


<p>POLICY 108</p>	<p>MEDIA RELATIONS</p>	
	<p>REVISED: 9/97, 02/09, 04/12, 12/13, 06/16, 11/17, 09/19, 09/20, 08/23</p>	<p>RELATED POLICIES: 108.1</p>
	<p>CFA STANDARDS: 1.06, 1.07, 32.05</p>	<p>REVIEWED: AS NEEDED</p> <p>THIS VERSION PUBLISHED: 09/05/2023</p>

A. POLICY STATEMENT

The Fort Lauderdale Police Department has established guidelines for the release and dissemination of agency information to the news media. It is the policy of this agency that information be released in a factual and professional manner and in a way as not to jeopardize the integrity of an official investigation or infringe upon the rights of the individual. All information shall be released in accordance with Florida Public Records Law, FSS 119; Florida Public Officers and Employees Law, FSS 112; and within the guidelines of established procedures.

B. MEDIA RELATIONS UNIT

The Media Relations Unit is comprised of a Public Information Officer, a Public Information Specialist, a Public Records Coordinator, and Photo Lab employees.

The Public Information Officer and Public Information Specialist (known also as PIOs) will act as the liaison between the Department and the mass news media to ensure that information regarding Department matters is properly disseminated.

The Public Records Coordinator shall receive and manage public records requests in accordance with Department Policy 111.6, Public Records Requests.

The Photo Lab employees shall take photographs and/or video of individuals, scenes, or events of public interest and of publicity value to the City.

PIOs Responsibilities:

1. Assisting members of the news media in covering routine news stories regarding police matters;
2. Responding to police scenes, which are of public concern, in order to gather pertinent information which will be released to news bureaus in a factual and timely manner. These scenes include or are not limited to police involved shootings, homicides, mass casualty incidents, critical missing persons, incidents involving major risks to public safety, and other high-profile incidents;
3. Maintaining an "on-call" status in order to respond to police scenes which are of significant interest to the public, and to assist police and media personnel in gathering pertinent information for public release;

4. Preparing written information in the form of news releases and media responses related to police incidents and agency activities that are of public interest, and to distribute those releases to the mass news media; including use of agency social media sites.
5. Arranging and coordinating department news conferences;
6. Coordinating with the Public Records Coordinator and/or the Investigations Bureau or the Chief of Police for the release of information regarding victims, witnesses, suspects, arrestees and agency personnel to the news media and ensuring that any release of information is in accordance with F.S.S. 112 and F.S.S. 119; Article I. Section 16 of the Florida Constitution. (Marsy's Law)
7. Coordinating with the Public Records Coordinator and/or the Investigations Bureau or the Chief of Police for the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations under the guidance of the Investigative Bureau Assistant Chief and/or Internal Affairs, in accordance with Florida State Statutes 112 and 119;
8. Being familiar with all agency activities, functions, operations and programs;
9. Releasing agency information under the authority and direction of the Chief of Police.

C. PERSONS AUTHORIZED TO RELEASE INFORMATION

The PIOs and/or a designee are authorized to release agency information to the news media under the authority and direction of the Chief of Police and within the guidelines of this policy.

1. The PIOs may coordinate responses to specific media inquiries with the appropriate police department employee.
2. An Investigations Bureau Captain or designee shall review and approve any news releases or official media updates concerning an active investigation, within their respective division, prior to publication. This does not include preliminary information, such as time, location, and type of incident, from the scene.
3. When assigned to an active police scene, police personnel shall refer all news media inquiries to the PIO.
4. The Public Records Coordinator is authorized to release information from department files in accordance with applicable public records laws. When applicable, all media related records requests will be approved by the PIOs. Internal Affairs will be notified prior to providing the records involving department employees or internal investigations.

D. NEWS RELEASES

All news releases shall be approved by the appropriate bureau chief or designee, prior to being released to the media.

E. NEWS MEDIA CREDENTIALS

The department recognizes valid forms of identification issued to media representatives by their respective local, national and international accredited news agencies. Press privileges, for closed/secure areas such as crime scenes, are extended to those news bureau representatives who carry and display proper identification issued by their agencies. Credentials will not be necessary if the media briefing occurs in a public area. Any questions concerning the validity of press credentials should be referred to the PIOs.

F. MEDIA ACCESS TO SECURED POLICE SCENES

1. Official police lines are established to:
 - a. Preserve the integrity of an area which is to be analyzed and processed during a criminal investigation;
 - b. Secure areas which may pose a threat to public safety and/or involve significant resources on the part of emergency services (e.g. major fires, natural disasters, or other catastrophic events).
2. The PIOs in consultation with the Officer in Charge or Chief of Police may if necessary extend certain privileges to members of the news media at secured police scenes so they may gather sufficient information regarding incidents of public interest.
3. On a scene with significant public and/or media interest, a "Media Staging Area" shall be established in order to give media personnel a safe, working view of the secured area, as well as convenient access to the PIO, or designee, without violating the integrity of the scene or hindering police operations.
4. Officers do not have the legal authority to prevent the public or news media representatives from photographing or videotaping police operations or crime scenes from outside official police lines.
5. First Amendment Auditors may be present at a police scene and begin video recording. As long as they are outside the official police lines and not obstruct the investigation, officers should not interfere with them.
6. The commanding officer of a police scene may take precautions to cover objects within the secure area which may not be appropriate for public view.

G. RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO THE NEWS MEDIA

1. Unless prohibited by applicable public records law and Marsy's Law, the following information may be released :
 - a. The date, time, location and nature of a reported crime;
 - b. The name, sex, age, and address of a person charged with a crime;
 - c. The name, sex, age of the victim of a crime (as long as Marsy's Law was not invoked);
 - d. An official photograph of an arrested person when cleared by the case investigator or PIO;
 - e. Department personnel may not prevent media representatives from photographing arrestees while in a public area however; arrestees shall not be paraded or posed for the media.

2. Information which may NOT be released unless cleared through a PIO:
 - a. The identity of any victim of a sexual battery, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, stalking, aggravated battery or witness tampering or any information, which if divulged, might lead to the victim's identity, residence or place of employment;
 - b. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to family notification;
 - c. Specific causes of death prior to the Medical Examiner's evaluation and the approval of a Criminal Investigations Division Captain;
 - d. Any information concerning the substance of a statement given to the police by the accused (e.g. refusal of statement, confession or admission);
 - e. The result of any examination or test of the accused;
 - f. The identity of a juvenile charged with a misdemeanor who has not been adjudicated as an adult; or a juvenile's criminal history;
 - g. Unauthorized release of information which is of an evidentiary nature regarding a criminal case;
 - h. Contents of a suicide note prior to case closure;
 - i. Personal opinions, such as, opinions regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused or merits of the case;
 - j. Information concerning the identity, testimony, or credibility of a prospective witness;

- k. Information received from, or actions taken by, other law enforcement agencies without their concurrence for the release;
 - l. The home addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers and photographs of active or former agency personnel or their family members; nor their family member's places of employment;
 - m. Unauthorized comments concerning prior criminal record, character or reputation of an accused;
 - n. Reports, transcripts or summaries of proceedings from which the media and public were excluded by judicial order.
3. Information concerning the identity of a juvenile offender (name, photographs, and address) may be released if the child is arrested for an offense which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony.

H. RELEASE OF INFORMATION INVOLVING OTHER AGENCIES

1. When an investigation involves another law enforcement agency the agency having primary jurisdiction and responsibility shall coordinate the release of information with all other involved agencies PIOs.
2. The federal agency controlling a narcotic investigation shall determine the guidelines for the release of information.
3. The F.B.I. shall be the primary authority in releasing investigative information regarding federally insured financial institutions, savings and loan associations and armored car courier services.
4. Whenever the police department and fire department have shared responsibility of an incident scene, the Police PIOs and Fire PIO will coordinate their efforts to ensure that information is appropriately released.
5. Whenever city administration and the police department have shared responsibility regarding incidents or situations involving city employees, the Police PIOs and City Hall's Strategic Communications Unit will coordinate their efforts to ensure that administrative and investigative information is appropriately released.

I. MEDIA ACCESS TO THE DEPARTMENT

1. Representatives of news media agencies entering the police department will be allowed access to specific areas of need by the PIOs or designated employee.
2. Media personnel must display proper credentials while in a secured area of the police department.
3. While in secured areas of the department, media personnel will complete their business under proper supervision and will return directly to a public area of the department.

4. Media photography within secured areas is restricted and must be authorized by the PIOs or designee.

J. NOTIFICATIONS

1. The Chief of Police and members of the Media Relations Unit shall, in an expeditious manner, be notified whenever:
 - a. Incidents of a sensitive nature which may draw public attention to an agency employee or the Department;
 - b. Incidents likely to attract significant ongoing media attention;
 - c. Incidents involving serious officer injury;
 - d. Incidents involving serious injury to a suspect or citizen due to police action;
2. The commanding supervisor of an incident scene shall determine who will be notified, and how, and shall verify that the appropriate notifications were made via the communication supervisor.