

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: The North Little Rock Police Department's policy is to cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information. The department will make every reasonable effort, consistent with accomplishing their police tasks, providing media members with accurate information dictated by the 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:

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 PIO will coordinate all matters involving the news media.
- 1.1.1 Any member selected for PIO will receive training for the position as soon as possible. Additional training will be encouraged when available. [CALEA 54.1.4]
- 1.2 The function and responsibilities of the PIO 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 crises within the department.
 - 1.2.7 Coordinating with the Investigations Division before the release of information on social media platforms. [CALEA 54.1.1g]

2. Public Information Officer Notifications

- 2.1 Members may contact the PIO by radio or telephone during duty hours. After Duty hours, the PIO may also be contacted by telephone or pager and available on an "on-call" basis for emergencies.
- 2.2 If it appears 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 location.
- 2.3 To ensure the PIO is kept aware of newsworthy events, the PIO will be notified in the following events:
 - 2.3.1 Officer-involved shootings;
 - 2.3.2 Bank robberies;
 - 2.3.3 Armed robberies involving the victim or suspect being shot;
 - 2.3.4 Homicides;
 - 2.3.5 Traffic fatalities;
 - 2.3.6 Hostage situations;
 - 2.3.7 Natural disasters or catastrophes;
 - 2.3.8 Major fires;
 - 2.3.9 Officer-involved incidents of any type that result in severe or fatal injuries to any party;
 - 2.3.10 Major burglaries where large sums of money or firearms are stolen; or
 - 2.3.11 Incidents that may be of interest to the news media
- 2.4 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 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 (PIO) 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 PIO will not release the following information:
- 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 about 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 for official Medical Examiner's reports on the 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 have been notified; and,
 - 3.4.6 The identity of a sex crime victim or any related information, which, if divulged, could lead to the victim's identity.
- 3.5 Arrest information related to juveniles will not be released to the public unless the arrest results in the minor being formally charged as an adult in Circuit Court.
- 3.6 The release of information regarding policy statements, standards of conduct, changes in organization, or disciplinary action of members will be coordinated and made by the Chief of Police or 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 PIO or 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 designee.
- 3.9 Statistical information from department computer systems may only be released to the media by the Chief of Police, designee, or the PIO.
- 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 sound judgment when deciding which facts of an investigation or incident should be released. Should any supervisor not know what information to release or when they should give the media 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 particular circumstances exist that would affect the case's prosecution. If exceptional circumstances exist relating to a specific incident, the PIO will be notified to facilitate.
- 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 releasing 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 PIO, the Assistant Public Information Officer, or the Incident Commander in the absence of either PIO. [CALEA 54.1.3]
- 4.1.1 Officers should use yellow crime scene tape 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, significant fires, natural disasters, and other catastrophic events. In a critical incident, the PIO will follow department 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 PIO. The PIO will act as a liaison during these types of incidents. The PIO will be responsible for gathering, preparing, and disseminating 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 they leave the premises, officers will ask the media to move to public property.

4.2.4 Media representatives may take photographs of a suspect in transit, but officers will not pose the suspect.

5. News Releases – Press Conferences

5.1 Media releases will be written and disseminated by the PIO 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 Division Commanders (or their designee) will forward media releases to the PIO as soon as practical.

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

6. Interviews

6.1 The PIO 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 PIO of any request for an interview.

7. Policy Changes

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

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