



Media Relations

.01 Policy

It is the policy of the Bladensburg Police Department to maintain an open and cooperative approach to providing information on matters of public concern to the news media and the general public. Information releases will be disseminated in a timely and accurate manner.

.02 Terms

Public Information Act (PIA): Maryland's Public Information Act gives the public the right to access government records without unnecessary cost and delay. The PIA applies to all three branches of Maryland state government as well as local government entities.

.03 Governing Legislation and Reference

Governing Legislation:

Maryland Code, General Provisions Article, §§4-201 through 4-306, Inspection of Public Records.

Forms: N/A

Reference:

Maryland Public Information Act Manual (13th Ed.).

General Order 240, Release of Information.

.04 Procedure

A. Media Relations Philosophy and Function

The Department's philosophy regarding media relations is to provide an open atmosphere for authorized media representatives to obtain news information by contacting appropriate levels of authority within the Department.

In order to implement department policy related to the release of public information and media relations, the following actions are considered to be essential elements of the Department's public information and media function:

- Assisting media personnel in covering news stories at the scenes of incidents;
- Preparing and distributing Department media releases;
- Arranging for, and assisting at media conferences;

- Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;
- Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential Department investigations and operations; and,
- Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.

B. Public Information Officer

The member designated by the Chief of Police shall serve as the Department's Public Information Officer (PIO). In the absence of the PIO, a Department authorized spokesperson may be designated as acting.

Members are required to obtain authorization from the Chief of Police or PIO prior to disseminating official Department media releases.

C. Media Access to Incident Scenes

Access to any crime scene, natural disaster, or other catastrophic event by members of the news media, including news photographers, will be controlled by the supervisor in charge of the scene. Such access will be monitored and regulated by the PIO and/ or supervisor in charge of the scene.

Access of the media to the perimeters of crime scenes will be dependent upon the tactical situation and the likelihood of jeopardizing Department operations relating to the investigation and collection of evidence. The PIO will coordinate and manage media activities in conjunction with the supervisor in charge.

Representatives of the news media will be denied access to incident scenes only:

- On private property at the owner or custodian's request;
- To preserve evidence;
- If their presence will seriously impede the work of fire fighters, EMS personnel, or police; or,

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- If their presence will hinder the investigation to the point where a successful conclusion will be jeopardized.

D. Media Access to Police Department Facilities

Representatives of the media will be afforded the opportunity to gather news information from police facilities, but will be escorted at all times when they are in secure areas of Department facilities that are not open to the general public.

Media representatives seeking to contact a Department member must be met in the lobby or waiting area and escorted by that member or designee while in all secure areas.

E. General Procedures for Media Relations

At incident scenes, media personnel seeking information should be referred to the on-scene supervisor or the PIO, if present.

The PIO is to be notified by the scene supervisor or designee of any major investigation that might result in interest of or notification of news media personnel.

During in-progress incidents, media representatives contacting the Police Department should be referred to the incident superior, PIO, or designee for information concerning the incident.

Inquiries from media representatives concerning in-progress incidents or investigations being handled by other agencies should be referred to the PIO or ranking supervisor in that agency.

Routine requests from media personnel for information not of incident nature (e.g., statistical information, interviews of members pertaining to any facet of police operations, administrative matters, etc.) should be referred to the PIO.

F. Determining Records Authorized for Release

Records and information in records that qualify as a public record, and which are not forbidden to be disclosed, made exempt, or confidential under law, may be released by the Custodian of Records, PIO, or designee.

Records and information in records that qualify as a public record, and which are made exempt under the law may not be released without approval by the Chief of Police or the Town Attorney.

The Maryland Public Information Act delineates what information in public records are exempt, confidential, or forbidden to be disclosed. Members with questions as to whether a record is authorized for release are to refer to the Public Information Act Manual for a specific determination. Members with further questions as to whether a record or information may be released are to contact the Chief of Police for further assistance.

G. Coordinating Media Relations in Matters Involving Multiple Public Service Agencies

In situations involving multiple public service agencies (e.g., fire department, state police, etc.), the following procedures are to be followed:

- The agency with primary jurisdiction over the incident is responsible for releasing or coordinating the release of media information unless; and,
- Other arrangements have been established.

H. Development of Media Policy

The Public Information Officer is responsible for the development of changes in policies and procedures relating to the Department's public information function. This can be accomplished through ongoing feedback on policy and procedures with allied agencies and soliciting feedback from media representatives.

HISTORY: Adopted May 1, 2014. Revised January 20, 2015.

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This General Order supersedes all other orders and memoranda in conflict therewith.

Authority:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles L. Owens". The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops and is positioned above the printed name.

Charles L. Owens
Chief of Police