



GENERAL ORDER ADM-14 MEDIA RELATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

EFFECTIVE JULY 7, 2021

This General Order contains the following numbered sections:

- I. POLICY
- II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- III. INFORMATION RELEASE
- IV. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
- V. INTERNAL AFFAIRS MATTERS
- VI. MEDIA ACCESS TO POLICE SCENES
- VII. MEDIA ACCESS TO POLICE FACILITIES
- VIII. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
- IX. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE WATCH COMMANDER
- X. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE COMMUNICATIONS SUPERVISOR
- XI. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE DUTY OFFICER
- XII. OTHER AGENCY MATTERS
- XIII. POLICY CHANGES
- XIV. CANCELLATION

I. POLICY

The Howard County Department of Police (HCPD) is committed to informing the community and the news media of events within the public domain in a timely manner. The HCPD shall cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information pertaining to activities of the Department, as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with Departmental operation, infringe upon individual rights, or violate the law.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- A. The HCPD recognizes that citizens must be informed about public safety issues and the activities of the police. The HCPD further recognizes the importance of releasing information in a consistent and timely manner while remaining aware of and sensitive to the needs of any victim involved in an incident.
- B. The HCPD will make certain information on its policies, programs, and daily activities available to the media on a regular basis.
 - 1. Certain reports, files, and other information maintained by the HCPD are open to reasonable and timely examination by the media provided that such examination does not disrupt normal activities, jeopardize investigations, or otherwise reveal information protected by law.
 - 2. The HCPD will not release certain information that may compromise the safety of persons involved in a police incident, the right of defendants to a fair trial, and protection of citizens against unwarranted invasions of privacy, or as prohibited by law.
- C. The HCPD will not purposely supply misinformation to the media. Information will be disseminated in such a manner as to ensure that first release of information is equally available to all reporters.
- D. All provisions of this General Order shall apply to all HCPD members when acting in their official capacities and they are in contact with any news media, and with regards to public messaging.
 - 1. All provisions of this General Order shall apply when it can be reasonably assumed that:

- a. The member is speaking on behalf of the HCPD concerning any matter;
 - b. When contact was initiated because of the member's association with the HCPD;
or
 - c. When discussing actions performed as a member of the HCPD.
2. Members of the Department not authorized to speak on behalf of the HCPD may comment only on matters of public concern or interest if the individual makes clear that the statements are personal, do not represent those of the HCPD, and the member does not present themselves as a member of the police department or communicate as such.

III. INFORMATION RELEASE

- A. The HCPD specifically authorizes the representatives listed below to officially communicate with the media on Departmental matters. Any other HCPD member communicating with the media on Departmental matters must first coordinate their communications through the Office of Public Affairs (OPA).
1. The Chief of Police or his designee;
 2. Members of the OPA;
 3. Commissioned Officers;
 4. The on-duty Communications supervisor or his designee; and
 5. The Information Management Division (IMD) Manager, when addressing requests from a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or a Public Information Act (PIA).
- B. Members are prohibited from making statements or releasing information to the media when a media release, social media post, or public announcement specifically states that the HCPD will not release any further information or when the OPA or the Chief of Police or his designee has imposed other limitations.
- C. When gathering information intended for public release, OPA members will contact the highest-ranking member on scene who is available to verify the information. Information provided by non-supervisory personnel shall not be released without the approval of an appropriate District or Bureau commander.
- D. The following information may be released by authorized members to the media and/or on social media:
1. Most teletype messages, accident reports, incident reports, and arrest reports will be released to the media through the IMD. Exclusions prohibiting the release of specific types of information are listed in this General Order.
 2. Investigative information that may be released includes:
 - a. The type or nature of an incident.
 - b. The location, date and time, any injuries or property damage sustained, and a basic description of how the incident occurred.
 - c. The amount and type of property taken, including its approximate value, if known. The case investigator, or in their absence the Watch Commander or Section Supervisor, will notify the OPA if these facts are not to be released.

- d. The name, age, and address in hundred block of a victim except:
 - i. The name and address of the victim of a rape, child abuse, or sex offense shall not be released; and
 - ii. If the release of the name would endanger the victim's safety.
 - e. The number of officers or other persons involved in an incident and the duration of the investigation.
 - f. The name and work unit of the officer investigating an incident.
 - g. Requests for aid in locating evidence, a suspect, or a complaint.
3. Arrest information that may be released includes the following:
- a. The name, age, and city or town of residence of adult arrestees. No juvenile arrest information may be released pursuant to Maryland Criminal Procedures §4-202.
 - b. The substance or text of the charge as contained in a warrant, indictment, or other charging document.
 - c. The identity of the arresting officers.
 - d. The circumstances immediately surrounding an arrest including time and place, pursuit, resistance, any injuries sustained, possession or use of weapons by the arrestee or the police, and description of any property or other items seized.
 - e. Amount of bond and/or place of detention, if known.
 - f. The booking photo from the current arrest, if confirmed with a commander that the release will not impact the investigation.
 - g. Upon notification of an expungement from the IMD, OPA has 15 days to respond to the IMD that they have received the expungement. In the case that the expunged charges and the arrestee's name were published on the HCPD website and/or on social media, the charges, name, and any booking photo shall be removed, and the IMD Manager must be notified.

E. Information that shall not be released:

- 1. The names of undercover officers.
- 2. The home addresses, telephone numbers, or other personal information of HCPD members will not be released except by written consent of the individual concerned.
- 3. The specific contents of any Incident Report where a juvenile is a suspect. Law specifically prohibits disclosure of such matters unless a court order directs otherwise.
- 4. Interpretation of HCPD orders, directives, rules, regulations, or policies.
- 5. Sensitive operational activities.
- 6. Personnel issues involving other members of the HCPD or any County employee.

7. Investigative information that shall not be released includes:¹
 - a. The identity of the victim of child abuse, rape, or any sex crime, or related information which, if divulged, might lead to the victim's identification.
 - b. Any information related to a juvenile who is a suspect or defendant in an incident over which the juvenile court has jurisdiction may not be released without a court order. The HCPD may acknowledge that a juvenile arrest has been made.
 - c. The contents of any suicide note.
 - d. Results of investigative procedures, e.g. line-ups, polygraphs, fingerprinting, etc. The fact that such procedures have been or will be performed may be acknowledged.
 - e. The identity of a victim or witness if such disclosure would significantly prejudice an investigation or constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy or safety.
 - f. Information regarding the specific identity or location of a suspect unless an arrest warrant exists.
8. Particular attention must be paid to comments about unchecked leads, unverified information, or specific details known only to someone involved in the crime.
9. The name of any persons seriously injured or killed in an incident investigated by the Department will be withheld until positive identification is made and next of kin notified. No information relating to a specific cause of death will be released until the office of the State Medical Examiner has made a determination.
10. Confidential intelligence information will not be disclosed without the express permission of a supervisor having authority over the incident or investigation in question.
11. Information that would:
 - a. Interfere with law enforcement proceedings, including pending investigations.
 - b. Reveal the identity of an individual who has furnished information to the HCPD under confidential circumstances, i.e. informants, concerned citizens, etc.
 - c. Disclose investigative techniques and procedures, thereby impairing future effectiveness of the HCPD.
 - d. Serve to endanger the life or physical safety of any person.
12. The pretrial disclosure of the following information may jeopardize a defendant's right to a fair trial and will not be released:
 - a. Observations about an arrestee's character.
 - b. Statements, admissions, confessions, or alibis attributable to an arrestee.
 - c. The refusal or failure of an arrestee to make a statement or to participate or allow investigative procedures such as polygraph examinations, etc.

¹ CALEA 55.1.1b
HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

- d. Statements concerning the credibility, character, or testimony of a victim or prospective witnesses.
- e. Any opinion as to an arrestee's guilt, or the possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged.
- f. Statements concerning evidence or arguments in the case, whether or not it is anticipated that such evidence or argument will be used at trial.

IV. ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS²

- A. Maryland's Public Information Act (PIA), contained within Title 4 of the General Provisions Article of the Maryland Annotated Code, gives the public and media the right to access government records.
- B. Managing PIA Requests:
 - 1. All PIA requests must be submitted and received in writing.
 - 2. The original HCPD recipient must immediately forward the original of any PIA request to the IMD Manager.
 - 3. The IMD Manager will make a written response to the requestor in accordance with the PIA.
 - 4. Each written request for information under the PIA must be logged in by the IMD Manager and forwarded to any organizational component holding the records or data pertinent to the request.
 - 5. Any organizational components receiving a request for information under the PIA must promptly respond within five (5) days to the IMD Supervisor.
 - 6. The IMD Manager shall ensure that PIA requests are reviewed and approved by the Office of Law, as appropriate.
 - 7. The IMD Manager will notify the requestor in writing of any denial and include the reasons for the denial. Each denial will inform the person of the right to appeal, pursuant to General Provisions Article § 10-623.
 - 8. The IMD Manager will initiate any other correspondence required by the PIA.
 - 9. After evaluation, mug shots may be disclosed in response to a PIA request unless the IMD Manager determines that disclosure would be contrary to the public interest.

V. INTERNAL AFFAIRS MATTERS

- A. Internal investigations are personnel matters. The HCPD and its members are prohibited by law from releasing information to the media about such matters unless the involved member waives the privilege of confidentiality.
- B. A member may request waiver of the confidentiality of his case by forwarding a memorandum to the Chief of Police.
- C. A member who releases information about his case to the media will be deemed by the HCPD to have waived confidentiality.

² CALEA 82.1.1c
HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

- D. A member who elects an open trial board or other open hearing or who appeals a decision to the Circuit Court will be deemed by the HCPD to have waived confidentiality.
- E. The HCPD may comment to the media in those cases where confidentiality has been waived. In such cases, comments will only be made after receiving explicit consent of the Chief of Police.

VI. MEDIA ACCES TO POLICE SCENES

- A. HCPD members will accord appropriate privileges to local, national, and international news media representatives, including photographers displaying appropriate credentials, i.e. place of employment identification.
- B. Whenever information must be denied to a media representative, the reason for the denial shall be explained.
- C. Members will extend every possible courtesy to accredited media personnel at police incident scenes or at any HCPD facility.³
 - 1. Media personnel will not be restricted from a scene beyond what is necessary for crime scene preservation.
 - 2. Media personnel will be permitted as close or be granted closer access than that which is granted the general public, generally providing an opportunity to view the scene.
 - 3. Access arrangements will:
 - a. Be restricted until the officer in charge determines the area is safe.
 - b. Allow press vehicles and equipment to be located as close or closer than the general public so long as those arrangements do not interfere with the police mission at hand.
- D. The Incident Commander shall designate a preliminary press area as early as possible and as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow at the incidents listed below, and public information may be provided to media representatives at:⁴
 - 1. A scene involving a major crime, such as a hostage and barricade situation.
 - 2. A scene involving a major fire, natural disaster, or other catastrophic event.
 - 3. Bomb threats or emergencies, man-made disasters, civil disturbances, and other unusual occurrences.
- E. Media personnel will be allowed to photograph, film, and videotape members, suspects, witnesses, or victims under any circumstances where a member of the public would be permitted to view the same. On private property, photography, filming, or videotaping requires the permission of the owner or owner's representative.
- F. Members of the HCPD will neither encourage nor prevent the photographing of defendants in public places. Posing of defendants for photographers shall never be allowed.
- G. Persons in custody will not be permitted to be interviewed nor will members be interviewed while an arrestee or prisoner is present.
- H. Members will neither instruct nor warn victims or witnesses not to talk to media personnel, although members may caution victims or witnesses about disclosing specific evidentiary information.

³ CALEA 11.3.4d and 54.1.3

⁴ CALEA 11.3.4d

VII. MEDIA ACCESS TO POLICE FACILITIES⁵

- A. Media personnel will be afforded cooperation when visiting police facilities.
- B. Requests for HCPD participation in feature articles and programs will be considered on a case- by-case basis by the OPA.
 - 1. The OPA will first contact the member advising them of the request, which they may decline.
 - 2. If the member is contacted directly by an outside source and is asked to speak as a member of the HCPD, the member shall refer the requester to the OPA for approval and coordination.
 - 3. If the member has not first been contacted by the OPA they are to assume that the request has not or has yet to be approved.
 - 4. If approved, permission for interviewing HCPD members and photographing police facilities will be limited to the specific scope of approval.
- C. Sworn officers or members of the HCPD who experience difficulties with media personnel will report the matter promptly to the OPA.

VIII. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

- A. The Office of Public Affairs holds primary responsibility for media relations, public affairs, and social media, and shall work cooperatively with all other organizational components to advance community relations.
- B. The OPA members shall work standard weekday business hours and ensure adequate on-call coverage and availability at all other times.
 - 1. The OPA shall include a supervisor who shall be the HCPD's primary Public Information Officer (PIO) and spokesperson.
 - 2. On matters directly related to media relations, the PIO shall report directly to the Chief of Police.
 - 3. Statements to the media concerning major cases or incidents will generally only be made by the PIO or designated member of the OPA.
- C. The OPA is responsible for the following pertaining to information released to the public and media.
 - 1. Preparing and distributing media releases.
 - 2. Posting on social media platforms.
 - 3. Assisting media personnel covering routine stories or at police incident scenes.
 - 4. Responding to newsworthy incidents.
 - 5. Arranging and assisting at news conferences.
 - 6. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about missing persons, victims, witnesses, and suspects.

⁵ CALEA 54.1.3
HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

7. Redacting of the Daily Crime Bulletin for the press and public.
 8. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations.
 9. Informing the public and media about the agency's victim/witness assistance services.
 10. Daily media monitoring and posting of media releases and events.
 11. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.
 12. Publicize the HCPD objectives, challenges, problems, and successes.
- D. The responsibility and authority in the following departmental affairs rests with the OPA.
1. Providing media relations training to HCPD members and recruits.
 2. Coordinating or assisting with special events planning.
 3. Assisting in crisis situations within the agency
 4. Maintaining an up-to-date and professional internet presence, i.e. HCPD website input and management, social media pages, etc.
 5. Writing, editing, layout, and design of the HCPD Annual Report.
 6. 7. Keeping the Chief apprised of significant information obtained through media or social media.⁶
- E. OPA shall continually conduct a survey of citizen attitudes and opinions through the HCPD website. Information obtained from the survey will be compiled annually and a written summary will be forwarded to the appropriate supervisor or commander and the Chief of Police.⁷ Survey items may include but not be limited to:
1. Overall agency performance.⁸
 2. Overall competence of HCPD members, as perceived by the community.⁹
 3. Members' attitudes and behavior toward citizens.¹⁰
 4. Community concern over safety and security within Howard County.¹¹
 5. Recommendations and suggestions for improvements.¹²
- F. The OPA has the responsibility to design professional marketing materials, publications, and audio/video presentations to promote the HCPD, consistent with General Order ADM-59, [Publications and Forms Control](#).

⁶ CALEA 11.3.3

⁷ CALEA 45.2.2f

⁸ CALEA 45.2.2a

⁹ CALEA 45.2.2b

¹⁰ CALEA 45.2.2c

¹¹ CALEA 45.2.2c

¹² CALEA 45.2.2f

X. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE WATCH COMMANDER

- A. The Watch Commander will keep the OPA informed of developments in major cases. The OPA will be kept informed of anticipated major events such as raids and/or multiple arrests.
- B. The Watch Commander will ensure that the OPA and the Communications supervisor are immediately notified of any:¹³
 - 1. Felony resulting in death or serious injuries.
 - 2. Shooting incident involving a member of the HCPD.
 - 3. Incident involving serious injury to a member of the HCPD or serious injury to another person that may have been caused by a member.
 - 4. Incident requiring an unusual police commitment, i.e. special teams, a large number of officers, etc.
 - 5. Incident that is receiving unusual media attention, media personnel at a scene, repeated inquiries, etc.¹⁴
 - 6. Incident likely to arouse an unusual level of public attention.
 - 7. Incident where a member requests the assistance of the OPA.
- C. In the event the Watch Commander does not require immediate assistance or response from OPA but believes an incident may be in the public interest, he will send an email to HCPDnews@howardcountymd.gov and/or ensure it is included in the Watch Commander's end-of-shift report. These events may include but not be limited to:
 - 1. Any motor vehicle collision involving a school bus with children on board or any motor vehicle collision involving death or serious injury.
 - 2. Any reported rape or other serious sex offense.
 - 3. Any robbery.
 - 4. Any incident involving a foot or vehicle pursuit and/or bailout where a significant amount of time or personnel are involved.
 - 5. Any incident that involves the closure of a major roadway for a period of time exceeding one half hour.
- D. Should the Watch Commander have contact with any member of the media at a scene, the OPA will be immediately contacted.

X. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE COMMUNICATIONS SUPERVISOR

- A. Media personnel frequently contact HCPD Communications by telephone during breaking news incidents. All such calls will be referred to the on-duty Communications supervisor or his designee who may provide basic details of an incident based on the information that they are receiving.
- B. Basic information may include:
 - 1. Location in hundred block and street name;

¹³ CALEA 11.3.3

¹⁴ CALEA 11.3.3

2. The nature of the call;
 3. The time it was reported; and
 4. Status of police response, i.e. enroute, on the scene, etc.
- C. Should the Communications supervisor or his designee be unable to provide sufficient information to answer media inquiries, they will immediately contact the on-call PIO. They shall not provide the PIO contact information to the requestor.

XI. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE DUTY OFFICER

- A. When contacted by the media and in the event of breaking news, each district Duty Officer (DO) shall refer callers to the HCPDnews@howardcountymd.gov email address.
- B. If the caller's need is critical and immediate, the DO may refer requestors to the HCPD website or Facebook and Twitter pages where all news releases are posted.

XII. OTHER AGENCY MATTERS¹⁵

- A. The HCPD is sometimes jointly involved with other agencies in newsworthy incidents where the HCPD does not have primary jurisdiction. In those cases, the primary public information function will not be provided by the HCPD. Although the OPA may assist, all media requests will be referred to the agency having primary responsibility.
- B. Fire scenes are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Fire and Rescue Services (DFRS). Members will not allow media access to these scenes until authority is granted by the DFRS Incident Commander. If the fire scene is determined to be a crime scene, access to the media will be granted consistent with this policy.
- C. Whenever information may affect another law enforcement agency or any local, federal, or state government, the OPA will contact the agency in advance of the release.

XIII. POLICY CHANGES¹⁶

- A. Whenever a change in HCPD written directives is contemplated that would directly impact media relations, the OPA will ensure that representatives of regional news media sources are made aware of the contemplated changes by written correspondence and seek their input. The correspondence should provide a due date of at least twenty (20) days to allow for written comments to be submitted.
- B. Prior to final implementation of the changes, the OPA shall review all comments received and, as appropriate, make recommendations to the Professional Standards Bureau to implement, reject, or modify the change based upon the comments.
- C. The OPA will provide copies of any new appropriate written directives to local media representatives.

¹⁵ CALEA 54.1.1f

¹⁶ CALEA 54.1.2

XIV. CANCELLATION

This General Order cancels and replaces General Order ADM-14, Media Relations, dated September 28, 2007.

AUTHORITY:



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Chief of Police