

Hiawatha Police encouraging residents to " stay-at-home"

Editors note--the following was submitted by Hiawatha Police Chief John Defore:

The Hiawatha Police Department has received several requests to authorize gatherings of individuals and has received even more questions about enforcement of the current “stay at home” order issued by the Kansas Governor.

Kansas Governor Laura Kelly’s Executive Order 20-16 directs all individuals to stay in their homes with the following exceptions:

- 1. Obtaining food, medicine, or other household goods**
- 2. Performing, or going to and from work at a business or organization to perform an essential function as identified in the Kansas Essential Function Framework**
- 3. Seeking medical care**
- 4. Caring for children, family members, or pets or caring for a vulnerable person in another location**
- 5. Engaging in outdoor activity, provided individuals maintain a distance of six feet from one another and abide by the 10-person limitation on gathering size**

Nothing in the executive order prevents families from gathering privately.

Except for these limited activities, the Governor’s order directs all individuals remain in their homes. This executive order is authorized by Kansas laws regarding emergency preparedness for disasters. These same laws, including K.S.A. 48-939, make it a class A misdemeanor crime to commit a “knowing and willful violation” of this executive order, which means that law enforcement personnel are authorized to arrest those individuals that knowingly and willfully violate the “stay at home” order.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment indicates outdoor activities are those that “do not involve groups, like running and hiking.” The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also recommends that if “children are playing outside their own homes, it is essential that they remain 6 feet from anyone who is not in their own household.” Both these agencies have a number of tips on their websites to help you maintain health and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The Hiawatha Police Department does not have the authority to suspend or change an executive order and cannot give anyone authorization to violate this executive order. Additionally, the Hiawatha Police Department will not make a determination whether your proposed activity is in violation of the order because its determination may not be binding on other law enforcement agencies.

It is not the goal of the Hiawatha Police Department to seek out violations of the executive order to arrest citizens for violations. It is important for citizens to understand the significance of the order to “stay at home” and to use their best efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 so we can all get through this crisis as quickly and safely as possible.

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