

Atlanta Police Department Policy Manual		Standard Operating Procedure
Effective Date September 15, 2018		APD.SOP.1060 Public Affairs
Applicable To: All employees		Review Due: 2022
Approval Authority: Chief Erika Shields		
Signature: Signed by ES		Date Signed: 9/13/2018

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1. PURPOSE

This directive establishes policy and procedure for interacting with the public and media representatives.

2. POLICY

The Atlanta Police Department will assist news media personnel and the public by releasing impartial information and will cooperate with the media at the scene of crimes, accidents, and other public safety incidents.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 The Public Affairs Unit (PAU) is responsible for serving as the liaison between the Department and the public to promote positive public relations, ensuring that material and information released is accurate, and reflects a positive and professional image while effectively serving the interest of the community, coordinating publicity for special events, and maintaining files of daily news clippings and news-related audio and video tapes.

3.2 All supervisors are responsible for adhering to the requirements of this directive, ensuring all employees adhere to the requirements of this directive, and notifying the PAU at least two days in advance of any community events they are sponsoring or participating in such as: community awards, the Crime Prevention Forum, or the graduation of participants from a drug awareness program.

3.3 All employees are responsible for adhering to the requirements of this directive.

3.4 The Communications Section is responsible for immediately notifying the PAU of all major and newsworthy events.



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4. ACTION

4.1 Public Relations

4.1.1 The PAU will promote positive relations with the public by:

1. Assisting in handling crisis situations involving the Department;
2. Assisting news media personnel in covering stories at the scenes of incidents as they pertain to public safety; (CALEA 6th ed. Standard 54.1.1a)
3. Being available for on-call responses to the news media;
4. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects; and (CALEA 6th ed. Standard 54.1.1d)
5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations as directed by the Chief of Police. (CALEA 6th ed. Standard 54.1.1e)

4.1.2 The PAU will coordinate all media requests for interviews.

4.1.3 The PAU will coordinate all requests from media representatives who wish to accompany employees on duty.

4.1.4 The PAU will maintain the Department's internal and external websites and ensure the veracity of its content.

4.1.5 At least annually the PAU will solicit input from the media as it relates to the public information function. (CALEA 6th ed. Standard 54.1.2)

4.2 Access to Scene
(CALEA 6th ed. Standard 54.1.3)

4.2.1 Employees will not allow media representatives or the public to enter the scene of any crime, accident, emergency, disaster, or other incident during the initial investigation.

4.2.2 Employees will not allow any person to interfere with the investigation of a crime, accident, or any other incident scene. The mere presence of a person taking pictures or asking questions about the incident does not necessarily constitute unlawful interference. Therefore, employees will not interfere with a citizen's right to make video, audio, or photographic recordings of police activity, as long as such recording does not physically interfere with the performance of an officer's duty. In the event that a media representative acting in his or her professional capacity is arrested, the PAU must be immediately notified. (APD.SOP.2011, "General Conduct ")

****This Section, 4.2.2, may not be deleted, revised, or amended pursuant to the May 19, 2015 Order in Calhoun, et al. v. Pennington, et al. 1:09-CV-3286-TCB. Consult the City of Atlanta Department of Law with any questions or concerns.****

4.2.3 Department employees will neither encourage nor discourage the photographing of suspects or defendants when they are in public places. Officers will not deliberately pose a person in



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custody for the media. Officers may discourage photographs if the suspect will be placed in a line-up.

4.3 Release of Information

4.3.1 Employees at the scene of a crime, accident, or other public safety incident may respond to specific requests for information that will not compromise or hinder an ongoing investigation. The incident commander may release general information about:

1. The incident: who, what, when, where and why;
2. The victim's age, gender, race (unless the incident is a sex crime or the victim is a juvenile);
3. The immediate circumstances of an arrest: time, place, and any act of resistance on the part of the arrestee; and
4. The arrestee's name, age, gender, race, place of residence, employment (unless the arrestee is a juvenile).

4.3.2 Employees at the scene of a crime, accident, or other public safety incident may not release general information about:

1. The prior criminal records, character, or reputation of the accused; the existence of any confession, admission of guilt, or statement made by the accused; the results of any examination or test conducted in an ongoing investigation or the refusal by the accused to submit to the same; or the opinion of an employee regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused, the merits of the case, or the quality of evidence gathered;
2. The identity of fatally or critically injured persons before the next of kin has been notified; the identity, testimony, or credibility of any prospective witness, the identity or location of any victims of sex offenses; or any information concerning the identity of individuals under the age of 17;
3. Any information received from other law enforcement agencies without their written authorization to release that information;
4. Any information about Departmental employees, to include: their involvement in an incident, possible disciplinary action taken, contact information, etc.
5. Official photographs;
6. Any information or statements regarding Department policy or procedure; and
7. Any information from the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) or the National Crime Information Center (NCIC).

4.3.3 Employees who are not willing to respond to media requests for information on scene should refer the matter to a supervisor, or to the PAU to avoid a response of "No Comment."

4.3.4 After leaving the initial scene of an incident, employees will direct all requests for information to the PAU.



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- 4.3.5 Department employees releasing any information to the news media or to the public in accordance with Section 4.3 will notify the Public Affairs Unit (PAU) of that information as soon as possible. Notification can occur by telephone or to the PAU unit email.
- 4.3.6 The PAU will monitor social networking sites (e.g., Face book, Twitter, and YouTube) for information that pertains to the Department, and its functions. PAU personnel will not edit citizen's comments on social media sites, but PAU personnel will delete comments if it violates the City's Social Media Citizen Use Policy, such as:
1. Any comments promoting or opposing any personal campaigning for election or political office, promotion, or advertisement of a business or commercial transaction, obscene, threatening, or harassing language;
 2. Any type of personal attack, or offensive comments that targets any ethnic, racial, age, religious group, gender, sexual orientation, or disability; and
 3. Any illegal activity, or posting that violates a trademark or copyright issue.
- 4.3.7 Employees will forward all requests to post a message on social media networking pages through the Public Affairs Unit (PAU) for review, and if approved, the message, photo, and/or video will be posted by the unit's designated staff in accordance with APD.SOP.1060, "Public Affairs," section 4.3, Release of Information. (State Law Enforcement Certification Program, 5th ed. Standard 1.2.7)
- 4.3.8 The Communications Section will not respond to inquiries by the media except to confirm the location of an ongoing incident or an incident that occurred earlier in the day.
- 4.4 Contacts with Media Representatives
- 4.4.1 Employees will not grant interviews or answer questions from media representatives regarding any work-related activities or incidents involving the Atlanta Police Department without prior approval from the Chief of Police, or the PAU except as provided for on the initial scene of an incident.
- 4.4.2 Whenever permission for real time actions of an Employee(s) to be recorded by persons and movie organizations in the production of written, video, or audio communication, such inquiries must be approved by, or receive written permission from the affected Division commander and the Chief of Police. The PAU Manager and the City of Atlanta (COA) law department will collaborate and provide a recommendation to the Chief of Police regarding such real-time recording. This inquiry may, or may not recounts any administrative, or criminal investigation, or activities conducted by the Department, or involves City equipment, or uniforms when such production is for the dissemination to any source outside of the Department. Such communication includes but is not limited to: movies, videocassettes, audiotapes, radio programs, television shows, scripts, books, articles, pamphlets, and periodicals.
- 4.5 Release of Crime Statistics
- 4.5.1 Official crime statistics that are certified by the Chief of Police for publication in the Uniform Crime Report may be released upon request by supervisors.



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- 4.5.2 Unofficial crime statistics, those that have not been certified for publication in the Uniform Crime Report, may only be released by the Chief of Police or his designee. Zone commanders are authorized to release unofficial crime statistics on a beat or neighborhood level.
- 4.6 Press Releases
- 4.6.1 The PAU will prepare all press releases and statements for distribution to the media. (CALEA 6th ed. Standard 54.1.1b)
- 4.6.2 News releases from the Department will be distributed through the PAU and distributed in a manner that allows all local media equal availability.
- 4.6.3 The PAU will coordinate the release of information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort. (CALEA 6th ed. Standard 54.1.1f)
- 4.7 Press Conferences
- 4.7.1 The PAU will schedule and prepare all press conferences as directed by the Chief of Police. (CALEA 6th ed. standard 54.1.1c)
- 4.7.2 All local media will be notified of a news conference as soon as practicable prior to the session.
5. DEFINITIONS
- NA
6. CANCELLATIONS
- APD.SOP.1060 Public Affairs; effective June 15, 2015.
7. REFERENCES
- May 19, 2015 Order in Calhoun, et al. v. Pennington, et al. 1:09-CV-3286-TCB
- APD.SOP.2011, "General Conduct"
- State Law Enforcement Certification Program, 5th Edition Standard 1.27
- Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), 6th Ed. Standards 54.1.1, 54.1.2, and 54.1.3