



*Kern County Sheriff's Office*  
**Policies and Procedures**

<b>TITLE:</b> Facial Coverings		<b>NO:</b> K-0304	
<b>REFERENCE:</b> Government Code 7289, Penal Code 185.5			
<b>APPROVED:</b> Donny Youngblood, Sheriff-Coroner			
<b>EFFECTIVE:</b> January 1, 2026	<b>REVIEWED:</b> November 24, 2025	<b>REVISED:</b> November 24, 2025	<b>UPDATED:</b> December 12, 2025

**POLICY**

The purpose of this policy is to affirm the Sheriff's Office commitment to transparency, accountability, and public trust; to establish clear limits on the use of facial coverings by sworn personnel; and to ensure compliance with Government Code 7289, which requires law enforcement agencies in California to maintain and publicly post a written policy regarding use of facial coverings. This policy is intended to prevent indiscriminate use of masks that obscure identity and undermine trust; ensure use is narrowly tailored, necessary, and documented.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Facial Covering:** Any opaque mask, garment, helmet, headgear, or other item that conceals or obscures the facial identity of an individual, including, but not limited to, a balaclava, tactical mask, gator, ski mask, and any similar type of facial covering or face-shielding item.

**NOTE:** A "facial covering" does not include any of the following:

- (A) A translucent face shield or clear mask that does not conceal the wearer's facial identity and is used in compliance with the employing agency's policy and procedures in Section 7289 of the Government Code.
- (B) A N95 medical mask or surgical mask to protect against transmission of disease or infection or any other mask, helmet, or device, including, but not limited to, air-purifying respirators, full or half masks, or self-contained breathing apparatus necessary to protect against exposure to any toxin, gas, smoke, inclement weather, or any other hazardous or harmful environmental condition.
- (C) A mask, helmet, or device, including, but not limited to, a self-contained breathing apparatus, necessary for underwater use.
- (D) A motorcycle helmet when worn by an officer utilizing a motorcycle or other vehicle that requires a helmet for safe operations while in the performance of their duties.
- (E) Eyewear necessary to protect from the use of retinal weapons, including, but not limited to, lasers.

In order to further the Sheriff's Office's mission and maintain the public's trust, sworn personnel shall not wear a facial covering while performing official duties, except as expressly permitted within this policy. The principle that generalized and undifferentiated fear and apprehension about officer safety shall not be sufficient to justify the use of facial coverings.

Any use of an opaque facial covering shall be approved by a supervisor prior to use only when no other reasonable alternatives exist and shall be documented via the "Facial Covering Use Report" on Sheriff Net. If more than one sworn personnel utilizes a facial covering during an incident, the use by each employee shall be documented in the submitted report. Furthermore, supervisors are prohibited from knowingly permitting violations of state law or this policy limiting the use of a facial covering. All completed "Facial Covering Use Reports" shall be submitted withing within 24 hours of the use of an opaque facial covering.

## **EXEMPTIONS**

Any use of a facial covering permissible under one of the below exemptions does not require supervisor approval or documentation. Permissible uses of facial coverings include:

- Active undercover operations or assignments authorized by supervising personnel or court order.
- Tactical operations where protective gear is required for physical safety.
- Applicable law governing occupational health and safety.
- Protection of identity during prosecution.
- Applicable law governing reasonable accommodations.

## **PENAL CODE 185.5**

Pursuant to PC 185.5(a), "a law enforcement officer shall not wear a facial covering that conceals or obscures their facial identity in the performance of their duties, except as expressly authorized in this section." "A willful and knowing violation of this section is punishable as an infraction or a misdemeanor" pursuant to Subsection "d", unless "the agency maintains and publicly posts, no later than July 1, 2026, a written policy pursuant to Section 7289 of the Government Code" pursuant to Subsection "f". PC 185.5 does not apply to either of the following:

- An officer subject to one or more of the exemptions noted above set forth in paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) of Section 7289 of the Government Code.
- An officer assigned to Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team units while actively performing their SWAT responsibilities.

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**DIRECTIVE A**

Failure to comply with the duties as listed in this section may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.