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|  | **Griffin Police Department** | | |
| **Standard Operating Procedures**  **TITLE: Chapter 29 Public Information/Media Relations** | | |
| Effective:  05/16/2019 | Rescinds: Chapter 29  02/01/2016 | Pages: 12 |
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**29. 1. 1 PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY**

It is the policy of the Griffin Policy Department to cooperate transparently and professionally with the official news media organizations in their efforts to gather and disseminate factual information that is consistent with established policies and procedures that are consistent with the Georgia Open Records Act. First and foremost it is the responsibility of the Griffin Police Department and subsequently all personnel of the department who may release information to do so in a manner that protects the innocent, the rights of the accused, and individual rights to privacy to ensure that victims, witnesses and defendants remain safe in a manner that does not subvert an individual’s rights to a fair and impartial trial.

Media organizations, as well as individuals who identify as members of media, can be valuable resources to the public and to the Griffin Police Department for the purposes of public awareness, general information and may assist in identifying suspects and acquisition of import information from the public. Based on these legitimate activities, the department will cooperate fully so long as the basic mission of the department is not adversely affected or subverted. Since “media” takes various forms, it is not possible to address all media inquiries in the same fashion. Media organizations and individuals vary in their methodology from television (local and national), radio, print, social media and web based reporting with each having different deadlines and requirements for production of their material. Based on these facts it is impossible to treat all outlets exactly the same, and methods must be adapted to address individual needs of the entity and the department on a case by case basis.

The frequency, method and depth of contact with any media organization or individual is at the sole discretion of the Chief of Police or his / her authorized representative so long as these methods do not subvert the intent of the department’s mission or violate the Georgia Open Records Act. When deciding the methodology for communication with any media entity, consideration will be given to efficiency for information sharing, pattern and practice established by individuals as to integrity and accuracy of reporting, first come/first serve request for information and appropriateness of the release of information in any given situation. At the sole discretion of the Chief of Police, the department information officers will decide the most appropriate mechanism for communicating with the media both in their individual capacities and in mass. Various mechanisms for communication may include, but shall not be limited to:

1) E-Mail Communication

2) Phone Communication

3) Face to Face Interviews

4) Televised Interviews

5) Mass News releases (print, electronic, social media, web based or televised)

6) Daily Bulletins

7) Incident report dissemination

8) Special Reports generated by the Griffin Police Department

The Griffin Police Department will choose the manner and method of release given the unique factors and circumstances surrounding each request balanced with the operational needs of the department along with consideration of reasonable requests made by the entity or individual involved.

The following is considered public information and may be released to the public:

1. Arrestee’s:

a. Name

b. Alias

c. Age

d. Sex

e. Race

f. Occupation

g. Address

h. Police Department ID number (case number)

I. Physical condition

2. Name of arresting officer

3. Date and time of arrest

4. Booking information

5. Charge

6. Court in which case is filed

7. Summary of arrest

8. Notation of any release or transfer

9. Bond amount

10 No other information about the arrestee will be released unless approved by the Chief of Police or designee.

**29. 1. 2 PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION**

The Griffin Police Department will cooperate with the news media in giving them information in which they have expressed interest about the department’s operations, as well as about situations for which the department wishes to generate interest, so long as the request does not conflict with the department’s core mission and such is in compliance with Georgia Open Records Act. To satisfy this requirement, the department will:

- Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories, and at the scene of incidents;

- Be available for on call response to the news media via phone or other electronic means;

- Prepare and distribute news releases relating to departmental activities;

- Arrange for, and assist at, news conference/s;

- Coordinate and authorize the release of appropriate information about victims, witnesses and suspects;

- Set up liaison and assist the media in crisis situations;

- Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning confidential departmental investigations and operations as soon as such release becomes appropriate.

**29.1.3 RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION**

The Public Information Officer will have the following responsibilities:

- Coordinate and release information from agency files to the local news media;

- Inform all local News media of changes in policy or procedures concerning the release of information or media access;

- Encourage local news agencies to participate in the formulation of information policy;

- Provide local news media with updated news releases, policies and procedures;

- Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories and make arrangements for or assist at news conference/s.

- Coordinate with public information contact of other agencies

involved in incidents with this department for media release;

**29.1.4 MEDIA REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION**

**Routine Inquiries**: Major cases and unusual events which generate a great amount of media interest will be handled by the Public Information Officer. (**NOTE**: Officers needing advice, counsel, or public information assistance at an incident scene are urged to request it. Such requests should be made by telephone rather than by voice radio.)

**Special Request**: Requests for information from specific department employees which may be considered background, statistical, documentary, or of a special or feature nature will be directed to the Public Information Officer. News representatives making such requests may be referred to the Chief of Police prior to making the information request.

Members of the department may not use department resources (personnel or equipment) to perform special research projects or to gather extensive data in response to media requests for information not normally available to the department. However, personnel may suggest sources for the information requested.

**News Releases, Features, Announcements**: Responsibility for planning, developing, writing and distributing information and articles about department activities or programs of the department and its members rests with solely with the Chief of Police.

Press releases shall be prepared as required by the Public Information Officer and distributed to local newspapers, radio and television and other outlets if appropriate, based on the discretion of the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

Newsworthy information concerning promotions, projects, programs or other activities should be forwarded in writing in advance of effective dates, or by telephone or e-mail when time doesn’t permit or there is an urgent need to release the information.

The subject matter in press releases shall conform with guidelines described in this policy.

**Contact person:** Media representatives may contact the Public Information Officer when necessary to verify an occurrence, time, date and location via e-mail or phone, as well as in person.

**29.1.5 AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE INFORMATION TO NEWS MEDIA**:

Other than the Public Information Officer, the following personnel may release information to the news media under the stated conditions:

- At the scene of an accident: Shift Supervisor, if there is no fatality involved.

- From agency files: Chief of Police.

- Concerning an ongoing criminal investigation: Chief of Police.

**29.1.6 ACCESS OF CREDENTIALED NEWS MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES:**

**General Access at Crime or Incident Scene**: Members of the department shall extend reasonable courtesy to properly identified news media reporters and photographers actively covering an incident at the scene. These courtesies may permit closer access than that granted to the general public, and may provide for vehicles and equipment to be located closer, so long as such does not interfere with either the mission or with the traffic flow. Also, where there is the danger of personal injury, access shall be restricted until the officer in charge determines the area is safe.

**Credentials:** Persons who identify as members of the media should be properly identified with credentials expressing their name, organization, and business and should not be in arrears with the City for monies owed for unpaid services such as open records requests that have not been redeemed and/or resolved. If any courtesy or request by persons who are not in compliance with this section is made by the individual, the courtesy or request may be denied and such courtesy or request may not be extended in any manner other than the actions and duties required by strict compliance with the Georgia Open Records Act.

**Direct Access at Crime Scene**. Direct access by media personnel may be allowed only after all known evidence has been processed and the on- site investigation has been completed. This restriction is necessary to preserve the integrity of the scene. Once such integrity has been ensured, media mobility will not be restricted.

**Hostage, Barricade Situations**. In hostage or barricade situations, the officer in charge shall designate a preliminary press area immediately upon arrival at the scene and may establish it closer to the scene when it has been determined that it is safe to do so.

**Release of Information**. Information may be released at the scene of an incident only by the Public Information Officer. In emergency incidents, media representatives should be directed to the Shift Supervisor who shall either release appropriate information or direct media representative to the officer in charge or media liaison.

**At Fire Scenes, Disaster Scenes**. Media access to, and movement within, fire lines at commercial and residential fire scenes is controlled by the fire officer in charge. When news media arrives at such events, the ranking police officer on the scene shall confer with the fire commander in charge and assist in establishing an observation point for the media.

**Photography, Television Recording by News Media in Public Places.** News media representatives shall be allowed to freely photograph or videotape at the scene of any incident so long as their activity does not significantly interfere with an investigation and its prosecution is neither compromised nor jeopardized. Officers may take protective measures such as covering a body, to prevent photographing or televising if such actions are deemed necessary by the officer in charge.

**Photographing, Televising by News Media of Suspects, Accused Persons.** Suspects or persons in custody shall not be deliberately posed for photography, telecasts or interviews. Neither shall department members pose themselves with a suspect or accused, nor enter into any agreement to have a suspect or person in custody at a prearranged time and place to be photographed or interviewed. No action shall be directed against the news media to prevent or impede their lawful right to photograph such persons at incident scenes or in other public places.

**Interviewing Persons in Custody**. News media representatives will not be permitted to interview persons in custody.

**Confidential Internal Investigations**. Confidential intelligence or investigative information from Criminal Intelligence will not be disclosed without the express permission of the Chief of Police. Sensitive or investigative information concerning an internal investigation (particularly the identity of officers involved) will not be disclosed by the internal affairs investigator except by express permission of the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

**Suicides.** The fact that a suicide has occurred may be acknowledged, along with factual information describing how it happened. The name, address, age, sex, and occupation of the victim may only be released after notification of next of kin. The fact that a suicide note exists may also be acknowledged, without further comment. Contents of all such messages are considered personal and confidential and shall not be made public.

**Citizen’s Request to Withhold Information.** Should a citizen request that information on an incident not be released or reported to the media, officers will explain that crime information is generally considered public information, and, therefore, available to the news media. Officers will also explain that such a request will be noted in the official report on the incident. Once so noted, the decision to publish unrestricted information about the event shall be left to the media. In compliance with the Georgia Open Records Act, the department may refuse to identify confidential sources, victims and witness so as to ensure their safety.

**29.1.7 MEDIA PARTICIPATION IN POLICY**

The contents of this General Order shall be furnished to professional local media representatives, including all amendments. Local news entities are invited and encouraged to participate in the formulation of policy as it pertains to the Department’s relationship with the media. The department will utilize this input to address any issues that may arise so long as the core mission of the department is not adversely affected.

**29.1.8 RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO NEWS MEDIA**

Information of interest to the news media falls into two general categories: Arrest Information and Investigative information and following regulations prescribe what may and what shall not be released to the media:

- Arrest information which **shall not** be released refer to SOP 29.1.9

- Arrest information which **may** be generally be released; refer to SOP 29.1.10

- Investigative information which **shall not** be released; refer to SOP 29.1.2

- Investigative information which **may not** be released; refer to SOP 29.1.12

- Investigative information which **may** generally released; refer to SOP 29.1.3

**29.1.9 ARREST INFORMATION WHICH SHALL NOT BE RELEASED**

The following arrest information shall not be released; by the Chief of Police or his designee in order to aid an investigation or warn the general public.

1. After an incident, but before arrest, or during investigation:

**DO NOT RELEASE**

- Identity or location of any suspect;

- Results of an investigative procedure such as a lineup, polygraph, fingerprinting, lab or ballistics test. (The fact that tests are performed may be acknowledged without further comment.)

- Information which, if prematurely disclosed, would significantly interfere with an investigation or apprehension, particularly unchecked leads; unverified information; specifics of ”Mo”; details known only to a suspect or officer; information may cause a suspect to flee or avoid apprehension.

- Identity of a prospective non-victim witness

- Identity of a victim/witness if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place the victim in clear personal danger.

2. After an arrest and formal charging, but prior to adjudication, certain information is restricted to ensure constitutional guarantees of a fair and impartial trial. Improper disclosure could form the basis for a legal defense.

**DO NOT RELEASE**

- Prior to criminal record, character or reputation of a defendant.

- Existence or contents of any confession, admission, statement of defendant, or the failure to make such.

- Performance or results of any test, or a defendant’s refusal or failure to submit to investigative tests such as a polygraph and other types.

- Identity, creditability, character, statement(s) or expected testimony of any witness, or perspective witness.

- Statement(s), prospective testimony, character, or creditability of any victim.

- Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant, or the merits of the case, including arguments and evidence or whether their use in court is expected.

- Possibility of a guilty plea, plea bargaining or other dispositions.

- Reports, transcripts, or summaries of proceedings from which the press and public have been excluded by judicial order.

**29.1.10 ARREST INFORMATION WHICH MAY GENERALLY BE RELEASED**

Some arrest information may be released at the time of or immediately following formal charging:

- Accused name, age, description, residence, employment, marital status (except juveniles).

- Substance or test of the charged as contained in a complaint, warrant or indictment.

- Identity of the investigating and arresting officer(s), or agency and the length of the investigation. (Exception-identity of undercover officers will not be released.)

- Circumstances immediately surrounding an arrest including (a) time and place of arrest; (b) method of apprehension; (c ) resistance and resulting injury; (d) possession and use of weapons by suspects; and (e) items of contraband seized.

- Amount of bond, scheduled court date, place of detention.

**29.1.11 INVESTIGATIVE INFORMATION AUTHORITY TO RELEASE**

Investigative information shall not be released except by the Chief of Police, Criminal Investigations Division Commander, or his/her designee.

- Identity of any victim of a sex crime, abduction, spouse or child, or related information which, if divulged, would tend to lead to the victim’s identity and endanger the victim.

- Identity of any juvenile under the age of 17 who is a suspect or a defendant in any case over which the Juvenile Court of Spalding County has jurisdiction.

- Identity of any critical injured or deceased person prior to the notification of next of kin. (**Exception** will be when notification has been attempted but is not possible within a reasonable time as determined by the Chief of Police.)

- Specific cause of death until determined by a competent medical examiner.

- Investigative information and information of an evidentiary nature.

- Contents of suicide notes.

- Personal opinion not found in fact.

- Unofficial statements concerning personnel or internal affairs matters.

- Home address and telephone numbers of members of the Griffin Police Department.

- Valuable or cash overlooked by crime perpetrators.

- Amount of money taken in a robbery.

**29.1.13 INVESTIGATIVE INFORMATION WHICH GENERALLY BE RELEASED**

Investigate information which may be released is applicable only to cases over which the Griffin Police Department has primary responsibility and jurisdiction. In investigations where there is a mutual effort by the Griffin Police Department and another agency and the other agency has primary responsibility, the other agency (state or federal) will determine guidelines and control the release of information.

Unless otherwise indicated, the following types of information may generally be released:

- Type or nature of an incident such as fire, accident, homicide, suicide, rape, robbery, assault or burglary.

- Location, date, and time, injuries value when known, except money taken in a robbery.

- Identity and general address of a victim. (See SOP 29.1.12)

- Casualty figures, to include known dead or injured.

- Name, age and address of any adult charged with a crime.

- Amount and type of property taken, including value when known, except money taken in a robbery.

- The fact that a juvenile has been taken into custody, including sex, age, general area of residence, and substance of charge.

- Requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant or a suspect. A person’s race may be released as descriptive information in such cases.

- Number of officers, or people, involved in an event or investigation and the length of the investigation.

**29.1.14 MEDIA ACCESS TO DISASTER INFORMATION**

Media access to disaster scenes shall be controlled by the on-site Supervisor or Civil Defense Director. In the absence of the Supervisor, media access will be limited to the on-scene command post.

**29.1.15 INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED TO THE CHIEF OF POLICE IN A TIMELY MANNER**

To ensure professional interaction with the news media, the Chief of Police shall be notified of newsworthy events prior to being contacted by the media, if at all possible. The information must be timely, accurate and should contain no suppositions or conjectures. The “Who-What-When- Where and Why?” should be conveyed by the Shift Supervisor, Investigator or their designee either during or immediately following the incident.

**29. 1. 16 NOTICE OF NEWS WORTHY INFORMATION**

In an effort to supply newsworthy information to media outlets in a fair and equitable manner new releases and public information announcements will be posted to the City of Griffin Police Department’s Facebook page before the material is sent to media outlets electronically. Given the number of media entities involved and the fact that contacts often change without notice, this method will be used to provide a quick and easy access mechanism for media personnel. Media personnel may be included in the traditional “e-mail” media notification list for mass notification but it is the responsibility of the individual media representative to ensure that their information is accurate and up to date. The same methodology applies to issuance and dissemination of the “Daily Bulletin”.

**29. 1. 17 SPECIAL REQUESTS OR “EXCLUSIVE” INTERVIEWS**

From time to time a media representative may request an exclusive interview (which may be in the form of an e-mail interview, phone interview, face to face interview or report) and consideration will be given to the request on a case by case basis. Generally, when such a request is considered it will be considered on a case by case basis in response to a ‘First come - First serve” manner. Given the challenges arising from competition between media outlets and general fairness, there is no requirement to conduct an “exclusive” interview, nor does the department guarantee that the material will not be disclosed to other entities.

**29. 1. 18 EXCEPTIONS TO THE GEORGIA OPEN RECORDS ACT**

The Georgia Open Records Act provides for certain exceptions whereby specific information is exempt from release. The Georgia Open records Act also provides for situations where the Griffin Police Department may *choose* to release information that might fall within the scope of an exemption for operational purposes. In cases where the Department *chooses* to release information where disclosure is not required, such release will require the permission of the Chief of Police prior to release.

**29. 1. 19 CONDITIONAL INTERVIEWS**

From time to time information may be requested where the department, Public Information Officer or Chief of Police, determines that it is in the best interest of the department and the integrity of the information, as it applies to the department’s mission, that a request for information or interview be conducted, declined or conducted in a restrictive manner. In these cases the Chief of Police, in his/her sole capacity, will determine how, when and if such information is disseminated, shared or released so long as such is conducted in compliance with the Georgia Open Records Act. Interviews may be conducted solely in written form, by e-mail or other correspondence, recorded or video-taped so as to ensure the integrity of what is said and by whom and to prevent the parsing of statements and information which tends to change the context or intent of the information released. As there is no requirement under the Georgia Open Records Act for the department or its representatives to take part in any “interview”, in person, by phone or by correspondence, members of the department may decline such a request as deemed necessary.