

## GENERAL MANAGEMENT

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### SOCIAL NETWORKING/ONLINE ACTIVITIES

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this policy is to state expectations of agency members with respect to their use of social media and social networking and the direct effect such use has upon the reputation and perception of this agency.

**Policy Statement:** The proliferation of social media or social networking, including Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn, Foursquare, The Squad Room, Usenet groups, on-line forums, message or bulletin boards, blogs, and other similarly developed formats presents unique issues for police management. With this technology, information can be available worldwide within a few seconds. It is important to understand that this means of communication demands the same responsibilities as other forms of expression. What a member of this department relays by social media has the same effect as the spoken word or demonstrated act. Members must realize that the information posted on social media sites reflects on them and on the Department. It is vital that each member accept their role as an ambassador of the Department, striving to maintain public trust and confidence, not only in their professional actions, but also in their personal and online actions. Any online activity that has the effect of diminishing the public's trust and/or confidence in this Department will hinder the efforts of the Department to fulfill our mission. By virtue of your position as a member of a law enforcement agency, you are held to a higher standard than members of the public, and your online activities should reflect such professional expectations and standards. Any online activity that detracts from the mission of the department or reflects negatively on the Department or any member of this agency will be viewed as a violation of this policy.

#### Summary of Changes:

#### Definitions:

**Social Networking Site:** Any online format or platform that focuses on social networks or social relations among people who share interests or activities and provide a means for users to interact over the internet. Examples of social networking sites include, but are not limited to, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, blogs, and forums.

**Online:** The connection between two or more electronic devices capable of transmitting information electronically or making information available for viewing through electronic means outside the protected network of the Department or other official law enforcement electronic network, such as the Internet, that is generally accessible by the public.

#### Procedure:

##### 1 Policy and Limitations

- 1.1 The First Amendment and the right to free speech or expression, when applied to public employees is analyzed differently than when it is applied to members of the general public. Courts have held that the speech of a public employee is limited by the legitimate overriding interest of the public employer.
  - 1.1.1 Any references made on a social networking site by a member concerning his/her employment at the Department may jeopardize the protected status of free speech.
  - 1.1.2 Comments on the internal operations of the Department or specific conduct of supervisors or peers that could impact the public perception or operation of the Department are not protected First Amendment speech and are thereby prohibited.
  - 1.1.3 Members may comment on issues of general or public concern (as opposed to personal grievances) so long as the comments do not disrupt the workplace, interfere with important working relationships or efficient work flow, or undermine public confidence in the member or Department.
- 1.2 Members shall not post, transmit, reproduce, or disseminate information (text, pictures, video, audio, etc.) to the Internet or any other forum, public or private, that would tend to discredit or reflect unfavorably upon the Department or any of the Department's members.
- 1.3 Except in the performance of an authorized duty, accessing social networking sites on department computers and devices or while on duty through any device is prohibited.
- 1.4 The posting to social networking sites and the transmission to unauthorized persons of Department business information is prohibited, including but not limited to:
  - 1.4.1 Confidential, sensitive, copyrighted, or other information to which a member has access due to his/her employment with the city;
  - 1.4.2 Information from or about an ongoing criminal or administrative investigation including photographs, videos, or audio recordings;
  - 1.4.3 Photographs of suspects, arrestees, victims, evidence, crime scenes, or accident scenes;
  - 1.4.4 Statements or opinions about a police use of force or other police action that may be controversial in nature.
  - 1.4.5 Comments related to pending prosecutions.

- 1.5 Members are prohibited from posting content that is inconsistent with their duties and obligations as a police officer to perform duties that could reasonably infer a lack of objectivity and fairness. For example, comments that are reasonably offensive based on race, sex, or religion. Such comments undermine the public trust and confidence required by this Department.
- 1.6 Social networking sites created or maintained by members must not contain any content from which interference could reasonably be drawn that is an official site of the Department.
  - 1.6.1 Posting, transmitting, or disseminating any pictures or videos of official Department training, activities, or work-related assignments is not allowed without the written permission of the Chief of Police or designee.
  - 1.6.2 Members are prohibited from using Department logos, emblems, badges, patches, marked vehicles, or any other material that specifically identifies the Department.
  - 1.6.3 Members may post portrait style photographs of themselves in uniform or photographs or video recordings taken during agency-sanctioned ceremonies such as Honor Guard or promotional ceremonies, provided these photographs or recordings do not bring discredit to the Department or its members in any manner. The posting of such images creates a nexus to the Department and thus greater scrutiny of the entire content of the member's site is appropriate.
- 1.7 Members must be cognizant that content posted on a social networking site or sent electronically to a single person has the potential to be shared broadly, and with individuals with whom a member did not intend to communicate. Such information may be used to attempt to discredit the member and/or the department publicly or in court. Care must be taken not to post any information that could be construed negatively towards the member or the department.
- 1.8 If co-workers are included in a member's social network, he/she will ensure that their content is consistent with all City and Department policies. Further, members shall not post content that would violate the City's policy against harassment or discrimination based on race, sex, religion, or any other class protected by law.
- 1.9 Members will be held responsible for the content that appears on their maintained social media or social networking sites regardless of whether or not the content was posted by the member.

## **2 Compliance Responsibilities**

- 2.1 Any member brought under administrative investigation and reasonable cause exists that violation(s) of this policy have occurred is required to provide the assigned investigating officer complete access to the social media and social networking platforms he/she participates in and/or maintains.
- 2.2 Any member becoming aware of, or having knowledge of a posting or web page in violation of this directive shall notify his/her supervisor for follow-up action.
- 2.3 North Little Rock Police Department Policy Directive 03-09 and 03-10 also contains related information to this policy.

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Patrick Thessing  
Chief of Police