

Columbus Police Division Directive	EFFECTIVE Aug. 15, 1995	NUMBER 10.13
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Media Relations and Public Appearances		



Cross Reference: 1-01, 1-02, 8.08, 10.18

I. Introduction

- A. The Division has an obligation to inform the public and news media of events that affect the lives of citizens in the community with openness and candor. To convey this information, the Division relies on the media, **so** cooperation between the Division and the media is mutually beneficial. Division personnel shall comply with the law, Division policy, and their bureau's standard operating procedures when addressing media representatives and the public.
- B. News media representatives routinely obtain copies of documents such as reports and the Daily Bulletin through the Public Records Unit. They also have access to virtually every police radio channel in addition to formal news releases and interviews with Division personnel. Therefore, the guidelines in this directive apply to those as well as any other means by which the media can reasonably be expected to obtain information.
- C. *Social media provides valuable assistance to Division personnel with community outreach, conducting investigations, preventing crime, and highlighting the actions and achievements of Division personnel.***
- D. *The Division endorses the exchange of information via social media to enhance communication, encourage collaboration, and foster productivity. This policy establishes the Division's position on the management of Division social media while providing guidance on its administration. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media, rather social media in general, as technology changes.***

II. Policy Statements

- A. No Division 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.
- B. Requests from the media for news-related information should be forwarded to the Public Information Unit (PIU) for a response, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. If a response from the PIU is necessary outside of these hours, a lieutenant or higher may order PIU personnel to respond.

- C. If PIU personnel are unavailable and/or their response is not necessary, Division personnel may address the media or disseminate investigative information only with prior approval from a lieutenant or higher.
- D. While representing the Division of Police on or off duty, Division personnel addressing the public or the media in person or in any written forum or publication shall comply with the following:
1. Exclusive rights to information shall not be granted to any media representative.
 2. Opinions of what should constitute Division policy shall not be stated.
 3. Criticism or ridicule of the Division or any of its employees shall not be expressed.
 4. Suggestions that the Division does or should take a stand on any political or social issue shall not be made.
 5. The identity of juvenile victims shall not be released unless permission is given by the Chief of Police.
 6. The Division's endorsement of any person, product, or service shall not be represented or suggested.
- Note: These policies also apply when distributing notifications via the "Alerts" function of the Columbus Police mobile application or posting on any Division social media account.
- E. The decision to release information on all serial crimes shall be made by the Chief of Police.
- F. Division personnel shall refer requests for copies of incident and/or traffic crash reports to the Records Section. Requests for copies of all other records shall be referred to the Public Records Unit.
- G. Requests from the media to view, film, or photograph evidence held by the Property Control Unit, Impounding Unit, or Forensic Services Bureau shall be directed to the PIU. A member of the investigating unit shall be present during the viewing of the evidence.

H. Representing the Division on Social Media

- 1. All Division social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Chief of Police or his or her designee.**
- 2. Sworn personnel of the rank of commander and above and personnel in the Public Information Unit and Community Liaison Section may create individual Division social media pages to post about their community interactions.**
- 3. All other Division social media sites or pages (for example, bureau or unit pages) shall be administered by the assigned bureau commander/manager or his or her designee.**

- 4. Social media pages shall clearly indicate that they are maintained by the Division and shall have Division contact information prominently displayed.**
 - 5. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology policies.**
 - 6. Social media pages shall state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the Division.**
 - a. Pages shall clearly indicate that posted content will be monitored and that the Division reserves the right to remove any content for reasons including, but not limited to, comments that contain obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks.**
 - b. Pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.**
 - 7. Division personnel representing the Division via social media outlets shall identify themselves as members of the Division.**
 - 8. Division personnel shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to social media.**
 - 9. Division personnel representing the Division via social media outlets shall not conduct private business on the social media site.**
- I. Photographs**
1. For the purposes of public records requests, photographs of sworn personnel that are currently in a plain-clothes or undercover capacity shall not be released, regardless of assignment.
 2. Photographs of sworn personnel that are not currently in a plain-clothes or undercover capacity should be released, except when specific information indicates that the release of the photograph would endanger the life or physical safety of sworn personnel.
 3. All photographs maintained by the Division, excluding those of sworn personnel listed in Sections II,I,1 and II,I,2, are public records that shall be made available to the media and the public, except when the release of the photograph:
 - a. Would reveal the identity of a suspect who has not been charged with an offense;
 - b. Would endanger the life or safety of a crime victim, witness, or confidential information source;
 - c. May be detrimental to a current investigation or pending court case; and/or
 - d. Has not been ordered by a court of competent jurisdiction and the photograph is of a juvenile.

4. Sworn personnel determining that an ID photograph should not be released shall immediately notify the Public Records Unit.
5. Requests for ID photographs shall be referred to the Public Records Unit.
6. Photographs of evidence shall be released only with the approval of the appropriate bureau commander or civilian manager.
7. During normal business hours (8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.), PIU personnel may release ID photographs with the approval of the investigating detective or his or her supervisor.

III. Procedures

A. PIU

1. Assist media personnel in covering news stories.
2. Arrange and/or assist at news conferences.
3. Establish procedures that set forth media perimeters at crime scenes, major fires, natural disasters, or other catastrophic events which do not conflict with existing procedures.
4. Assist with crisis situations within the Division.
5. Be on-call for the Division in order to respond to media inquiries in a timely fashion.
6. Coordinate the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations, as well as the release of information on victims, witnesses, and suspects.
7. Develop procedures for releasing information when other public agencies are involved in a mutual effort.
8. When available, prepare and distribute Division news releases.

B. Personnel Releasing Information

1. When releasing written information, complete the Media Information, form A-10.100. A request for the release of public records such as reports, must be referred to the Public Records Unit.
2. Ensure the release does not jeopardize an investigation or the prosecution of a criminal suspect.
 - a. Release information regarding investigations in-progress only with the authorization of the appropriate investigative personnel.
 - b. When in doubt whether information may be released, refrain from releasing and refer inquiries to the appropriate bureau commander or civilian manager.
3. Ensure the information released is made equally available to all requesting media representatives.
4. If not assigned to the PIU, forward all news releases to a chain of command supervisor for approval.

5. Use the following guidelines when releasing information:
- a. Information usually appropriate for release includes:
 - (1) The identity of an adult or juvenile charged with a crime.
 - (a) Age
 - (b) Employment and/or marital status, if pertinent to the case
 - (c) The address of an adult charged with a crime
 - (2) The criminal charge.
 - (3) Investigating and/or arresting agencies, if the investigation has been completed.
 - (4) The length and scope of the investigation, if the investigation has been completed.
 - (5) The time and location of the arrest.

Note: When the Division and other law enforcement agencies are involved in a mutual effort, the originating agency is responsible for media requests.

- b. Information usually inappropriate for release includes:
 - (1) Observations about a suspect's character or guilt.
 - (2) A suspect's statements, admissions, alibis, or lack thereof.
 - (3) The identity of persons previously charged but not convicted.
 - (4) A juvenile's prior arrest record.
 - (5) The identity, statements, or credibility of potential witnesses.
 - (6) Information that would tend to disclose the identity of a confidential source or witness.
 - (7) A victim's full name, unless the victim is deceased. Only release the initials of a living victim to preserve privacy.**
 - (8) A victim's address or place of employment. Only release a general description of the area (for example, street blocks), unless it is a business or the scene of the crime.**
 - (9) The identity of victims of sexual assault.**
 - (10) Graphic descriptions of wounds or crime scenes.**
 - (11) Investigative procedures.**
 - (12) The opinion of agency personnel regarding the merits of an investigation or the quality of evidence gathered.**
- c. Information prohibited from being released includes:
 - (1) Details that could jeopardize the successful prosecution of a case.
 - (2) The identity of persons questioned but not charged with a violation.
 - (3) Photographs and fingerprints of juveniles.
 - (4) Reports of and information regarding child abuse and neglect.
 - (5) Data accessed through law enforcement databases.

- (6) The home address of sworn personnel.
 - (7) Social security numbers.
 - (8) Medical records.
6. Provide a copy of all approved news releases to the PIU prior to the end of the shift.
 7. Notify the chain of command and the PIU prior to the end of the shift when a verbal interview is given to the news media. Include the following:
 - a. Name of the reporter and media outlet to which the interview was given
 - b. Date and time of the interview
 - c. Description of the incident that was the subject of the interview
 - d. Summary of information released
- C. Personnel Addressing Public/Legislative Bodies
1. Obtain approval from the bureau commander or civilian manager prior to representing the Division at a public appearance.
 - a. The Division generally will not pay overtime for public appearances resulting from private arrangements.
 - b. Wear the uniform of the day for the respective assignment unless deviation is approved by the bureau commander or civilian manager.
 2. Obtain approval from the Chief of Police prior to representing the Division before any legislative body.
 - a. If possible, notify the Professional Standards Bureau (PSB) Commander prior to giving testimony; otherwise, notify afterwards as soon as practical.
 - b. Prior to submitting written testimony, forward a copy of the testimony through the involved chain of command to the deputy chief.
 3. For testimony on behalf of law enforcement before any legislative body while not representing the Division:
 - a. Provide prior written notification to the Legal Advisor through the chain of command;
 - b. Contact the Legal Advisor directly if there is insufficient time for notification to be made through the chain of command;
 - c. Indicate that the opinion expressed is not necessarily that of the Division of Police and the name of the organization being represented, if applicable; and
 - d. Do not wear the uniform or Division ID without the prior approval of the Chief of Police.
- D. Deputy Chief
1. Review the proposal for written testimony.
 2. Approve or disapprove the proposal.

3. Notify the originator.
4. Forward a copy of the written testimony to the PSB Commander.

E. Bureau Commander

1. Forward a list of all covert personnel to the Public Records Unit by March 1st and September 1st of each year.
2. When personnel enter into a covert assignment, submit a letter containing the covert personnel's information to the Public Records Unit.

F. Public Records Unit

Maintain the list(s) of covert personnel provided by bureau commanders and those outlined on the unpublished covert assignment transfer list.