

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

MEDIA RELATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

Purpose: To provide guidelines for cooperation with members of the media and the release of information to the public.

Policy Statement: It is the policy of the North Little Rock Police Department to cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information. The North Little Rock Police Department will make every reasonable effort, consistent with accomplishing their police tasks, in providing members of the media with accurate information as dictated by policy in all matters and dealing with the media on current events. The Department will not release any information that would jeopardize a criminal investigation or infringe upon an individual's constitutional rights.

Summary of Changes: New Format.

Procedure:

1 Procedure

- 1.1 The Chief of Police will appoint a Public Information Officer (PIO) who will function as the primary contact for all media relations. The Public Information Officer will coordinate all matters involving the news media.
- 1.2 The function and responsibilities of the Public Information Officer will include, but are not limited to:
 - 1.2.1 Assisting news media representatives in covering routine news stories and responding to inquiries.
 - 1.2.2 Providing assistance at the scene of major incidents. [CALEA 54.1.1a]
 - 1.2.3 Preparation and distribution of written news releases. [CALEA 54.1.1b]
 - 1.2.4 Arranging and coordinating news conferences as required or requested. [CALEA 54.1.1c]
 - 1.2.5 Coordinating with Investigations Division Commander when releasing victim, witness, or suspect information as allowed by law. [CALEA 54.1.1d]
 - 1.2.6 Assisting with crisis situations within the agency.

2 Public Information Officer Notification

The Public Information Officer may be contacted by radio or telephone during duty hours. After duty hours, the PIO may also be contacted by telephone or pager and will be available on an "on-call" basis for emergency situations.

- 2.1 If it appears that an incident may attract media attention, a supervisor will respond to the scene, evaluate the situation and determine if the PIO is needed at the scene of the incident.
- 2.2 In order to insure that the PIO is kept aware of newsworthy events, the PIO will be notified in the following events:
 - 2.2.1 Officer involved shootings;
 - 2.2.2 Bank robberies;
 - 2.2.3 Armed robberies involving the victim or suspect being shot;
 - 2.2.4 Homicides;
 - 2.2.5 Traffic fatalities;
 - 2.2.6 Hostage situations;
 - 2.2.7 Natural disasters or catastrophes;
 - 2.2.8 Major fires;
 - 2.2.9 Officer involved incidents of any type that result in serious or fatal injuries to any party;
 - 2.2.10 Major burglaries where large sums of money or firearms are stolen; or
 - 2.2.11 Any other incident that may be of interest to the news media.
- 2.3 Any member learning of a newsworthy event will forward the information to their supervisor as soon as practical. The supervisor is responsible for forwarding the information to the Public Information Officer (PIO).

3 Media Information Release Procedures

- 3.1 Information concerning newsworthy occurrences may be released by the following personnel:
 - 3.1.1 Public Information Officer;
 - 3.1.2 Assistant Public Information Officer;
 - 3.1.3 Division Commanders or their designee
 - 3.1.4 The Chief of Police or his designee
- 3.2 If authorized members other than the Public Information Officer release information concerning newsworthy occurrences, the PIO will be briefed on what information was released as soon as practical.

3.3 The PIO or incident supervisor may, upon request, release limited factual information to members of the media including:

3.3.1 The facts and circumstances of an arrest including the time and place, any resistance, pursuit, and use of weapons by either the suspect or the officer;

3.3.2 The suspect's name, age, residence, and occupation, (except related to juveniles as outlined in this directive);

3.3.3 The identity of the arresting and investigating officer, provided it does not compromise the officer or a police operation; and

3.3.4 The charges on the suspect and a brief description of the elements of the offense.

3.4 The following information will not be released:

3.4.1 The content or existence of any statement, admission, or confession;

3.4.2 Personal opinions regarding a suspect, evidence, or any matter pertaining to an investigation;

3.4.3 Any statements concerning anticipated testimony or the truthfulness or credibility of any witness;

3.4.4 The results of fingerprinting, polygraph, ballistic, or laboratory tests except official Medical Examiner's reports on cause of death or blood/breath results;

3.4.5 The names of victims, both civilian and officers, injured or killed until the next of kin has been notified; and,

3.4.6 The identity of a sex crime victim, or any related information, which if divulged, could lead to the identity of the victim.

3.5 Arrest information related to juveniles will not be released to the public unless the arrest results in the juvenile being formally charged as an adult in Circuit Court.

3.6 The release of information regarding statements of policy, standards of conduct, changes in organization, or disciplinary action of members will be coordinated and made by the Chief of Police or his designee. [CALEA 54.1.1e]

3.7 Members will not comment on rumors relating to Departmental activities or discuss personnel investigations with non-police personnel. Inquires of this nature will be referred to the Public Information Officer or to the Chief of Police.

3.8 Non-public records will not be made available to the media unless authorized by the Chief of Police or his designee.

3.9 Statistical information from Department computer systems may only be released to the media by the Chief of Police, his designee, or the Public Information Officer.

3.10 Records personnel and support services supervisors may release the following information to the media upon request:

3.10.1 Accident reports that are available to the general public,

3.10.2 General reports that are available to the general public, and

3.10.3 Court docket information.

3.11 Supervisors making statements to the media must exercise good judgment when deciding which facts of an investigation or incident should be released. Should any supervisor not know what information to release or when the media should be given information, the supervisor should contact the PIO.

3.12 Members will not instruct a victim or person reporting an incident not to talk to the media unless special circumstances exist that would affect the prosecution of the case. If special circumstances exist relating to a particular incident, the PIO will be notified to facilitate as a media liaison.

3.13 If a police incident involves a mutual response involving another agency or multiple agencies, the agency with primary jurisdiction will be responsible for the release of information to the news media. [CALEA 54.1.1f]

4 Media Access to Crime Scenes/Incidents

4.1 Access by media representatives to a police scene or an assembly point for the media will be the responsibility of the Public Information Officer, the Assistant Public Information Officer, or the Incident Commander in the absence of either PIO. [CALEA 54.1.3]

4.1.1 Yellow crime scene tape should be used to define all restricted areas.

4.1.2 Media access to any specific area where evidence could be destroyed or compromised will be temporarily denied.

4.1.3 Media access may be limited when the presence of the media would interfere with a police operation or present a reasonable risk to citizens, media, or police personnel. [CALEA 54.1.3]

4.2 Media representatives should not be excluded from the general vicinity of crime scenes, accident scenes, major fires, natural disasters, and other catastrophic events. In the event of a critical incident, the PIO will follow NLRPD Policy Directive 40-4 Critical Incident Response Manual and Emergency Operations Plan, to provide public information and maintain media relations. For safety purposes, the news media should coordinate their activities with the Public Information Officer. The Public Information Officer will act as a liaison during these types of incidents. The Public Information Officer will be responsible for the information gathering, preparation, and dissemination of information to the news media representatives.

4.2.1 Photographers should not be restricted from taking pictures at a crime or accident scene.

4.2.2 The media should not be denied access to an area where the public is allowed.

4.2.3 If any media representatives, including photographers, are on private property and the owner or custodian of that property requests that they leave the premises, officers will ask the media to move to public property.

4.2.4 Photographs may be taken of a suspect in transit but the suspect will not be posed by any member.

5 News Releases- Press Conferences

5.1 Media releases will be written and disseminated by the Public Information Officer to all area media outlets. In the absence of the PIO, the Assistant PIO, Division Commanders (or their designee) may issue media releases.

[CALEA 54.1.1b]

5.1.1 Media releases written and disseminated by a Division Commander (or their designee) will be forwarded to the PIO as soon as practical.

5.2 The PIO will coordinate and/or facilitate all news conferences in conjunction with the Chief of Police or his designee. News conferences should be reserved for major events or concerns to the community. [CALEA 54.1.1c]

6 Interviews

6.1 The Public Information Officer is responsible for assisting the media by conducting interviews or coordinating interviews with qualified agency personnel.

6.2 Any member contacted directly by the media will notify the Public Information Officer of any request for an interview.

7 Policy Changes

7.1 The North Little Rock Police Department and the PIO will seek input from media representatives concerning changes in public information policies and procedures in order to establish a more effective working relationship at least once every three years. [CALEA 54.1.2]

Mike Davis
Chief of Police