

**GENERAL ORDER**

August 2017

Immediately

**II-03**

Distribution: All Employees

Subject: **RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC AND NEWS MEDIA**

Index as:	Information Release News Media Policy PIO	Press Release Policy Public Record Public Information	Public Information Officer Public Information Release Procedures Release of Public Information
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Accreditation Standards: 41.2.4, 54.1.1, 54.1.2, 54.1.3, 55.1.1 and CFA 1.07

Cross Reference: [G.O. II-15, Security of Records and Files](#)

§119.07, §119.01, §316.066 and §985.04(5), F.S.S.

Replaces: G.O. II-03, Release of Information to the Public and News Media (April 21, 2022)

This Order consists of the following sections:

- I. Policy
- II. Definitions
- III. Public Information Function
- IV. Information Available for Release
- V. Information Not Available for Release
- VI. Persons Authorized to Release Information
- VII. Media Relations at Crime/Incident Scenes
- VIII. Identification of Media Representatives
- IX. Media Information Sources

**I. POLICY**

A. The St. Petersburg Police Department recognizes the right of the public to have access to public records and the news media's right to report on matters of public interest. In accordance with Chapter 119 of the Florida State Statutes, it is the policy of the Department to release all information in a manner which does not jeopardize an individual's rights nor impair the prosecution of the offender nor impede the law enforcement process.

B. It is the policy of this Department that a professional, working relationship be maintained between the police and news media representatives, so both may accomplish their respective objectives. News media representatives are recognized as having an obligation to gather information which is in the public interest; and, as long as the fulfillment of their tasks does not interfere with police objectives, they will be permitted to pursue their activities without interference from police personnel, within the confines of the law.

## II. DEFINITIONS

A. Public Information Officer (PIO) – Any employee acting in that capacity as a member of the Community Awareness Division.

B. Public Record – All documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, data processing software or other material, regardless of the physical form, characteristics or means of transmission, made, or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency.

## III. PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION

A. The Department has established a Public Information Office in the Community Awareness Division.

1. The Manager, Community Awareness Division, or designee serves as the Public Information Officer (PIO).

2. The PIO will:

- a. Assist news personnel in covering news stories at the scenes of crimes or incidents;
- b. Prepare and distribute agency news releases;
- c. Arrange for and assist at news conferences;
- d. Be available for on-call responses to the news media;
- e. Coordinate and authorize the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects;
- f. With approval of the Chief of Police, coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations, including those where the accused may be a Department employee; and
- g. Develop procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.

B. The PIO will involve media representatives in the development and revision of policies and procedures relating to the news media.

## IV. INFORMATION AVAILABLE FOR RELEASE

A. All public records, except those which are exempt under Chapter 119, F.S.S. or other applicable law, will be made available upon request to interested citizens or members of the news media in a reasonable time and under reasonable conditions.

B. Public records will be released to the news media without partiality. No employee will delay the release of information to favor any particular news media representative or agency.

C. Information will be made available from:

1. Source Documents:

- a. Incident Reports
- b. Citations
- c. Crash Reports
  - 1) Florida law restricts who may obtain a copy of the report. Crash reports or related information may only be released by the Records Division, or the Legal Division.
  - 2) At all times, the crash reports, including supplements that do not contain criminal investigative information, may only be released when the investigation is complete or when the investigation will not be impeded by questioning the investigating officer, except as may be limited by this Order.
- d. Bicycle Registrations
- e. Solicitor Permit
- f. Taxi Permits
- g. Complaint/Arrest Affidavits
- h. Memorandums to All Personnel or All Officers relating Department policies or procedures; however, investigative techniques or procedures will not be released.

2. Crime/incident Information - in synopsis form **will** be released from the scene if at all possible, including:
  - a. Type of crime/incident
  - b. Date/time occurred
  - c. Address occurred (except as may be limited by sections in this order);
  - d. Nature of injury or loss if any
  - e. Possible type of weapon used (*i.e.*, gun, knife, blunt instrument) and/or nature of force used; with the exact cause to be determined by the medical examiner
  - f. Information about the hospital or medical examiner
  - g. Identity of the investigating officer
  - h. Status of the case, *i.e.*, open or closed.
3. Arrested Person(s) – Information that will normally be released includes:
  - a. Name, age, address and occupation (except as may be limited by sections in this order);
  - b. Nature of charge;
  - c. Circumstances surrounding the arrest, including time, place, resistance, pursuit, or weapons used;
4. Arrested Juveniles – When the record has been created after October 1, 1994, the name, address, photograph and crime or arrest report will be released if the child has been taken into custody for a violation of law which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony.
5. Miscellaneous Information
  - a. Name, age, address, and description of person(s) for who warrants have been issued;
  - b. Information on non-criminal incidents, including fires, industrial or other accidents, drowning victims, missing persons, etc. (except as may be limited by sections of this order).

**D. Department records, offense/incident reports and other materials will not be released to the public or media representative(s) for review or purchase until any information exempted or made confidential by Florida law, including active criminal investigative information, has been properly removed or redacted.**

**E. Department records, offense/incident reports and other materials will not be released to the public or media representative(s) for review or purchase until any information exempted or made confidential by Florida law, including active criminal investigative information, has been properly removed or redacted.**

1. All public/media requests to purchase Department records, other than Office of Professional Standards records, will be processed by the Records Division, and coordinated with the appropriate investigative division or the Community Awareness Division.

#### F. Criminal History Record Information

1. The Department is generally prohibited from releasing information obtained from the Florida Criminal Information Center and National Criminal Information Center (FCIC/NCIC) to the public.

2. It is permissible to confirm prior criminal record information upon specific inquiry, utilizing the Pinellas County Case Management System (Odyssey) and Departmental records. Thus, if a question is raised - "Was X arrested by your agency or in Pinellas County?" - It is permissible to respond to the inquiry.

#### G. When the Accused is a Department Member

1. In an ongoing criminal investigations where the accused is a Department member, the Chief of Police, or designee, may release the date, time, and nature (if known) to the public and/or news media.

2. Any other information released will be in accordance with FSS Chapter 119.

## V. INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE FOR RELEASE

A. Records and information classified as confidential or exempt pursuant to federal law, the Florida Public Records Law (Chapter 119), or court order, will not be released.

B. Exemptions from public disclosure include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Examination questions and answer sheets of examinations, which are administered for the purpose of licensing, certification, or employment.
2. Active criminal investigation information and active criminal intelligence information.
  - a. Information is considered *active* if it is directly related to pending prosecutions or appeals;
  - b. Criminal intelligence information will be considered *active* as long as it is related to intelligence gathering conducted with a reasonable, good faith belief that it will lead to detection of ongoing, or reasonably anticipated, criminal activities.
  - c. The names or addresses of witnesses involved in active criminal investigations;
  - d. The names, addresses, and photographs of suspects wanted in crimes, unless help from the news media is desired in an effort to locate the suspects.
3. Any information revealing the identity of confidential informants or sources.
4. Any information revealing surveillance techniques, procedures, or personnel.
5. Information of any type which may reveal undercover personnel of any criminal justice agency.
6. Photographs, names, addresses, or other information which will reveal the identity of sex offense victims as defined in Chapter 794, F.F.S.; and
  - a. Also exempt is the exact location of the offense IF it is a residence or business address;
  - b. However, the victim's sex and age will be released along with a general description of the City area where the offense occurred.
7. Any information which reveals the personal assets of the victim of a crime, other than property stolen or destroyed during the commission of the crime.
8. The home addresses, telephone numbers, and photographs of active or former law enforcement personnel.
  - a. The home addresses, telephone numbers, photographs, and places of employment of the spouses and children of law enforcement personnel;
  - b. The names and locations of schools attended by the children of law enforcement personnel.
9. Photographs, name, address, or other information which will reveal the identity of any victim of child abuse as defined by Chapter 827, F.S.S.
10. Identity of deceased victims, until reasonable efforts have been exhausted to notify the next of kin.
11. Identity of persons legally defined as juveniles who have been arrested or who are under investigation, except as otherwise specified under Florida Law.
12. Information concerning child abuse offenses as defined according to Florida Law.
13. Information regarding evidence prior to the discovery process, including:
  - a. The contents of any statement, admission, or confession, or the fact that a person made or refused to make any statement, admission, or confession;
  - b. Opinions of agency members concerning the character, reputation, guilt, or innocence of the accused person;
  - c. Opinions of agency members regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused or evidence, arguments, or merits of the case;
  - d. Statements concerning the identity, anticipated testimony, credibility, or the truthfulness of prospective witnesses;

- e. Fingerprint, polygraph, ballistics, or other laboratory test results;
- f. Precise description of modus operandi or evidence seized or discovered during the investigation.

14. Information or records that could be used to locate or harass a victim or their families, upon request of the victim, family member, or authorized representative.

C. All criminal intelligence and criminal investigative information received by this Department prior to January 25, 1979, is exempt.

## VI. PERSONS AUTHORIZED TO RELEASE INFORMATION

A. The PIO, or designee, is responsible for coordinating and releasing information pertaining to criminal incidents and activities of the Department.

B. Matters pertaining to Department personnel will be released by the Chief of Police, or designee.

C. Information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations **will** be released by the Chief of Police or the PIO.

D. Information concerning Department plans, policies, or administrative changes will be released by the Chief of Police, or designee.

E. The Manager, Records Division **will** respond to routine press inquiries regarding past events, referring to the request to the PIO, as may be appropriate.

F. Employees of the Department, other than exempt management personnel, are not required to honor any work-related news media requests while off duty. In the event the employee chooses not to answer off-duty inquiries, the media representative will be referred to either the PIO or the on-duty Watch Commander.

### G. Major Incidents or Arrests

#### 1. Watch Commander

a. During the normal working hours of the PIO, the on-duty Watch Commander, or designee will, in a timely manner, provide the PIO information about any major incident or significant arrest.

b. During hours when the PIO is not working, the on-duty Watch Commander, or designee will address media questions.

#### 2. Investigative Services Bureau (ISB)

a. During the normal working hours of the PIO, the ISB Division Commander or Investigative Unit Supervisor will, in a timely manner, provide the PIO information about any major incident or significant arrest.

b. During hours when the PIO is not working, the ISB Division Commander or Unit Supervisor and the on-duty Watch Commander (or designee) will address media questions.

c. A copy of the information released to the public will be provided to the on-duty Supervisor, Emergency Communications Center for posting on social media, when directed by the Watch Commander or Scene Supervisor.

#### 3. Emergency Communications Center

a. During the normal working hours of the PIO, all calls from the media for information on a major incident, arrest or of an administrative nature (excluding traffic information) **will** be referred to the PIO.

b. During hours when the PIO is not working, the on-duty Emergency Communications Center Supervisor, or designee, when contacted by the media, will verbally release any Media Release prepared by a Watch Commander, **ISB Bureau** Commander or Supervisor, **or** the PIO.

#### 4. Examples of major incidents and arrests include, but are not limited to:

- a. Homicide;
- b. Activation of the SWAT team;
- c. Officer involved shooting;
- d. Traffic fatality;
- e. Skyway Bridge incident (*i.e.* disaster, suicide, etc.);

- f. Serious fire (two alarms or fire deaths);
- g. Shooting involving serious injury;
- h. Multiple arrests;
- i. Arrest in a significant long-term investigation;
- j. Arrest resulting in multiple case closures;
- k. Arrest of a public figure.

H. The Supervisor, Emergency Communications Center, may contact the PIO if, in their judgment, an incident is likely to attract widespread media attention.

## VII. MEDIA RELATIONS AT CRIME/INCIDENT SCENES

A. Public Information or "Situation Briefings" will be provided, as soon as practicable, at the scene of a crime or police incident by either the Officer-in-Charge, the Squad Sergeant, the Watch Commander, or the PIO. Follow-up information will be released by the Unit responsible for any continuing investigation and coordinated with the PIO in accordance with this General Order.

B. At the scene of a police-related incident, other needed police activities.

1. News representatives with properly displayed press identification will be allowed, as conditions permit, to go as near as feasible to the scene itself.

a. Media representatives are not to be considered as the "general public" in the area of an incident or crime scene, but as persons who must fulfill their assigned tasks.

b. Media representatives are not, however, exempt from laws enforced by this Department.

2. Officers will not assume media representatives know exactly where a crime scene has been established.

a. Whenever possible, a scene should be surrounded by rope or tape to control access.

b. When this is not possible due to personnel resources, time, size of area, or other factors, the Officer-in-Charge **will** delineate a reasonable scene area and relate its points of reference to the media.

3. In all cases, media representatives will be allowed to remain wherever the general public is allowed. Allowing news reporters and photographers beyond the exterior perimeter is dependent upon the tactical situation and will be approved by the Officer-in-Charge.

4. If the incident is within a private building or dwelling, police personnel will secure and protect the building or dwelling, in whole or in part, as may be necessary in order to protect the scene. Under such circumstances, the general public and media representatives may be excluded from the building or dwelling until the police purpose is accomplished and the scene is released.

5. If the incident is outside a building or dwelling, police personnel will delineate the specific area and prevent the general public and media representatives from entering the actual scene for such length of time as is needed to complete the on-scene police investigation.

6. At a crime or incident scene where an outside agency (*i.e.*, FBI, Secret Service, Fire Department) is responsible for the investigation, the Department's spokesperson (PIO, Watch Commander, etc.), responsible for releasing public information, will inform the outside agency what information has been released to the media and then refer all further requests to that investigating agency.

a. Public information released on all joint agency investigations will be mutually agreed upon by the agency personnel responsible.

b. When operating under the Incident Command System, the PIO **will** be the Department's primary representative to the Joint Information Center (JIC).

7. If a crime scene is on private property and the owner or person in charge of the property denies entry to members of the media and states this decision to the news representatives in the presence of police personnel, police have an obligation to ensure the denial is honored; otherwise, press representatives have the right to remain on private property, outside the established crime scene, to complete their news-gathering tasks.

C. Police employees will consider the “deadline” time of the media representative when they request information and will oblige the representative as much as possible in meeting this “deadline.”

D. At fire-related incidents, the decision to allow properly identified reporters and photographers to pass beyond fire lines, or to restrict them from a fire area, will be the responsibility of the on-scene Fire Commander.

E. Photographing police-related incidents, including motor vehicle accidents, injured persons, and uncovered bodies, will be at the discretion of the news media, provided the process does not interfere with rescue personnel or the investigation.

F. Photographing individual in custody will not be permitted within Police Headquarters; however:

1. Prisoners may be photographed outside Police Headquarters; prisoners will not be posed for photographers.

2. Department photographs of an arrested person may be released, provided they will not jeopardize an investigation.

G. Employees will refrain from advising victims or witnesses not to converse with news media representatives. Persons involved in incidents, who are in police custody, **will** not be allowed to discuss such incidents with news media representatives.

H. Employees **will** not seek publicity through the news media or furnish information to the media for the express purpose of seeking personal notoriety, while acting in an official capacity for the City.

#### VIII. IDENTIFICATION OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES

A. Properly issued media credentials **will** be worn or displayed on the outer garment of the bearer at all times when on the scene of police incidents or within Police Headquarters.

B. Visits to Police Headquarters, other than the lobby area, will be coordinated by the PIO.

C. Employees of the Department **will** extend every possible courtesy and cooperation to properly identified members of the working press, consistent with Department policies and procedures covering the release of public information.

D. Free-lance writers, reporters and producers **will** be directed to the PIO to present their request(s) and coordinate their visit.

#### IX. MEDIA INFORMATION SOURCES

A. To facilitate the dissemination of information to the public, news media representatives should pursue the following channels for information:

1. The PIO is to be contacted in person or by telephone for the desired information during normal working hours, Monday through Friday. The PIO will notify the media of prepared press releases and scheduled press conferences.

2. Media representatives, requesting feature story interviews (excluding on-the-scene situations) with on-duty employees of the Department, should first contact the PIO and explain the request.

a. The PIO will coordinate the request with the Bureau, Division, Section or Unit Commander(s) to prevent interference with the employee’s assigned duties.

b. If such an interview is granted, the employee **will** release information in accordance with this Order.

B. All personnel should understand it is standard press policy that any conversations with a representative of the news media are “on the record” and are subject to being quoted.

C. During hours when the PIO is not working, media representatives may contact a Watch Commander or Supervisor, Emergency Communications Center, to obtain a synopsis of a major incident that may have occurred.

D. Media representatives desiring additional information regarding an incident, other than what may have been obtained from the synopsis provided by the Supervisor, Emergency Communications Center can pursue the opportunity of going to the scene and gathering the desired information from the Officer-in-Charge.

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Anthony Holloway  
Chief of Police