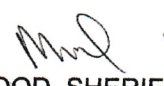

	VOLUSIA SHERIFF'S OFFICE GENERAL ORDER GO-054-01	Distribution All Personnel	Reissue/Effective Date 07/26/2023
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Title PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND MEDIA RELATIONS			
Section		AUTHORITY OF MICHAEL J. CHITWOOD, SHERIFF  	

To protect and serve with courage, honor and integrity by fighting crime, maintaining trust, and building community partnerships.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this general order is to establish guidelines and define responsibilities for the release of information to the news media and the dissemination of informative data and statistics to the community.

II. DISCUSSION

In order to effectively provide and disseminate information to the community and the news media, the Volusia Sheriff's Office (VSO) must establish and maintain public affairs and media relations procedures. These procedures should provide for the timely and effective distribution of information, which bolsters community support, provides for the rights of the public to be informed, yet safeguards against the release of information, which could impede ongoing investigations or damage the integrity and rights afforded to victims. It is therefore, imperative that this position be maintained by professionally experienced, trained and knowledgeable individuals. [CALEA LE 54.1.4]

III. POLICY

It shall be the policy of the VSO to be committed to informing the community and the news media of events within the public domain that are handled by or involve the VSO.

IV. PROCEDURE

A. GENERAL [CALEA CM 6.1.4 (a, b, c)]

1. The VSO Public Affairs Director shall have the responsibility of coordinating news media activities and acting as liaison between the VSO and the news media. All press releases shall be sent to the Public Affairs Director for dissemination to the news media as soon as practicable upon completion of the situation being reported. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (a), 6.1.4 (a, b, c)]
2. The Public Affairs Director will: [CALEA CM 6.1.4 (a, b, c); LE 54.1.1 (b, c)]
 - a. Act as a liaison between news media representatives and the agency for the dissemination of news including but not limited to, specific incidents, statistical information and feature stories on VSO activities, personnel or changes. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(b)]
 - b. Respond to the incident scenes which are of concern to the press and coordinate information release. [CALEA LE 54.1.1 (a)]
 - c. Act as a spokesperson for the agency and advise the Sheriff on matters relating to media affairs.
 - d. Assist news personnel by issuing press releases that originate with the investigating officers and answer questions concerning press releases. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(c)]

- e. Coordinate and authorize release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (e); LE 54.1.1 (d)]
 - f. Respond to the scene of special operations or unusual incidents and assist the Incident Commander in the management of the media and dissemination of information to news media representatives. [CALEA LE 54.1.1 (a)]
 - g. Be available and "on-call" twenty-four-hours-a-day by telephone, or radio for response to emergency situations or other VSO occurrences which involve the media. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (b); LE 54.1.1 (a, c)]
 - h. Gather, utilize and disseminate information provided by VSO employees to compose a finished press release in traditional news style. Specific attention should be given to the rules of grammar, punctuation and spelling. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(b)]
 - i. Schedule and assist at press conferences for incidents considered of major significance; i.e., the conclusion of a lengthy investigation or arrests in an unusually high-profile case. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(c)]
 - j. At the direction of the Sheriff, act as the VSO spokesman to provide information on events that may have negative connotations in the public sector. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(c)]
 - k. Assist in crisis situations within the VSO. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (f)]
 - l. Coordinate media requests for interviews with the Sheriff or VSO personnel, with the approval of the Sheriff.
 - m. Coordinate the release of information or statistics concerning confidential investigations or operations. Normally, information will not be supplied to the press until such information becomes "public record." [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (g); LE 54.1.1 (e)]
 - n. Coordinate and release information relating to the VSO objectives, challenges, and successes. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(b)]
 - o. Coordinate the processing of all requests from the media for access to public records of the agency.
3. When unavailable, due to vacation or out of town business trips the Public Affairs Director will advise the communications supervisor.
 4. When an incident requires an immediate agency spokesperson, the Incident Commander shall designate a spokesperson.
 5. When the Public Affairs Director is unavailable during normal work hours, the assistant to the Public Affairs Director may release information from agency files.
 6. In the Public Affairs Director's absence, the Deputy in charge of an incident or their supervisor will release information concerning criminal investigations and incidents.
 7. When available, the Detective in charge of a criminal investigation or their supervisor will answer media representatives' inquiries on agency cases. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(c)]
 8. The Public Affairs Coordinator will, during normal office hours, attempt to comply with media requests for information by notifying the appropriate person to supply the information, be it the Sheriff, a Detective in charge of the investigation, a Division Chief or a Shift Commander. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(c)]
 9. VSO employees shall cooperate with the Public Affairs Director and assist in the release of information, which does not impede or interfere with ongoing investigations.
 10. The Public Affairs Director shall seek the advice of Incident Commanders, Detectives or other Deputies in charge of incidents or operations in a conscientious effort to protect the rights of individuals and the interests of the VSO. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(d)]
 11. Individual Personnel are not prohibited from answering telephone calls and questions from the media concerning an investigation or incident. However, particulars about victims, suspects or witnesses relative to an individual case, or information which may be confidential or exempt, shall not be released without the authorization of the Public Affairs Director.
 12. When other public service agencies such as Fire Services, Medical Examiner's Office or other outside agencies are involved in a mutual effort, the agency having primary jurisdiction shall be responsible for coordination and release of any information beyond the basic information provided

by either the VSO Office of Public Affairs and Media Relations, or Communications Center personnel. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(f)]

B. PRESS RELEASES [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (c)]

1. Public information shall be released as promptly as circumstances allow in an impartial, courteous and objective manner. The Supervisor or Deputy in charge shall prepare and forward newsworthy events to the Public Affairs Director in a timely fashion. The Public Affairs Director shall be responsible for releasing press releases. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (c); LE 54.1.1 (b)]
2. When deemed necessary and approved by the Sheriff, the Public Affairs Director may distribute public service announcements to all local television, radio and newspaper companies within Volusia County, Florida. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(a, c)]
3. Press releases regarding criminal activity and events, which may be of interest to the press are available to all legitimate media sources from the Office of Public Affairs and Media Relations. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(a, c)]
4. Supervisors shall ensure that information concerning newsworthy events, which has been released to the press during the absence of the Public Affairs Director is reported to the Public Affairs Director as soon as possible.
5. Press releases should be prepared on major events or arrests, the seizure of large quantities of narcotics, weapons or currency, items of public interest and unusual events and forwarded to the Public Affairs Director for release. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(b)]
6. Press releases shall be released on a daily basis: as they occur if during working hours or during a major incident day or night. [CALEA LE 54.1.1.(b)]
7. To ensure information is equally available to all area media, press releases will be broadcasted by electronic transmission to agencies on a recipient list.
8. Press releases are issued in the Sheriff's name and shall be generally limited to those aspects of the case or incident that are "public record." However, a press release may contain additional data the Detective in charge of the incident and Public Affairs Director consider appropriate and which does not conflict with Federal and State law.

C. INFORMATION NOT TO BE RELEASED [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (g)]

1. Neither the Public Affairs Director nor any other member of the VSO shall release the following information:
 - Information concerning the testimony or credibility of any prospective witness. VSO personnel will not give their opinion on the specific merits of a case or the specific quality of evidence.
 - Information received from other law enforcement agencies without their concurrence.
 - The identity of critically injured or deceased persons, until the next of kin has been notified.
 - The specific cause of death until determined by the Medical Examiner.
 - The exact monetary figures involved in robbery or embezzlement cases, until completion of the investigation.
 - Identity or location of suspects, without permission of the Detective in charge.
 - Unchecked or unverified leads or information.
 - Information concerning civil actions.
 - Information commonly used as investigative tools, i.e., specifics that only the suspect would know and may be used as suspect confirmation.

D. EXCEPTIONS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION

1. Among the exceptions to the public information law are:
 - Information on active criminal intelligence or active investigative information without the permission of the Case Agent or Detective in charge.
 - Information, which may identify a confidential informant or source.

- Surveillance or undercover techniques, procedures or personnel.
- Information or photographs, which reveal the identity of victims of a sexual battery or lewd, lascivious, or indecent assault.
- Information that reveals the identity of the victim of any sexual offense or child abuse.
- Information that would reveal the assets of the victim of a crime.
- Information that would reveal the address or telephone number of active or former law enforcement personnel or the address, place of employment or school of spouse or children.
- Information revealing the substance of a confession, until the final disposition.
- As outlined in Florida Statutes, press releases may include the names and addresses of juveniles taken into custody for a violation of law, which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony. Also, the names and addresses of such individuals may be released if they were found by a court to have committed at least three or more violations which, if committed by an adult, would be misdemeanors.
- Information relating to a complaint or the existence of a complaint filed against a law enforcement officer until the final disposition of the complaint.
- Complaints or records relating to discrimination, until the final disposition.
- Inmate medical records.
- Expunged or sealed arrest records.
- Victim information, if the victim has invoked the confidentiality provisions afforded by the Florida Constitution Article 1. Section 16 Rights of Accused and Victims, known as Marsy's Law.

E. ONGOING INVESTIGATIONS[CALEA LE 54.1.1.(d, e)]

1. The Supervisor or Deputy in charge of an ongoing investigation or newsworthy event shall forward information to the Public Affairs Director as soon as possible. The release of information regarding ongoing investigations shall conform to the guidelines stated herein.
2. Information that may be released before charges are officially filed may include:
 - A confirmation or denial that an offense allegedly occurred.
 - A brief, non-technical explanation of the incident as reported.
 - The location, date, and time of the alleged incident.
 - Confirmation that arrest(s) was made.
 - Name of officer in charge of investigation (unless confidentiality is requested or necessary due to assignment).
 - A statement that the matter is under investigation.
3. Information that may be released after official charges have been filed includes:
 - Specific charges against the defendant.
 - The defendant's name and identifying information.
 - The arresting Deputy's name and a statement of investigation duration.
 - Circumstances of the arrest, i.e., place and time, amount of resistance, weapons involvement and a general description of property seized.
4. The Public Affairs Director may arrange for the release of mug shots on a case-by-case basis and upon the request of the media pursuant to Public Records law.
5. In some cases, information which is not confidential by law may be of a sensitive nature.
6. The Public Affairs Director should make the press aware of victim's requests that certain information not be released.
7. The decision to publish the information is the responsibility of the press.

F. PRESS CONFERENCES [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (d); LE 54.1.1 (c)]

1. A press conference may be conducted with the consent of the Sheriff. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (d); LE 54.1.1 (c)]
2. In most cases, the Sheriff, a Division Chief or the Deputy in charge of the case, and other knowledgeable Deputies will be present to provide additional background information. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (d); LE 54.1.1 (c)]
3. VSO representatives should be appropriately attired and respond to inquiries courteously. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (d); LE 54.1.1 (c)]
4. The Public Affairs Director should respond to improper questions or adversarial situations. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (d); LE 54.1.1 (c)]
5. Media representatives will be supplied with appropriate press packets. Packets may include, but are not confined to: [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (d)]
 - When appropriate, a general press release detailing the incident, with correctly-spelled names, dates of birth and addresses of suspects.
 - Applicable statistics.
 - Photographs of suspects, news clippings and other visual objects that will meet the special needs of television crews.
6. At the discretion of the Sheriff, Public Affairs Director or their designees, any party or representative of the news media may be prohibited entry to the press conference area.
7. Media representatives will remain in one central location until the press conference is scheduled to begin. At the conclusion of the press conference, reporters will be escorted from the room and will exit through the same door.
8. In instances where the VSO is engaged in an activity with another agency (e.g., another law enforcement agency, fire department, Medical Examiner's Office), the agency having primary jurisdiction shall be responsible for releasing or coordinating the release of information. [CALEA CM 2.6.6 (h)]

G. STAGING AREAS [CALEA LE 54.1.3]

1. The media shall remain outside the outer perimeter or within the established press area at the scene of an unusual or high risk incident, major occurrence, major fire, natural disaster or crime scene. [CALEA LE 54.1.3]
2. The Public Affairs Director shall be responsible for the control of the press within the press area, and shall have the authority to eject individuals disrupting or hampering law enforcement activities. [CALEA LE 54.1.3]
3. In the event a reporter is ejected from the press area, the Public Affairs Director will record the event and report the incident in writing to the reporter's supervisor.
4. Information shall be released and coordinated by the Public Affairs Director.
5. In the absence of the Public Affairs Director, the Incident Commander shall designate a Deputy to act as public information spokesperson.

H. PRESS EXPECTATIONS

1. News media representatives will not interfere with the following law enforcement operations at the incident scene:
 - Contacting barricaded suspects during the operation.
 - Soliciting information from emergency services personnel while they are performing their assigned duties.
 - Using lights and camera equipment in such a manner as to endanger the lives of personnel.
 - Media representatives shall remain within the designated press area or outside of the outer perimeter.
2. Media representatives will be requested to honor specific requests to delay the release or omit information obtained within the (inner perimeter) press area when it relates to:

- The identity of critically injured or deceased persons, until the next of kin has been notified.
- When information release might be of aid to a suspect, i.e., the live coverage of operations which could endanger the lives of law enforcement personnel, or operations during a barricaded suspect or hostage situation.
- When photographing undercover or surveillance personnel would reveal their identity.
- Specifics that only the perpetrator or person committing an offense would know and that may be used as suspect confirmation.

Removal from the media distribution list

written report

3. Media representatives will remain in one central location until the press conference is scheduled to begin. At the conclusion of the press conference, reporters will be escorted from the room and will exit through the same door.
4. Media representatives in violation of the expected behavior will be ejected from the press area and are subject to removal from the media distribution list.
5. When a media representative violates one or more of the above listed rules, the Public Affairs Director and the Incident Commander shall submit a written report to the Sheriff detailing the event.
6. Each incident will be decided on a case by case basis.
7. In most cases, violations may be handled by mediation with the media representative's supervisor.
8. The Public Affairs Director shall maintain files relating to violations.
9. The Public Affairs Director shall be responsible for identifying problems, which may occur between the VSO and the press. If these problems are the result of a policy failure, the Public Affairs Director shall solicit ideas and suggestions from the press and submit a written evaluation of the problem(s) and input from the press, to the Sheriff. [CALEA LE 54.1.2]
10. These suggestions and ideas will be taken into consideration in the revision or formulation of policies and procedures. [CALEA LE 54.1.2]

I. SOCIAL MEDIA [CALEA LE 54.1.1 (g)]

1. The Office of Public Affairs & Media Relations serves as the administrator of all social media platforms utilized by VSO.
2. The Public Affairs Director and staff are responsible for the development and implementation of effective social media strategies to accomplish the VSO's mission.
3. Primary objectives of the VSO social media strategy include:
 - Increasing community engagement;
 - Fostering transparency;
 - Disseminating timely public safety information;
 - Assisting in solving crimes and missing person cases;
 - Furthering the VSO recruitment efforts.
4. Posting social media or other web content in a manner that purports to represent the VSO without prior approval of the Sheriff, Chief Deputy, Public Affairs Director or designee is prohibited.