

Private Persons' Arrests

333.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for the handling of private person's arrests made pursuant to Wisconsin common law.

333.2 ADVISING PRIVATE PERSONS OF THE ARREST PROCESS

Officers should use sound discretion in determining whether to advise an individual of the arrest process.

- (a) When advising any individual regarding the right to make a private person's arrest, officers should refrain from encouraging or dissuading any individual from making such an arrest and should instead limit advice to the legal requirements for such an arrest, as listed below.
- (b) Private individuals should be discouraged from using force to effect a private person's arrest. Absent immediate threat to their own safety or the safety of others, private individuals should be encouraged to refer matters to law enforcement officials for further investigation or arrest.

333.3 ARRESTS BY PRIVATE PERSONS

A private person may arrest another under the following circumstances:

- (a) When a felony has been in fact committed and he/she has reasonable grounds to believe the person to be arrested has committed it.
- (b) For a misdemeanor amounting to a breach of the peace and committed in his/her presence.
- (c) When a merchant or service provider, a merchant's or service provider's adult employee or security agent, has reasonable cause to believe that a person has stolen merchandise or services in his/her presence, he/she may detain the person at the place of business where the offense occurred in a reasonable manner for a reasonable length of time to deliver the person to a peace officer or to a parent or guardian in the case of a minor (Wis. Stat. § 943.50(3)).

333.4 OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

Any officer presented with a private person who has made a private person's arrest must determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that such an arrest would be lawful.

- (a) Should any officer determine that there is no reasonable cause to believe that a private person's arrest is lawful, the officer should take no action to further detain or restrain

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the individual beyond that which reasonably appears necessary to investigate the matter, to determine the lawfulness of the arrest and protect the public safety (Wis. Stat. § 968.08).

1. Any officer who determines that a private person's arrest appears to be unlawful should promptly release the arrested individual. The officer must include the basis of such a determination in a related report.
 2. Absent reasonable cause to support a private person's arrest or other lawful grounds to support an independent arrest by the officer, the officer should advise the parties that no arrest will be made and that the circumstances will be documented in a related report.
- (b) Whenever an officer determines that there is reasonable cause to believe that a private person's arrest is lawful, the officer may exercise the appropriate option based upon the charges:
1. Take the individual into physical custody for booking.
 2. Release the individual upon issuance of an ordinance citation.
 3. Release the individual pending the filing of formal charges.

333.5 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

In all circumstances in which a private person is claiming to have made an arrest, the individual must complete and sign a written statement. If the person fails or refuses to do so, the arrested subject shall be released unless the officer has an independent reason to take the person into custody.

In addition to the written statement (and any other related documents, such as citations and booking forms), officers shall complete a narrative report regarding the circumstances and disposition of the incident.