
 - 3. Notice of seizure has been given in a timely manner to those who hold an interest in the seized property.

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4. Property is promptly released to those entitled to its return (CRS § 16-13-501.5; CRS § 16-13-302).
5. All changes to forfeiture status are forwarded to any supervisor who initiates a forfeiture case.
6. Any cash received is deposited with the fiscal agent.
7. Assistance with the resolution of ownership claims and the release of property to those entitled is provided.
8. Current minimum forfeiture thresholds are communicated appropriately to officers.
9. This policy and any related policies are periodically reviewed and updated to reflect current federal and state statutes and case law.
- i. Ensuring that a written plan that enables the Chief of Police to address any extended absence of the forfeiture reviewer, thereby ensuring that contact information for other law enforcement officers and attorneys who may assist in these matters is available.
- j. Selling or destroying forfeited property as ordered by a court (CRS § 16-13-506; CRS § 16-13-507; CRS § 16-13-311).
- k. Depositing forfeited money in the court registry where the forfeiture order was entered, and overseeing the sale to ensure that the proceeds are distributed as set forth in CRS § 16-13-311.
- l. Applying to the court for expenses reimbursement consistent with CRS § 16-13-311, when applicable, and sending copies of the documents to the district attorney.
- m. Unless directed by an authorized agent of the federal government, ensuring that no seized property is transferred to a federal agency for forfeiture under federal law unless an owner of the property is being prosecuted in federal court (CRS § 16-13-505; CRS § 16-13-307).
- n. Placing currency seized in an interest-bearing account during forfeiture proceedings after ensuring that portions of the bills have been photocopied for evidence at hearings (CRS § 16-13-510; CRS § 16-13-303).
- o. Ensuring that the process of selling or adding forfeited property to the department's regular inventory is in accordance with all applicable laws and consistent with the department's use and disposition of similar property (CRS § 16-13-501.5; CRS § 16-13-302).
- p. Upon completion of any forfeiture process, ensuring that no property is retained by the Louisville Police Department unless the Chief of Police authorizes in writing the retention of the property for official use.

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- q. Reporting seizure information within the required time periods (even if no forfeiture proceeds were received) to the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) as set forth in CRS § 16-13-701.

Forfeiture proceeds should be maintained in a separate fund or account subject to appropriate accounting control, with regular reviews or audits of all deposits and expenditures.

Forfeiture reporting and expenditures should be completed in the manner prescribed by the law and City financial directives.

602.7 DISPOSITION OF FORFEITED PROPERTY

No forfeited property shall be used and no forfeited proceeds shall be expended until the committee on the disposition of forfeited property approves (CRS § 16-13-702). Members are prohibited from purchasing forfeited property (CRS § 16-13-501.5; CRS § 16-13-302).

No member of this department may use property that has been seized for forfeiture until the forfeiture action has been completed and the Chief of Police has given written authorization to retain the property for official use. No department member involved in the decision to seize property should be involved in any decision regarding the disposition of the property.

602.8 FORFEITURE PAYMENTS FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES

Payments or distributions from a federal agency as a result of a forfeiture action may only be received by this department when the aggregate net equity value of the property and/or currency seized is in excess of \$50,000, and a forfeiture proceeding has been commenced by the federal government related to a filed criminal case (CRS § 16-13-306.5; CRS § 16-13-504.5).

602.9 GRANTS FROM THE DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The forfeiture reviewer is responsible for ensuring funds received through a grant from the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) are used in a manner that complies with the policies and procedures established by DCJ, and that any necessary reporting is completed and submitted to DCJ in the required time frame (CRS § 24-33.5-522).