

	<b>PALACIOS POLICE DEPARTMENT</b>	
	<b>Policy 5.2 Media and Public Information</b>	
	<b>Effective Date: 1/04/2021</b>	<b>Replaces: 02/07/2006</b>
	<b>Approved: <i>Milton Rivera</i> <u>Milton Rivera, Chief of Police</u></b>	
	<b>Reference: TBP 5.03 and 5.04</b>	

## I. POLICY

This agency must have the support of the community to be successful. Establishing and maintaining an effective relationship with the news media is crucial to accomplishing this goal. A positive working relationship with the media is mutually beneficial. It shall be the policy of this agency to cooperate with the news media and to maintain an atmosphere of open communication. To this end, information shall be released to the news media in an impartial, accurate, and timely fashion. It shall be the responsibility of each employee to abide by this philosophy of cooperation.

## II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines regarding media relations and the release of information to the public through the news media.

## III. RESPONSIBILITIES IN RELEASING INFORMATION

- A. The Chief of Police may designate any member of the department as the Public Information Officer (PIO) for the department. The PIO is the primary contact for the news media. In the event that no PIO has been designated or if he/she is unavailable, the Chief of Police is responsible for PIO duties.
- B. Supervisors with responsibility for a specific case or incident may be the secondary contact for the news media with the approval of the Chief.
- C. The Chief of Police or supervisors may direct other employees to respond to media inquiries.

## IV. TRAINING

This agency is committed to providing proper training for its public information officer. Supervisors, line officers, and other personnel who interact with the

media shall also be provided appropriate training in media relations and the Public Information Act.

## **V. PROCEDURES**

A. Media Requests: The agencies will respond to all media inquiries in a timely and professional manner.

1. During normal business hours, media inquiries shall be directed to the Chief of Police.
2. No employee shall release any information that would jeopardize an active investigation, prejudice an accused person's right to a fair trial, or violate the law.
3. The Chief of Police or PIO shall be responsible for assisting the news media by conducting interviews or coordinating interviews with other qualified agency personnel.
4. Employees contacted directly by the media requesting an interview shall notify the Chief.
5. All conversations with members of the news media should be considered "on the record" and subject to being quoted.

B. News Releases

1. News releases shall be written and disseminated to the media and to agency employees on major incidents and events of community interest or concern.
2. The Chief of Police or appropriate designee will write the news release.
3. The Chief of Police, or designee, will approve all news releases.
4. News conferences shall be held only in connection with major events of concern to the community.

C. Access to Crime Scenes and Critical Incidents

1. Agency personnel shall be courteous to news media representatives at crime and critical-incident scenes.
2. At such scenes, agency personnel shall ensure that the media respect the established perimeter.
3. In general, members of the media shall receive no more and no less access to an incident scene than members of the general public. However, the Chief or PIO designee may allow news personnel and their equipment closer access to a crime or critical-incident scene so long as the degree of closeness does not interfere with law enforcement operations.

4. No member of this agency shall prohibit the media from news-gathering practices, including photography and interviews, outside the established perimeter of a crime scene or critical-incident scene.
5. News media representatives shall not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility of their injury or death. If this is the only consideration, the scene commander shall advise the media representative of the danger and allow the media representative to make the decision to enter on his or her volition.
6. Only the Chief or scene commander shall release information to the news media at crime and critical incident scenes.
7. At critical incident scenes, the Chief or scene commander shall establish a media briefing area as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow.
8. At critical incident scenes, members of the agency shall work in close cooperation with the media to ensure that live broadcasts do not disclose any information that could endanger law enforcement personnel or the general public.

D. Access to Suspects

No member of this agency shall pose any suspect or accused person in custody or make him or her available for media interviews.

E. Joint Investigations or Operations Involving Another Agency

In a multijurisdictional investigation, the lead investigative agency is responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information. The PIO or designee for the lead agency shall share that information with all involved agencies in advance of public dissemination.

## **VI. INFORMATION RELEASE GUIDELINES**

- A. The release of information is subject to restrictions placed by applicable state and federal laws.
- B. No member of this agency shall release any information that would hamper the successful conclusion of an investigation or jeopardize the safety of affected persons.
- C. Agency members can release the following information:
  1. Basic information about a crime or incident
  2. Basic information about victims, except as excluded by law
  3. Description of suspects
  4. Basic description of weapons and vehicles used

5. Basic description of stolen items
6. Basic description of injuries and condition of victims
7. The name, age, address, and other basic information about arrestees and the charges against them
8. Information contained in arrest affidavits and other applicable crime or incident reports
9. Booking photographs.

D. Agency members shall not release the following information:

1. Names, addresses, or any other information that would identify the victim of a sex offense, child abuse, or any other crime where the privacy of the victim is protected by law
2. Names, addresses, and basic information about juvenile arrestees, as governed by state law
3. Active criminal investigative information, active criminal intelligence information, and surveillance techniques
4. Names of informants and information provided by them
5. Supplemental or investigative reports until such time as the case is closed or the lead investigator deems it permissible
6. Grand jury testimony and proceedings
7. Active internal affairs investigations, as governed by state law
8. Names of witnesses, unless required by state law
9. The identity of critically injured or deceased persons prior to notification of next-of-kin
10. Home address, telephone numbers, and familial information of law enforcement personnel
11. Names of undercover personnel
12. Any other information that could jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigative and prosecution
13. Any other information prohibited by state law from public disclosure.

## **VII. SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

- A. The Public Information Officer shall be responsible for operating, managing, and monitoring all department-sponsored social media sites.
- B. Operation of the social media sites shall be in accordance with Policy 2.8 Use of Social Media.