

TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

GENERAL ORDERS

 Proudly Policing Since 1841	SUBJECT News Media Relations		 Nationally Accredited 1986
	CHIEF OF POLICE <i>Signature on File</i>		
NUMBER 36	ORIGINAL ISSUE 07/15/1985	CURRENT REVISION 10/28/2022	TOTAL PAGES 8

AUTHORITY/RELATED REFERENCES

FSS Chapter 119, Public Records
 GO-46, Rules of Conduct
 GO-17, Records Management
 SO-1, Emergency Management Procedures

ACCREDITATION REFERENCES

CALEA Chapters 41, 54
 CFA Chapter 28

KEY WORD INDEX

Development of News Media Relations Policy	Procedure VII
General Guidelines	Procedure I
Press Releases	Procedure IV
Public Information Office	Procedure II
Public Information Release Guidelines	Procedure V
Restrictions/Rights of Media at Crime/Disaster Scenes	Procedure VI
Watch Commander's Responsibilities	Procedure III

POLICY

The Department is responsible for establishing protocols for its members in their interactions with the news media and the release of public information, and members shall adhere to these protocols in the course of their assigned duties.

DEFINITIONS

Major Breaking Situation: Any occurring or recently occurred incident involving the Department where the news media has, or is likely to have, an interest in obtaining information about the incident from the Department.

TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Public Information Office (PIO): An office comprised of the Director and Assistant-Director of Communications, which coordinates the official release of information on behalf of the Department.

PROCEDURES

I. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- A. The Department encourages cooperation between its members and the news media.
- B. The Chief of Police is responsible for selecting the Director and Assistant-Director of Communications and may select adjunct members to assist with the duties and responsibilities of the Public Information Office (PIO).
- C. Prior to answering media questions, members shall coordinate the release of information with the PIO.
 - 1. Delivery of police services shall have priority over other activities; however, members shall cooperate with the news media as fully as possible.
 - 2. Members of any unit may answer questions, in coordination with the PIO, about their specific areas of responsibility and activities in which they are directly involved.
 - 3. In addition to newspaper interviews, members and supervisors (except those assigned to undercover investigative duties) are encouraged to honor requests for “on camera” and “taped” interviews.
 - a. It is the responsibility of each member to coordinate these activities with the PIO.
 - b. It is the responsibility of each member to be familiar with what information may or may not be released.
- D. Under no circumstances shall arrestees be posed for cameras or participate in media interviews while in Department custody.
- E. Members shall not initiate contact with the news media regarding any Department-related event, activity, or incident unless the contact has been coordinated through the PIO.

TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

- F. The Records Section shall, during normal business hours, permit all reports to be inspected and produced, except those exempted by FS Chapter 119.
- G. In incidents involving multiple public service agencies involved in a mutual effort, the PIO is responsible for the following:
 - 1. Participating in a Joint Information Center (JIC) when activated through the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during a critical incident, and
 - 2. Absent a JIC/EOC situation, coordinating the release of information with the other public service agencies involved in the mutual effort.

II. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

The Public Information Office (PIO) is responsible for the following activities:

- A. Coordinating news releases which require a department spokesperson (e.g., administrative issues, criminal investigations, major breaking situations),
- B. Assisting news media personnel in covering routine news stories and at incident scenes where the Department is involved,
- C. Being available for on-call responses to the news media,
- D. Preparing and distributing news releases as warranted or directed,
- E. Arranging and assisting with news conferences,
- F. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects,
- G. Assisting as needed or directed in crisis situations within the Department,
- H. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential Department investigations and operations,
- I. Developing procedures for releasing information in incidents involving multiple government agencies,

TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

- J. Coordinating approval of City of Tallahassee and Department icons and symbols, (e.g., badges, patches) when used in publications or promotional materials,
- K. Managing the Department's online image and social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter),

PIO personnel representing the Department via the agency's social media outlets will:

1. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the agency and will adhere to Department and City standards of conduct, observing conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
 2. Identify themselves as a member of the agency.
 3. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee or comments concerning pending prosecution, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate exempt or confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to Department training, activities, or work-related assignments without permission.
 4. Not conduct political activities or private business on such social media outlets.
- L. Performing other Department-related functions as directed by the Chief of Police.

III. WATCH COMMANDER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

In major breaking situations when there is a need to provide information to the media and the PIO is not immediately available, the Watch Commander (or supervisor in charge of the investigation or incident) shall release only such information necessary to protect persons or property from imminent threat or harm. Such information includes:

- A. Incident type,
- B. Incident location,
- C. BOLO information, and
- D. Evacuation route(s).

TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

IV. PRESS RELEASES

- A. Designated members shall issue written press releases concerning agency activities when deemed appropriate by the Chief of Police or the PIO.
- B. The PIO is responsible for ensuring press releases are in a written format and equally available to all news media representatives.
- C. Although press releases are permitted from all areas of the Department, approval from the PIO or Chief of Police is required before release to the media.

V. PUBLIC INFORMATION RELEASE GUIDELINES

- A. Information available to the public under applicable state and federal law shall be released, and includes the:
 - 1. Classification of the charged crime,
 - 2. Time, date, location, and nature of a reported incident,
 - 3. Time, date, location, and nature of a crime and arrest (if any).
 - 4. Name, sex, gender, age, and address of a person arrested if the person is:
 - a. An adult, or
 - b. A child (under 18 years of age) and has been taken into custody for a violation of the law, which, if committed by an adult would be a felony, or has been found by the court to have committed at least three or more violations, which, if committed by an adult, would be a misdemeanor,
 - 5. Copies of documents given to, or required by law or Department protocol to be given to, the arrested person (which may include witness information).
- B. In order to protect the rights of an accused person, or because it is prohibited by law, the following information shall not be released:
 - 1. Information classified as confidential by law or judicial decision:

TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

- a. Information revealing the identities of confidential informants or sources,
 - b. Information revealing the identities of undercover personnel of a criminal justice agency,
 - c. Information revealing surveillance techniques, procedures, vehicles, or equipment,
 - d. Information revealing the identity of the victim,
 - e. Information revealing personal assets of the victim (information regarding assets stolen or destroyed in the crime area is available),
 - f. The home address, social security numbers, dates of birth, telephone number(s), and photographs of active or former sworn or civilian Department members, their spouses, and their children, and the places of employment and schools of their spouses and children,
 - g. Information received from another criminal justice agency on the promise of confidentiality when the information was not otherwise available, and
 - h. Information revealing the name of a juvenile except when allowed by Florida Statute.
2. Information regarding evidence prior to a trial, including:
- a. Any evaluation of the prior criminal record, character, or reputation of the accused,
 - b. The existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement of the accused, or the refusal or failure of the accused to make any confession, admission, or statement,
 - c. The performance of the accused during an examination or the refusal of the accused to submit to any examination or test,
 - d. Any opinion of a member regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused, the possibility of any plea arrangement, or the merits of the case,
 - e. The credibility of any prospective witness,

TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

- f. Fingerprints, truth verification exams, ballistics, or other laboratory results, and
 - g. Precise descriptions of evidence seized or discovered during an investigation.
- C. While photographs of an accused are typically released by the receiving facility (e.g., Leon County Jail), the PIO is authorized to release photographs of an accused when deemed necessary to do so.
- D. The release guidelines in this section are applicable when the accused is a member of the Department and will comply with state and federal laws.

VI. RESTRICTIONS/RIGHTS OF MEDIA AT DISASTER/CRIME SCENES

- A. Perimeters are established to prevent unauthorized access to crime and critical incident scenes.
- B. Established perimeters are equally applicable to media representatives; however, denying media representatives access to areas in close proximity to police operations or disaster recovery operations solely for their protection is not justified.
- C. If the presence of the media in any way hinders a police operation, they should be directed to the nearest area where their presence will no longer be a hindrance.
- D. Media representatives may be granted special access by a commanding officer (lieutenant or higher rank) or the PIO at the scene of a police operation, provided:
- 1. Their presence will not jeopardize the operation, or hinder the preservation of evidence, and
 - 2. The scene is located on public property, or if located on private property, the owner or the owner's agent has consented to the presence of the media representative(s).
- E. Officers are not authorized to deny news media representatives the opportunity to photograph or videotape police operations or crime scenes from behind "police line" markers.

TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT

VII. DEVELOPMENT OF NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

- A. The PIO shall work closely with news media representatives and solicit comments and suggestions relating to Department policies and procedures that impact media activities.

- B. As directed by the Chief of Police, the PIO will organize formal meetings with members and appropriate media representatives to discuss problems or concerns the media may have in the course of covering Department activities.

History: issued 07/15/1985, revised 03/01/1988, 01/01/1991, 12/01/1995, 06/15/2001, 08/07/2005, 12/05/2008, and 11/15/2016.